

**Epistemologies of Play:  
Folly, Allegory, and Embodiment in Early  
Modern Literature**

Katrina Lucia Spadaro

A thesis submitted to fulfil the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

The University of Sydney

June 2021

# Statement of Originality

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, and that all the assistance received and sources consulted in preparing this thesis have been acknowledged.

Katrina Spadaro

# Authorship Attribution Statement

Part of Chapter Two of this thesis is published as: Spadaro, Katrina L. 'Reading Tudor Folly: Sex and Scatology in *The Play of the Wether*,' *Modern Philology* 118.4 (2021): 470-91.

Some small excerpts from Chapter Three appear in the article: Spadaro, Katrina L. 'Disease, Folly, Authorship: Robert Armin and *Twelfth Night*,' *Shakespeare*, 17.3 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2021.1887341>.

Katrina Spadaro

# Abstract

This thesis argues that the textual stylistics, and embodied form, of Early Modern folly are complicit in constructing and maintaining networks of knowledge. This function emerges from a Menippean history that positions the Silenus Box – an interface of grotesque form and hidden knowledge – as an allegory for exegesis. In applying this allegory to the aesthetics and bodies of Early Modern folly, this thesis suggests that folly assumes an arbitrating role in epistemic networks. A prominent marker of this function is the discursive communities forming around, and through, foolery, rendering it a nucleus of philological, interpretive, and sociable systems.

My four chapters test the possibilities and limits of this hypothesis by situating folly, as an exegetical allegory, in a range of discursive fields. Chapter One traces the strategic use of Menippean forms in three texts that intervene in humanist-scholastic debates: Lorenzo Valla's *Encomium of St. Thomas*, Angelo Poliziano's *Lamia*, and Erasmus' *The Praise of Folly* (translated by Thomas Chaloner). It suggests that irony in these texts is presented as a codified form – one stratifying closed epistemic communities – a construction that persuades audiences to align with humanist principles as a signal of interpretive expertise. Chapter Two transports this principle into the Tudor Court, suggesting that courtier-fool types in Skelton's *Magnyfycence* and John Heywood's *The Play of the Wether* deliver interpretive provocations as catalysts for princely self-knowledge.

In contrast, the final two chapters suggest that the Menippean aestheticisation of subaltern forms enables a renegotiation of knowledge as a category. Chapter Three explores the conceptual proximity of humanist fools with mentally disabled characters in two Shakespearean texts, *Twelfth Night* and *King Lear*. It suggests that this proximity might be antagonistic – Feste domineers over the exegetically-weak madman, Malvolio – but also recuperative, with Lear's Fool coming to arbitrate new epistemic networks formed around shared bodily knowledge. Chapter Four uses Wallerstein's world-systems theory to interrogate the status of 'global folly' in seventeenth-century nonsense verse. This chapter locates a rhythm of chiasmus in these texts,

whereby the ‘novelties’ of the global periphery are co-opted for English sociability and amusement, but later come to characterise the epistemological disintegration of Civil War England.

This thesis hopes to argue for a recuperative view of Menippean forms – one which acknowledges their complicity in elite humanist culture, but also emphasises how their porous form powerfully destabilises absolutes. My research yields a view of folly as a generative and highly-mobile aesthetic language, spinning discursive networks that reflect, construct, and tease open the structures of early modern epistemology.

# Acknowledgements

First and foremost, thank you to Liam Semler, without whom this thesis would never have been conceived (much less completed). Liam guided my candidature with patience, insight, and a deep knowledge of the field, shaping my work with the same precision and nuance that he brings to his own. I'm so grateful to have learnt from Liam's rigour and scholarly integrity. Perhaps more significantly, I'm grateful to have learnt from the authentic care Liam shows in his pedagogy. A deeply-held view of the value, dignity and intellectual agency of those under his supervision – whether the first-year student or the exasperating PhD candidate – tangibly shapes Liam's professional practice, and is something I hope to emulate within and without academia. Thank you.

I have been lucky to have a second supervisory figure in Gordon McMullan, who oversaw my year of research at King's College London. I'm so grateful for Gordon's advice, good humour, and generous insights about my project and the field. Gordon never flinched in giving me feedback I didn't want to hear, each time invigorating my thinking and leaving the project far better for it.

Katherine Spadaro lovingly reads everything I write (and will always be my favourite 'Reviewer 0'). While this is a small gift in relation to the lifetime of support and sustenance she has given me, I'm so grateful for her willingness to engage deeply with an area of research that isn't her own, and to patiently, constructively, and meticulously help shape this thesis.

This project would have been impossible without a generous and enabling institutional infrastructure. I am grateful for the Australian Government Research Training Stipend that funded my research. I am also grateful to the Department of English and, in particular, the encouraging and stimulating forum provided by the Early Modern Literature and Culture (EMLAC) group. Most of all, I am grateful to the department members who have given the systems around me a warm, encouraging and invaluable-helpful face. Of this number, particular

thanks are due to Paul Giles, Sarah Gleeson-White, James Kane, Brigid Rooney, Huw Griffiths, and Matthew Sussman.

I've had the opportunity to present portions of this thesis at a range of venues, including the King's College London/Shakespeare's Globe Graduate Conference, the Harvard Institute of World Literature, the Renaissance Society of America, and the Australian and New Zealand Shakespeare Association. Many thanks to panel chairs, coordinators and attendees for their intellectual generosity, insightful observations and encouragement. These contributions have enriched my thinking about this research area, and the discipline more widely.

Undertaking this research has enabled me to foster helpful and lasting connections in Sydney, London and beyond. For their helpfulness, generous insights and collegiality, my thanks to Julian Neuhauser, Gabriella Edelstein, Reto Winckler and Laurie Johnson. For their stimulating (and often interdisciplinary) dialogue, encouragement and friendship, thank you to Marion Derouineau, Carolin Becke, Lauren Weber, and Ruby Kilroy.

Over the past four years, I have been sustained by the friendship of some of the most energising, witty, and loving people I know. These people know how significantly they have shaped me, spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually; thank you! My particular thanks to Alex Harbilas who, in our years of friendship, has gone from a schoolmate, to a best mate, to a flatmate. Coming home to Alex is coming home to ease and laughter (and easily the cleanest flat on the block).

My thanks to Martin Spadaro, who has nurtured me emotionally and materially all my life. There isn't a logistical challenge I've encountered in the past four years which he hasn't applied himself to with creativity, zest, and deep fatherly love. Thanks are also due to my beloved grandparents, John and Katie Graham, who generously supported me – and humoured my folly – as I began this degree. I'll always treasure their kindness and guidance.

My fiercest, wisest and funniest advocates remain the fold I was born into. Mum, Dad and John: thank you with all my heart.

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# Introduction

## **Towards a Dionysian Man**

This thesis locates Early Modern folly at the intersection of its Menippean literary inheritance – a generically-unstable collage of revitalised satire and continental folklore – and embodiment. The first preoccupation is, in some ways, the simpler of the two. By tracing its Menippean influence, this thesis suggests that folly is invoked as an allegorical guide to the exegesis of complex, heterogenous and resistant texts. This allegory is invoked in humanist writings by Pico, Rabelais and Erasmus, all of whom use the Silenus Box as a conceptual device illustrating an interface of folly and wisdom. Writings on the Silenus Box – most influentially, those in Erasmus’ *Adagia* (1515) – thus point to it as a manual for interpretation, instructing the exegete to penetrate grotesque form and read a richly complex interiority. In addition to these philological guides, this allegorical legacy can also be traced in a less didactic form: through the production of interpretive circuits around folly. This thesis traces a series of exegetes of folly – from Maarten van Dorp, to Henry VIII, to Shakespeare’s Malvolio – who powerfully animate the interpretive legacy of folly by positioning it as a codified form, both socially and textually. The circuits of exegesis formed around folly suggest a tradition of humanist play interested in sociable and epistemological networks that consciously construct figures on the margins. These circuits are also richly suggestive because they stage confrontations between textual, allegorised matter and its interpreters. As such, this humanist legacy produces folly as a site for negotiating the immense material stakes of interpretation and allegory.

This extension into the material world brings the other significant concern of the thesis – embodiment – into focus. My concern with embodiment has several manifestations. Firstly, in the key premise of this thesis: that the action of fools and folly can be freshly understood by *re-embodiment* interpretive allegory. Where scholarship on folly as interpretive allegory becomes overly fixated on its metaphorical aspect, it risks erasing embodiment as a key signifier. To rectify this emphasis, this thesis traces the allegorical legacy of folly as it manifests, not simply in Menippean textual mishmash, but in the body and behaviours of the fool. The second body allegorical folly brings into the frame is that of its textual counterpart: the exegete. This body is most conspicuous in acts of interpretive error – which foreground it in a range of postures, from conscribed inaction to public humiliation. As such, one of the trends this thesis traces is an articulation of exegetical failure via the intensification of embodiment. The final form of embodiment this thesis treats are the bodies for whom difference – especially neurological difference – is constructed and then conscribed by social norms. Taken together, these forms of embodiment occupy a spectrum that spans interpretive symbolism to material fact, and each text I study negotiates this strain between the epistemic and the material in complex and productive ways. By tracing the friction between allegorical folly and folly as embodied fact, this thesis uncovers a range of dynamic outputs. It takes the intersection between the two as a generative nexus for satire and political discourse on the one hand, and ethical advocacy on the other.

Although it takes Menippeanism as its core study, this thesis is less interested in typologies than in taking a more expansive view of the mode.<sup>1</sup> This view groups Menippean

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<sup>1</sup> The most famous of these typologies is probably that of Mikhail Bakhtin in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

texts according to a porous cluster of shared interests, primary among them the preference of abstract satirical targets (often epistemological fallibility) over material, a burlesque intermingling of high and low culture, and a stylistics of fragmentation, pastiche and play.<sup>2</sup> Clarifying the exact epistemic status of this fragmentary style to the Early Moderns is thus essential groundwork for this thesis. Yet this status is sometimes obscured by the long shadow of the Enlightenment, one legacy of which has been the shrinking significance of non-empirical forms. An oft-cited quote from Rosi Braidotti is one example of the reach, even the retroactive reach, of this shadow<sup>3</sup> – ‘At the start of it all there is He: the classical ideal of “Man”, formulated first by Protagoras as “the measure of all things”, later renewed in the Italian Renaissance as a universal model and represented in Leonardo da Vinci’s Vitruvian Man.’<sup>4</sup> If Braidotti’s claim has proven essential in inaugurating posthuman scholarship, it has also served as a flashpoint galvanising early modernists to present a richer view of Renaissance thought. In the place of the cultural accoutrement of the Vitruvian Man – regarded by Braidotti as ‘the emblem of Humanism as a doctrine that combines the biological, discursive and moral expansion of human capabilities into an idea of teleologically ordained, rational progress’ – theorists of Early Modern posthumanism have emphasised representations of the human species as powerfully entangled in a multitude of epistemological, material and animal worlds, as incomplete, evolving, and

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<sup>2</sup> Scholarship establishing these commonalities includes Christopher Robinson, *Lucian and His Influence in Europe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Douglas Duncan, *Ben Jonson and the Lucianic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981); Charles A. Knight, *The Literature of Satire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Karen ní Mheallaigh, *Reading Fiction with Lucian: Fakes, Freaks and Hyperreality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> The following quote is a flash-point for scholarship on Early Modern posthumanism. It is quoted in Karen Raber, ‘Posthumanist Studies’ in *The Arden Research Handbook of Contemporary Shakespeare Criticism*, ed. Evelyn Gajowski (London: Arden Shakespeare, Bloomsbury, 2020), 292, and Joseph Campana and Scott Maisano, ‘Introduction’ in *Renaissance Posthumanism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (New Jersey: Wiley, 2013), 13.

powerfully precarious.<sup>5</sup> This broadened view does not attempt to divorce humanism from the critical question of human aptitude. Endeavour – philological, exegetical, antiquarian and civic – remained key to the humanist project.<sup>6</sup> Yet Karen Raber is right to attribute clichés of humanism that take the Vitruvian Man as emblem to an act of historical ‘slippage’: this valorisation of man as rational, autonomous agent owes more to the legacy of later, Enlightenment, thought – epitomised in the work of Descartes – than Renaissance humanism.<sup>7</sup> As theorists of Early Modern posthumanism remind us, the fragmented and grotesque were central in defining both the aesthetic and the epistemic contours of the Renaissance. Parables, adages, mythology and hieroglyph are all apportioned key roles in the formation and encapsulation of esoteric truths.

The purpose of this thesis is not to deny the hierarchies Braidotti interrogates (hierarchies glorifying the Vitruvian Man as westernised, neurotypical, able-bodied, and so on), nor to anachronistically equalise them. Instead, it aims to situate these hierarchies in a dynamic and complex discursive field ignited by the Menippean revival – one populated by the partial, fragmented and precariously ludic – that renders them highly malleable. In fact, an archetype at some removes from this cliché of the Early Modern ideal as male, proportioned, westernised, and *reasoning* – the fool – emerges as an unlikely avatar for humanist epistemology. In exploring the significance of this avatar, I want to contribute to the ongoing project displacing the Vitruvian Man from his central position in present-day clichés of Renaissance thought and make room for a different construct: what Friedrich Nietzsche has termed a Dionysian Man.

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<sup>5</sup> Notable work in this vein includes Joseph Campana and Scott Maisano (eds.) *Renaissance Posthumanism* and Karen Raber, ‘Posthumanist Studies’.

<sup>6</sup> We can see the valorisation of these endeavours in humanist thought in Pico’s seminal *Oratione de hominis dignitate* (1496), which suggests that the *studia humanitatis* might enable humankind to achieve quasi-platonic ascension.

<sup>7</sup> Raber, ‘Posthumanist Studies,’ 292-3.

The Dionysian Man, writes Nietzsche, emerges from a site of celebratory cognitive collapse – he uses the analogy of ‘intoxication’ – realised in the grotesque satyrs of the Greek chorus, and the horrific wisdom of the ‘daemon’ Silenus.<sup>8</sup> The Dionysian captures the spirit of Bakhtin’s carnivalesque, including the communal fervour emblematised through bodily excess. Like the carnivalesque,<sup>9</sup> the Dionysian has an authoritative complement: the rationalist Apollonian Man. For Nietzsche, the Apollonian represents a field of dream, mimesis and the plastic arts, epitomised in the Olympic pantheon.<sup>10</sup> In the interplay of the Dionysian and the Apollonian – manifesting, respectively, in the musical chorus and mimetic dialogue – lies the emotive power of Greek tragedy.

The construct of the Dionysian Man is a conceptual access-point to Early Modern folly because it captures a celebratory fragmentation that is never entirely divorced from Apollonian (or, to draw on modern-day cliché, Vitruvian) epistemology. Significantly, the motif of Silenus (a foolish satyr and disciple of Dionysus) flagged by Nietzsche gives the broad epistemic value apportioned to folly a much clearer shape.<sup>11</sup> In humanist writings, the Silenus is frequently invoked in relation to text: it marks an esoteric interiority that contradicts grotesque form.

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<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 47, 22.

<sup>9</sup> I am referring to the ‘safety-valve’ theory that sees the carnivalesque as an attempt to release revolutionary fervour in a controlled way. I discuss this theory in more detail on pp. 19-20.

<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche, *Birth*, 21-7.

<sup>11</sup> Although Silenus is the name of a mythographic figure, this thesis will frequently abstract him into a broader allegorical construct as ‘the Silenus.’ This follows Erasmus’ usage in *Adagia*.

Because of this, these writings produce Silenus as a metaphor for textual interpretation: folly emerges as a guide and emblem for the philological and interpretive efforts prized by humanist thought. In what follows, I provide an overview of some portraits of Silenus, and trace the way he emerges as an interpretive allegory throughout key Menippean texts. Then, I consider the fraught question of embodiment, and present evidence for the value of re-embodiment Silenus – reading the fool as an allegorical body – rather than simply viewing Silenus as an abstract textual metaphor. In section three, I give an overview of critical perspectives on folly which this thesis attempts to build on and complicate. In the final section, I outline the general shape of the thesis and gesture towards some key findings.



Figure 1. *Maschera di Papposileno*, c. 100-50 B.C.

## **Reading Folly: Between Interpretive Allegory and Embodiment**

Though Dionysian satyrs like Silenus and Marsyas were viewed in opposition to the plastic arts, evidence from antiquity shows how widely they inspired its practitioners. Surviving artefacts from sculpture and masks (Figure 1) to ceramic homewares seek to capture Silenus and his defiantly-nebulous form. One such antiquarian novelty, a ‘Silenus Box,’ provides the conceptual scaffolding for a famous discussion of folly and its value to humanist thought: Erasmus’ essay



‘Sileni Alcibiadis’ (published in his *Adagia* in 1515). For Erasmus, the box, with its clear delineation of interior and exterior, provides the basis for a theory of holy folly founded on paradox:

The Sileni are said to have been a kind of small figure of carved wood, so made that they could be divided and opened. Thus, though when closed they looked like a caricature of a hideous flute-player, when opened they suddenly displayed a deity, so that this humorous surprise made the carver’s skill all the more admirable.<sup>12</sup>

Erasmus’ invocation of the Silenus is sourced from Plato’s *Symposium*, a precedent which first uses the Silenus Box as a metaphor for the wisdom of Socrates. In the *Symposium*, Alcibiadis claims of Socrates that:

His words are like the images of Silenus which open; they are ridiculous when you first hear them; he clothes himself in language that is like the skin of the wanton satyr – for his talk is of packasses and smiths and cobblers and curriers, and he is always repeating the same thing in the same words, so that any ignorant or inexperienced person might feel disposed to laugh at him; but he who opens the bust and sees what is within will find that they are the only words which have a meaning in them, and also the most divine, abounding in fair images of virtue, and of the widest comprehension, or rather extending the whole duty of good and honourable men.<sup>13</sup>

In the *Adagia*, Erasmus elaborates on Plato’s vision by drawing the Silenus into syncretic dialogue with Christianity. Erasmus finds a Judeo-Christian rendition of the Silenus in the Old

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<sup>12</sup> Erasmus, *The Adages of Erasmus*, ed. William Barker (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 242-3.

<sup>13</sup> Plato, *Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Symposium, Republic*, trans. B. Joewtt, ed. Louise Ropes Loomis (Roslyn, New York: Walter J. Black, 1942), 213-14.

Testament, wherein prophets roamed ‘in exile in the wilderness, contriving to live among wild beasts.’<sup>14</sup> With this re-contextualisation, Erasmus transforms the Silenus into a mode of holy piety, boasting practitioners such as John the Baptist and, in his most daring conceit, Christ himself.

For Erich Auerbach, the appeal of the Silenus as metaphor to humanist writers is clear: ‘it offers a concept of Socrates’ personality and style which seems to give the authority of the most impressive figure among the Greek philosophers to the mixture of genres which was a legacy of the Middle Ages.’<sup>15</sup> Yet perhaps the most prominent legacy of the Erasmian Silenus is in its appeal to biblical exegesis. Erasmus presents the Silenus Box as a metaphor for biblical meaning as early as the *Enchiridion militis Christiani* (1503), where he writes that ‘especially do the Holy Scriptures, like the Silenus of Alcibiades, conceal their real divinity beneath a surface that is crude and almost laughable.’<sup>16</sup> Here Erasmus draws on an earlier comment by Pico della Mirandola, who claims the Silenus as exegetical metaphor in a letter to Ermolao Barbaro (1485). Intervening in the humanist debate on the respective value of *res* and *verba*, Pico writes that the best philosophy is comparable to the Silenus in its combination of rustic style and esoteric content.<sup>17</sup>

What begins to emerge from these invocations is a portrait of the Silenus as a powerful allegory for textual interpretation. In fact, Erasmus curbs the impulse to read the Silenus in terms

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<sup>14</sup> Erasmus, *Adages*, 246.

<sup>15</sup> *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 280.

<sup>16</sup> Erasmus Desiderius, *The Enchiridion of Erasmus*, trans. Raymond Himelick (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), 105.

<sup>17</sup> For a full translation of this letter, see Quirinus Breen, ‘Giovanni Pico della Mirandola on the Conflict of Philosophy and Rhetoric,’ *Journal of the History of Ideas* 13.1 (1952): 384-426.

of more generalising metaphor when he instructs readers to ‘pierce the heart of the allegory’ to open the Silenus.<sup>18</sup> Viewed as an allegory instead of a metaphor, the Silenus becomes a mobile guide for instruction rather than a static analogue. The Silenus does not simply capture an interface of folly and esoterica but, in doing so, models exegesis. Rabelais is explicit in this allegorical aspect of the Silenus when he invokes it, transformed now into a medicinal box, in his preface to *Gargantua*.

That is why you must open this book and scrupulously weigh what is treated within. You will then realize that the medicine it contains is of a very different value from that which its box ever promised: in other words, that the topics treated here are not as frivolous as the title above it proclaimed.<sup>19</sup>

So, too, a mention of Silenus by Montaigne has led to suggestions that *Essais* invokes the trope in a similar allegorical way: as a guide for penetrating Montaigne’s rustic *verba* – the digressive style of the essay – to access erudite philosophy.<sup>20</sup>

If the Silenus, as allegory, models textual interpretation, it remains instructive to critics today. In fact, several humanist texts with no explicit references to the Silenus have been read with the Silenus Box as a governing hermeneutic, indicating that the satyr is as alluring a figure to recent students of Erasmus as he was to the Early Moderns.<sup>21</sup> Even readings of *Adagia* itself

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<sup>18</sup> *Adages*, 248.

<sup>19</sup> Francois Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 207.

<sup>20</sup> In ‘Of Physiognomy’ Montaigne invokes the Silenus in his discussion of Socrates. Erich Auerbach and, more recently, Sam Hall had drawn on this excerpt to apply the Silenus to *Essais*. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 279; Hall, ‘The Deformed Face of Truth in Erasmus, Montaigne and Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*,’ *Exegesis* 1 (2013): 21-31.

<sup>21</sup> Among these I count David Wootton’s reading of More’s *Utopia* in *Thomas More’s Utopia*, ed. David Wootton (Cambridge Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999); Barbara J. Bained’s reading of Thomas Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy* in her article ‘Kyd’s Silenus box and the limits of perception,’ *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 10 (1980):

have been guided by the principles epitomised by the Silenus. One such reading is offered by Daniel Kinney, who suggests that Erasmus' taxonomy of proverbs transformed rustic tableaux of life in antiquity into a transcendent values system.<sup>22</sup> More recently, John Lepage has made a similar case, writing that 'the satirical elements of the adage, disguised in the "ridiculous and contemptible" rind of a pseudoacademic treatise on a proverb about the ridiculous and contemptible, shine forth with brilliant luster, and a Silenus grows out of Erasmus' digressive style.'<sup>23</sup>

As appealing as this model is, it may not withstand sustained scrutiny. William Barker takes issue with the assumption of a unitary, extractable truth embedded in both readings. Rather, he asserts that the very structure of the *Adagia* resists and obscures this object, even as 'the impulse to find a truth within the adage is very restrained or becomes lost in a myriad of cross-references. Truth in the *Adagia* is plural, shifting.'<sup>24</sup> Yet the approaches of Kinney and Lepage illustrate the enduring appeal of the Silenus as interpretive allegory – a desire we might trace back to Pico, Erasmus and Rabelais – even in the face of textual resistance. The goal of this reading is to take the allegorical appeal of folly embodied in the Silenus seriously. That is, to describe the action of allegorised folly even as it strains against the material conditions of the

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41-51; and Bruce Dannier's reading of the preface to Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* in "Inversorum Silenorum": Inversions of the Silenus in Robert Burton's "Democritus Junior to the Reader", *ELR* 27.2 (1997): 233-257. A final interesting illustration of this use of the Silenus as a guiding metaphor is Claudia Corti's edited volume *Silenos*. In this study of the reception of Erasmus in the works of later authors, Corti positions Erasmus himself as the sacred innards of the Silenus Box: 'embedded within Shakespeare, Nashe, Ascham, Wilson or Puttenham there lay Erasmus, with that ironic smile of his as immortalized by Holbein.' See 'Introduction' in *Silenos: Erasmus in Elizabethan Literature*, ed. Claudia Corti (Pisa: Pacine Editore, 1998), 6.

<sup>22</sup> Kinney, 'Adagia: midwife to the rebirth of learning,' *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 11.2 (1981): 169-92.

<sup>23</sup> John L. Lepage, *The Revival of Antique Philosophy in the Renaissance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 48-9.

<sup>24</sup> William Barker, 'Implied Ethics in the *Adagia* of Erasmus: An Index of *Felicitas*,' *Renaissance and Reformation* 30.1 (2006): 93.

Early Modern fool, whether those of ‘artificial’ jesters, the mentally ill, or the ‘savages’ on the expanding periphery of European empire. This thesis asks what happens, and what is at stake, when the allegorical principles of the Silenus are reconciled with the gross physicality of the satyr and, at another remove, the circumscribing embodiment of the Early Modern fool.

My thesis argues that the legacy of humanist epistemology freighted the fool with an allegorical baggage that endured and thrived on the Tudor stage. In fact, one of the most intriguing facets of this legacy is in the evolution of the Shakespearean wise fool. Yet both the Erasmian Silenus and the wise fool are preceded by rich, variegated and transnational discourses of foolery; in a number of popular forms, wise folly had considerable sway in the Middle Ages. It can be seen in moral allegories like Sebastian Brant’s *Das Narrenschiff*; in figures of Medieval folklore like Hanswurst and Marcolf; and in the stylised clown Harlequin of the *commedia dell’arte*.<sup>25</sup> Theatrically, the Vice figure of the morality play heralded many aspects of the wise fool with his trickery, elusiveness, and sexual and scatological themes. The French *sottie*, with its cast of fools and triumphant *roi des sots* (chief fool) also popularised ludic performances centred on wit, play, and the revelation of folly in unlikely places. By the time Marsilio Ficino published the first translation of the *Symposium* in 1484, leading Socrates to become an emblem of erudite, philosophical folly, the seeds for this idea had long been sown in Medieval popular culture. With

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<sup>25</sup> See Sebastian Brant and Alexander Barclay, *The Ship of Fools*, ed. T. H. Jamieson (Edinburgh: William Paterson, 1874). The name ‘Hanswurst’ originated in Brant’s text, and became a popular archetype in German Reformation polemics, notably Martin Luther’s *Wider Hans Worst* (1541). The figure of Marcolf has more opaque and trans-continental roots (roots explored in greater detail in Chapter Two), emerging as a mainstay of Medieval European folklore. He first reached English shores with the translation of the *Dialogus Salomonis et Marcolfi* [The Dialogue between Solomon and Marcolf] in 1492. See Nancy Mason Bradbury, “Rival Wisdom in the Latin ‘Dialogue of Solomon and Marcolf,’” *Speculum* 83.2 (2008): 331–65. The Italian *commedia dell’arte* was first performed in England around 1552, and its influences can be traced all the way to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. A useful history of the English use of *commedia dell’arte* is Artemis Preeshl, *Shakespeare and Commedia Dell’Arte* (London: Routledge, 2017).



Figure 2. Rubens, *The Drunken Satyr*, c. 1611.

the ‘Sileni Alcibiadis’, then, Erasmus neither invented nor popularised the notion of the wise fool. However, the production of the Silenus as exegetical allegory powerfully articulated an existing network of ludic figures and modes that, with their riddling

humour, equivocation, trickery and symbolism, invited and demanded interpretation. To re-embodiment the Silenus, then, is not simply to impose allegorical weight onto the fool, but to explore how the discourses of folly that preceded *Adagia* invited such allegorisation in the first place.

An examination of Early Modern visual culture supports this return to re-embodiment the Silenus. A widely popular motif in the visual arts, Silenus is the titular figure in a range of works exaggerating his grotesque bodily aspect, including paintings by Piero di Cosimo, Jusepe de Ribera, Pomponio Amidano, Anthony van Dyck, and Peter Paul Rubens (Figure 2). Further, interdisciplinary research by Raymond Waddington catalogues invocations of Silenus in the personal iconography of Renaissance writers, spanning title pages, portraits and personal emblems.<sup>26</sup> Waddington’s book culminates in a study of attempts by satirist and pornographer Pietro Aretino to style himself in the image of the Silenus in portraits by Titian (Figure 3) and

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<sup>26</sup> Raymond B. Waddington, *Aretino’s Satyr: Sexuality, Satire, and Self-Projection in Sixteenth-Century Literature and Art* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004). He cites some of these examples on pages 125-6 and, more extensively, on 223-4.

Sebastiano del Piombo, as well as an authorial woodcut prefacing *La Vita di Maria Vergine* [‘The Life of the Virgin Mary’].<sup>27</sup> These images consistently emphasise Aretino’s corporeal size and rugged, overgrown facial hair (Figure 3 goes even further in summoning the woodland, satyric world by depicting Aretino in earthy colours and furs). The popularity of this imagery suggests that Renaissance renditions of Silenus presented him as an embodied fool as frequently as they invoked him as an allegory for literary pastiche.



Figure 3. Titian, *Portrait of Pietro Aretino*, c. 1537.

Likewise, evidence from literary culture is indicative of a widespread focus on the embodied Silenus. This is exemplified by Erasmus himself, in the colloquy *Poliphemus, or the Gospeller*, which produces a tableau of grotesque physicality.<sup>28</sup> The cyclops Poliphemus turns evangelist as he gifts a bound copy of the gospel to Cannius, to which his friend facetiously responds that he ‘thynkes ye haue not trimmed it sufficiently for all your cost ye haue bestowed vpon it’ (Aiv<sup>v</sup>). When Poliphemus asks what the book lacks, Cannius delivers a searing return: ‘mary the heed of Silenus, an olde iolthed drunkard totynge out of a hoggedhed or a tunne’ (Aiv<sup>v</sup>). This dialogue echoes familiar carnival dialectics: when Cannius meets claims of unitary truth with a counter of grotesque physicality, he subjects Poliphemus’ evangelism to

<sup>27</sup> Waddington, *Aretino’s Satyr*, 117-151.

<sup>28</sup> Erasmus, *Two dialoges wrytten in laten by the famous clerke, D.Erasme of Roterodame, one called Polyphemus of the gospeller, the other dysposyng of thynges and names*, trans. Edmonde Beck (Canterbury: John Mychell, 1550).

metamorphosis – the abstract becomes embodied. Ultimately, of course, Cannius is the victim of the dramatic irony of this scene, invoking a grotesque image which, rather than threatening the gospel’s esoteric content, confirms it. The dialogue reminds readers that the dynamic textual value emblematised by Silenus is grounded in physical disfigurement.

Further, the signature philosophy of Silenus foregrounds the question of embodiment. In Plutarch’s *Consolation to Appollonius*, translated by Erasmus under the title *A treatise perswadynge a man patientlye to suffer the deth of his friende* (1531), Midas captures Silenus and insists he share his wisdom. The request leads Silenus to spout an adage of his own: ‘the best is neuer to be borne, the next is most swiftly to be clene extinct.’<sup>29</sup> It is this very retort that Nietzsche cites – wherein lies the ‘horrific wisdom of the Silenus’ – as an example of the powerful union of the Dionysian and Apollonian in classical drama.<sup>30</sup> Silenus’ famed anti-natalism mobilises a tension of longed-for dissipation and circumscribing fleshiness.

The fact that Erasmus himself circulated these accounts suggests that his own view of the Silenus was more complex than that of abstract textual allegory. M. A. Screech corroborates this position in his reading of the significance of Silenus in *Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly*. In ‘Sileni Alcibiadis’, Screech writes, ‘the grossness of the body is presented as the source of the trouble besetting the spiritual man.’<sup>31</sup> As Screech notes, this view is the legacy of Erasmus’ Neoplatonic sympathies, which anticipated the quasi-erotic subsuming of the Christian soul into Christ. The status of the body in this school of thought is, at best, ambivalent; although Erasmus allows for a

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<sup>29</sup> See Desiderius Erasmus, *A treatise perswadynge a man patientlye to suffer the deth of his friende* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1531), Bii<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche, *Birth*, 31.

<sup>31</sup> M. A. Screech, *Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly* (London: Penguin, 1988), 105.



resurrected body, he also incriminates the flesh as the key obstacle to this ecstatic union. In Screech's view, then, fleshy encasement cannot be dismissed as textual metaphor; instead, it is the source of the divine incongruity of the Silenus.

There is ample evidence supporting the scholars who invoke Silenus as an allegory for interpreting ludic style. Silenus lent himself as a fitting emblem for acts of generic mishmash, for the intercourse of erudite abstraction and sensory impact that became characteristic of humanist experiments in the Menippean style. By over-emphasising this legacy, however, scholars may risk dispossessing Silenus of his most characteristic marker: a conscribing visual form, whether artistic, in the case of the Silenus box, or embodied, in the case of both Socrates and Silenus himself. While Silenus became a fitting allegorical symbol for erudite literary games, this legacy exists in a sustained tension with popular figures that invoke his embodiment: fools, clowns, rustics and the like. My goal is to interrogate this tension by re-embodiment the Silenus Box – to view it, not simply as a corporeal allegory, but as an allegorical corpus.

If Silenus as allegory positions texts as graphically physical, so too does it enable the inverse of this process: the textualisation, even allegorisation, of the body. This process can be measured by an emphasis on the body of the fool as a site of interpretation, an enlivened cluster of symbols that walks the stage alongside the increasingly psychologically-realistic *dramatis personae* of the late Tudor and early Stuart years. Erasmus articulates this focus on audience interpretation of the fool's body in the 'Sileni Alcibiadis':

Such, to be sure, is the nature of things really worth having. Their excellence they bury in their inmost parts, and hide; they wear what is most contemptible at first glance on the

surface, concealing their treasure with a kind of worthless outward shell and not showing it to uninitiated eyes. Vulgar, unsubstantial things have a far different design: their attractions are all on the surface and their beauties are at once displayed to all and sundry, but look inside and you will find that nothing could be less like what was promised by the label and the outward view.<sup>32</sup>

Within Erasmus' theological schema, the nature of this 'initiated' viewer takes shape when the Silenus model is applied to Christ: 'if one has the good fortune to have a nearer view of this Silenus, open – if, in other words, he shows Himself in His mercy to anyone, the eyes of whom have been washed clean – in heaven's name what a treasure you will find.'<sup>33</sup> The initiated viewer of Erasmus' sketch is the recipient of God's grace, spiritually awoken to view the value of the Silenus. The statuses of viewer and object are mutually determined: the viewer instils the value of the Silenus by permeating its 'worthless outward shell', and in turn this recognition marks the viewer's membership of a community formed around shared knowledge.

If Erasmus' interpreter inhabits a theological world – initiated into understanding through grace – Rabelais' preface to *Gargantua* uses the allegory to suggest a more secularised form of interpretation via methodical analysis. Yet both portraits act to produce interpretive circuits around the Silenus. Building on these representations, this thesis treats the allegorised body of the fool as the generative and textual nucleus of networks that extend into the material world via the act of interpretation. Thus I argue that the Silenus Box legacy produces the body of the fool as a site for negotiating the material stakes of interpretation and allegory.

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<sup>32</sup> Erasmus, *Adages*, 244-5.

<sup>33</sup> Erasmus, *Adages*, 245.

In fact, the Silenus as an allegory intensifies the issue of interpretation in three ways. First, on the basic level that allegory as a form demands interpretation. Then, doubly, because of its legacy as an allegory for the *very act of interpretation*, advanced by Pico, Erasmus and Rabelais. And, finally, because of the oppositional relation between token and object – grotesque form and esoteric content – embodied in the Silenus. This oppositional relation is contingent on the act of interpretation, an act in which the interpreters act as synapses networking token and object. Because of this interpretive emphasis, the fool gestures beyond himself to the epistemic circuits he produces, redirecting attention to readers and audiences in their roles as arbiters of his significance. The allegorical fool embodies, and catalyses, the reverberations of the interpretive act within a material sphere.

## Critical Perspectives on Folly

### 1. Folly and Carnival

Enid Welsford's seminal study *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (1935) is often credited with giving the Early Modern fool a renaissance of his own. Welsford documents two related trajectories: the institutionalisation of the fool as entertainer as he moved from countryside, to court, to stage, and the increasing abstraction of the fool as he progressed from actuality into the social imaginary.<sup>34</sup> Welsford's is one of a number of studies that sketches the rich heritage of the fool, encompassing traditions as various as Ancient Greek philosophy, Medieval folklore, masques, *sotties* and the *commedia dell'arte*.<sup>35</sup> These scholars present the fool

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<sup>34</sup> Enid Welsford, *The Fool: His Social and Literary Context* (London: Faber and Faber, 1935).

<sup>35</sup> Anthropological studies emphasising the classical heritage of the fool include Allardyce Nicoll's *Masks, Mimes and Miracles: Studies in the Popular Theatre* (New York: Cooper Square, 1963) and John Doran's *The History of*

as essentially liminal, both in the metaphorical sense often used in literary studies and in the specifically ritual one with which Victor Turner first deployed the term.<sup>36</sup> The fool, with primeval origins embedding him in the social unconscious, emerges as both product and symbol of a culture in transformation. This liminality extends to the fool's presence in the margins of ruling structures. As John Southworth, Erica Tietze-Conrat and William Willeford have emphasised, the fool is diametrically opposed to, and yet deeply intertwined with, king and governor. This is a relation these scholars conceive of in terms of real-world symbiosis and the cultural symbolism of complementarity.<sup>37</sup>

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*Court Fools* (London: Richard Bentley, 1858). Those emphasising the Medieval and Renaissance heritage of the fool include Barbara Köneker's *Wesen and Wandlung der Narrenidee im Zeitalter des Humanismus: Brant – Murdner – Erasmus* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1966), Karl Friedrich Flögel's *Geschichte des Grotesk-Komischen* (Dortmund: Harenberg Kommunikation, 1862) and Yona Pinson's *The Fool's Journey: A Myth of Obsession in Northern Renaissance Art* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008). Works exploring the theatrical formulation of the fool include Barbara Swain's *Fools and Folly During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), Olive Mary Busby's *Studies of the Fool in Elizabethan Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), and William Willeford's *The Fool and his Sceptre: A Study in Clowns and Jesters and Their Audience* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969). A number of studies eschew this Eurocentric focus to establish the global currencies of folly, in regions such as China, India, and North America. For an introduction to the global breadth of foolery see works such as Karl Friedrich Flögel's *Geschichte des Grotesk-Komischen* (Munich: Verlegt Bei Georg Müller, 1914); Paul Radin's *The Trickster: A Study in American Mythology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956); Beatrice K. Otto's *Fools Are Everywhere: The Court Jester Around the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); and Lewis Hyde's *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2008).

<sup>36</sup> In his essay 'Betwixt and Between', Turner emphasises the importance of the liminal period as one of profound meaning and potentiality in Zambian tribal rites. See *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1967). A clear application of this theory can be found in Hyde's *Trickster Makes This World*, which positions the trickster-figure as a 'boundary crosser.' In the sphere of literary studies, critics emphasising this liminality include Welsford, C. L. Barber and Edward Berry (who cites his indebtedness to Turner). See Welsford, *The Fool*; C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); and Edward Berry, *Shakespeare's Comic Rites* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>37</sup> Historians tend to paint this relationship in terms of practical interchange. John Southworth, for instance, explains the king-fool binary as one 'advantageous to the ruler because it provided him necessary recreation, for putting aside the rituals and prerogatives of kingship in simple enjoyment of the humour and companionship of a fellow human being who carried no weight of social and political debt; advantageous to the fool because it gave him a privileged haven for the practice of his eccentric skill for so long as he could keep his patron amused and retain his interest.' See *Fools and Jesters in the English Court* (Stroud: Sutton, 2003), 3. Erika Tietze-Conrat offers a medicinal explanation: 'He needs him to dispel his melancholy, so that the depressive's gastric juices, so vital to his digestion, function properly. He needs him in order to bolster up his self-confidence, whenever he sees this comic miniature, this loathsome deformity standing before him. He needs him as a symbol.' See *Dwarfs and Jesters in Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1957). Literary critics and anthropologists are predictably more concerned with the symbolic currencies of this relationship, and Willeford's *The Fool and His Sceptre* is an example of this focus.

These anthropological studies place the fool firmly within the symbolic binaries that have become a cliché of New Historicist criticism: of high and low culture, the elite and the collective, carnival and hegemony. The critical history of the fool is imbricated in the history of one expression of ‘low’ culture – the carnivalesque – a popular Medieval mode that saw the suspension of order and hierarchy during periods of seasonal festivity. In *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin conceives of carnival as a ‘second world and second life outside of officialdom’ with elements of saturnalian festivity as well as Medieval folk humour.<sup>38</sup> Fools sit centre-stage in this discourse of the lower stratum – that is, the symbolic realm of bodily excess and the grotesque – and, as a result, carnival tropes permeate the appearance, symbolics and dramaturgical function of foolery. In fact, Robert Weimann contends that foolery is the clearest residue of the theatre’s primeval carnival heritage.

In spite of numerous transformations, he has never achieved the psychological complexity or ability to develop associated with the more modern dramatic characters. Thus he remains, more than any other figure in drama, closest to his early ritual heritage. The descendant of a ritual that has long since lost its original function, the fool is an atavistic agent of the cult, and, through his *mimesis* and parody, its heretic.<sup>39</sup>

Roughly contemporaneous with the publication of *Rabelais and His World* came the emergence of two works that lay foundations for the most obvious critique of Bakhtin’s model: his presentation of carnival as proto-Marxist liberation. These are the seminal works of C.L. Barber and Northrop Frye, both of which advance structural analyses of Early Modern comedy that

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<sup>38</sup> M.M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 6.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 11.

conceive of saturnalian revelry as *subordinate* to restorative order.<sup>40</sup> Barber memorably claims that ‘the dynamic relation of comedy and serious action is saturnalian rather than satiric, and that the misrule works, through the whole dramatic rhythm, to consolidate rule.’<sup>41</sup> This conception of the comic structure as a tool of orthodoxy enables critiques of Bakhtin’s work as optimistic, and unable to account for the powers sanctioning carnival in the first place. To move beyond this critical optimism, New Historicists venture a model of carnival as a socio-political ‘safety-valve.’<sup>42</sup> This theory treats carnival as a means of social sedation, strengthening compliance through the seasonal release of anarchic feeling. This line of criticism is summarised by David Wiles, who writes that ‘the assumption that this entity dubbed ‘carnival’ is the property of the folk as distinct from the elite seriously obscures the mechanisms by which power was validated and maintained in the early modern period.’<sup>43</sup> The containment:subversion model allows the fool, as agent of carnival and the occult, to run amuck without threatening governing orthodoxies. With a few notable exceptions, this view of carnival, and the fool’s role within it, became a matter of New Historicist consensus.

These dissenters are worthy of notice, however, if only to clarify what was at stake in the oft-observed decline of fooling as entertainment in the Jacobean years. Michael Bristol

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<sup>40</sup> See Barber, *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy* and Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>41</sup> Barber, *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy*, 234.

<sup>42</sup> For a survey of various views emphasising the safety-valve model see Berry, *Shakespeare’s Comic Rites*; Richard Levin, *The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Manfred Pfister, ‘Comic Subversion: A Bakhtinian view of the comic in Shakespeare,’ *Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft West Jahrbuch* (1987): 27-43; François Laroque, *Shakespeare’s Festive World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Sandra Billington, *Mock Kings in Medieval Society and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991) and Peter Stallybrass and Allon White’s *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986). A recent work by Richard Preiss configures this dynamic in an interesting new way, arguing that stage clowns have proto-authorial, authoritative roles. See *Clowning and Authorship in Early Modern Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>43</sup> David Wiles, ‘Carnavalesque in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*’ in *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin*, ed. Roland Knowles (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1998), 79.

summarises the clearest case against safety-valve theory: the idea that authorities could be so effective as to ensure conformity in the aftermath of festive excess. ‘For catharsis to actually work in such a reliable way,’ Bristol notes, ‘it would be necessary for festivals to be completely unselfconscious occasions in which nothing was ever learned, and for the participants to cooperate, year after year, in an oppressive routine contrary to their interests.’<sup>44</sup> Bristol allows carnival to be dangerous and radical in ways that New Historicist criticism denies. This approach to the dangers of carnival also sheds light on the gradual erasure of foolery from public spaces in the wake of Shakespeare, a shift with explanations ranging from the benign (an evolution in audience tastes) to the more insidious.<sup>45</sup> In this latter camp is Robert Hornback’s *English Clown Tradition* (2009), which insists on a revision of the fool’s significance that foregrounds his satiric aspect. Rejecting the safety-valve theory as over-simplistic, Hornback writes that ‘the stakes involved in clowning could be extraordinarily high, incorporating heady moral, religious, political, philosophical and educative concerns.’<sup>46</sup> Hornback draws on a scholarly tradition emphasising the complicity of folly and satire, and which powerfully contextualises the politics of the early modern fool.

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<sup>44</sup> Michael Bristol, *Carnival and Theater: Plebian Culture and the Structure of Dramatic Authority in Renaissance England* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 27.

<sup>45</sup> In *Studies of the Fool*, Busby suggests that the fool, more a popular character than an aristocratic favourite, lost favour with the increasingly courtly audiences of the Stuart years. For Barbara Swain (*Fools and Folly*), the ‘humanisation’ of drama, emphasising psychological realism over type and allegory, brought about a change in tastes where the archetypal fool was no longer welcome. Peter Thomson suggests a more epistemic change, in which the increasing substitution of the knave for the fool suggests the ‘downgrading of the philosophical significance of folly in Stuart London.’ ‘Clowns, Fools and Knaves: Stages in the Evolution of Acting’ in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, ed. Jane Milling and Peter Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 423. Tim Prentki extrapolates such a shift with explicit reference to the onset of the ‘Age of Reason.’ Reason, he writes, ‘is, at bottom, antithetical to the social function of the fool who is forever pointing to the limitations and fallibilities of the species. It is therefore not surprising to find that this period witnessed the gradual erosion of the rituals and social spaces which gave vent to manifestations of irrational practices that highlighted aspects of human behaviour at odds with the dominant discourse of progress.’ *The Fool in European Theatre: Stages of Folly* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 120.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Hornback, *The English clown tradition from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2009), 5. Another recent attempt to foreground the satiric nature of the fool can be found in Phebe Jensen’s *Religion and Revelry in Shakespeare’s Festive World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), which positions the carnival aesthetic as derivative of Catholic spiritism, and as such a subversive vehicle for sectarian divisions.

## 2. Folly and Satire

As Hornback reminds his reader, the most powerful tool in the fool's satiric arsenal had theological origins: the assumed innocence of neuroatypicality.<sup>47</sup> However the moral status of the fool, like his utterances, is more complex and contradictory than a binary of innocence and culpability suggests. On the one hand, late Medieval and Early Modern culture seems to view folly and sin as effectively synonymous, with Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* and Sebastian Brant's allegorical satire *Das Narrenschiff* the most famous examples of a tradition positioning universal folly as a vivid manifestation of the Fall. The fool's marginalisation is furthered by a common attitude viewing visual deformity as indicative of God's judgement.<sup>48</sup> Yet the causal link between sin and the perceived mutations of folly is highly complicated; Neil Rhodes attributes these defects to collective, rather than individual, transgression: 'the monstrous births, the tortured criminal, and the plague- or famine-stricken city are all objectifications of moral deformity.'<sup>49</sup> Complicating matters further is the issue of intellectual agency. As Welsford summarises the issue, the same deformities that produce the fool as a vivid portrait of sin 'deprive him both of rights and responsibilities and put him in the paradoxical position of virtual outlawry combined with utter dependence on the support of the social group to which he belongs.'<sup>50</sup> The fool emerges as a paradox: a manifestation of sin whose neurological difference denies him free will and, consequently, culpability. Instead, the fool in literature is positioned as

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<sup>47</sup> Hornback, *The English Clown Tradition*, 18.

<sup>48</sup> Neil Rhodes points to this tendency in his study of the grotesque in *Elizabethan Grotesque* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 14. Yona Pinson asserts a dual function in the Medieval fool: 'while embodying human folly and the entire society of sinners he, at the same time, also assumes the position of the wise outsider who points out the culpability of 'other' fools.' *The Fool's Journey*, 1.

<sup>49</sup> Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grotesque*, 14.

<sup>50</sup> Welsford, *The Fool*, 55



a didactic reminder, and lurid product, of a postlapsarian world from which he is morally insulated.

As a social pariah, the fool shares the detached perspective of the satirist, drawing on the *dramatis personae* of Aristophanes and Juvenal, and anticipating those of John Skelton, Andrew Marvell and Edmund Spenser. The fool's satiric positioning is entrenched further through a widespread etymological fallacy: the linkage of satiric writing as a genre with mythological satyrs, famed for their rustic appearance and vitriolic speech (Silenus is perhaps the most famous of this brood). This marginalisation, combined with beliefs in the fool's moral innocence, produced a highly political dimension of folly. Because the theological emphasis on the fool's innocence sheltered him from sanctions, to construct oneself in the image of the fool emerged as a means of evading censorship. Robert Goldsmith writes that the influx of imposters taking advantage of the fool's license created, not just a new expression of foolery – that of the 'wise fool' – but a new mode of political commentary:

The wise fool of our study was not always so blunt in his truth-telling or so direct in his ridiculing of folly as was the philosopher or the poet. And unlike the typical buffoon, he was more often ironical than scurrilous in his critical comments. The difference between these spokesmen was essentially a difference in temper or tone. Irony of manner is as old as the comic spirit and one of its earliest manifestations.<sup>51</sup>

This new tradition placed the fool at the frontier of socio-political change, delivering polemics beneath the guise of play. The fool's satiric potential and political immunity are frequently

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<sup>51</sup> Goldsmith, *Wise Fools in Shakespeare*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1958, 11.

credited with popularising the ideas and aesthetics of folly among humanist writers. The incorporation of the wise fool persona into the humanist repertoire is an example of the obsessive ‘self-fashioning’ Greenblatt famously attributes to the Early Moderns.<sup>52</sup> A notable rendition of this humanist performance of folly is Erasmus’ contemporary Thomas More, who combined piety and antic wit in order to embody the ideal of holy folly.<sup>53</sup> His legacy is captured in terms of paradox by biographer Edward Hall, who recollects his ludic approach towards martyrdom:

I cannot tell whether I should call him a foolish wise-man or a wise foolish-man, for undoubtedly he, beside his learning, had a great wit, but it was so mingled with taunting and mocking that it seemed to them that best knew him that he thought nothing to be well spoken except he had ministered some mock in the communication, in so much as at his coming to the tower, one of the officers demanded his upper garment for his free, meaning his gown, and he answered he should have it, and took him his cap, saying it was the uppermost garment he had.<sup>54</sup>

When confronted by the historical particulars of More’s life, it is tempting to view his performance of folly as politically-motivated. For a devout Catholic facing the sanctions of

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<sup>52</sup> Of More specifically, Greenblatt attributes motives of ‘self-fashioning and self-cancellation, the crafting of a public role and profound desire to escape from the identity so crafted.’ See *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 13.

<sup>53</sup> Erasmian notions of folly would have been thoroughly assimilated by More, to whom Erasmus even dedicates *The Praise of Folly*. In turn, scholars have asserted that More’s seminal work, *Utopia*, invokes a hermeneutical frame derived from the Silenus. See David Wootton, ‘Introduction,’ in *Thomas More’s Utopia*. More’s attitudes to folly are most explicitly voiced in his *Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation*, a text which serves as something of a manifesto, constructing a model of holy folly he himself would come to embody. For more on this theme, see Nancy Yee, ‘Thomas More’s *Moriae Encomium*: The Perfect Fool in *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*’, *Moreana* 21 no. 101/2 (1990): 65-74.

<sup>54</sup> Edward Hall, *The Union of the Two Noble Families of Lancaster and York* (1550), facsimile edition (London: Scholar Press, 1970), fol. ccxxvi<sup>r-v</sup>.

Reformation politics, it is commonly agreed, the guise of folly seems an obvious means for More to equivocate on his personal convictions, or voice dissent without repercussion.<sup>55</sup>

If, in playing the fool, the sum of More's strategy was political manoeuvring, its failure is self-evident. However, to view the performance of folly as a stylish exercise in equivocation is reductive and unsatisfying. Theories of socio-political pressure alone are unable to explain the popularity of folly as a mode, and the extent to which play and foolery emerge as serious sources of aesthetic pleasure in contemporary writings. These theories, too, commit an interpretive fallacy the humanists looked on with scorn: they divorce signification from its context, reducing "meaning" to a discrete essence divisible from form. As such, this reading will treat folly as a stylistic form and argue that, when performed by humanists, it is less the result of socio-political duress than a rhetorical tool, consciously applied in the construction and configuration of knowledge. In fact, one potent outworking of the Silenus Box allegory is an ability to bridge the gap between folly as epistemology and folly as satire. By invoking interpretive allegory, the aesthetics of folly produce epistemic circuits, even as they enable acts of persuasion founded on the very *production* of such circuits: harnessing the very-human impulse to signal inclusion and comprehension.

### 3. Folly and Epistemology

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<sup>55</sup> Some critics suggest that More employs this strategy in his writing, using Menippean ambiguity to strategically entangle ironic and sincere statements. See, for instance Greg Walker, 'Folly' in *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, ed. James Simpson and Brian Cummings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 331-3. Equally, however, More's performance of light-hearted foolery may have been designed to construct his martyrdom. Greenblatt writes that More's performed merriment on the gallows was both the realisation of the humanist ideal of *sprezzatura* and also, more significantly, intended as 'the manifest sign of that certainty More's beliefs conferred upon him.' *Renaissance Self-fashioning*, 71.

While New Historicists grappled with the socio-political formation of the fool, an adjacent strand of criticism worked to position him within the sphere of literary value. Key to this process was the work of William Empson, which asserted the aesthetic value of indeterminacy in the defiance of neoclassical norms. Empson does not simply aim to redeem ambiguity from its status as aesthetic parergon, he attempts a critical repositioning which locates ambiguity in the majority of figurative forms.<sup>56</sup> When even metaphor can be classed under the broad mantle of Empsonian ambiguity, New Criticism paved the way for foolery, as an expression of linguistic, aesthetic and behavioural ambiguity, to be considered in serious analytical terms.

Recent scholarship has foregrounded this ambiguity as a means of breaking through the containment:subversion stalemate and considering folly in more philosophical terms.<sup>57</sup> Rather than echoing binaries of high and low culture, orthodoxy and heterodoxy, these critics insist that folly enables a philosophical stance that transcends binaries altogether. Jonathan Bate and Donald Wehrs, for instance, have both advanced a model of foolery as a branch of Renaissance anti-stoicism, preferring experience and embodiment as modes of knowledge.<sup>58</sup> Robert H. Bell also considers folly as an epistemic lens, one which encourages scepticism by alerting viewers to

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<sup>56</sup> Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1930).

<sup>57</sup> While my focus is on recent trends and their impact on critical approaches to folly, these works are not without precedent. Two of the most important contributions to this scholarship, to whom these more recent readings are indebted, were made by twentieth-century critics Walter Kaiser and M.A. Screech. Both these critics unearth the enormous philosophical potential of folly, Kaiser with reference to anti-stoicism and a Pauline folly grounded in the natural world, and Screech with a focus on the charismatic properties of folly as espoused by early theologians such as Origen, and reified by Erasmus and his ilk. See Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly: Erasmus, Rabelais, Shakespeare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963) and Screech, *Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly*.

<sup>58</sup> Bate's work emphasises the experiential knowledge foregrounded through actorly performance, while Wehrs focuses on body-spirit harmony as a tenet of Erasmian ethics. See Jonathan Bate, 'Shakespeare's Foolosophy' in *Shakespeare Performed: Essays in Honor of R. A. Foakes*, ed. Grace Ioppolo (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), 17-33. and Donald Wehrs, 'Touching Words: Embodying Ethics in Erasmus, Shakespearean Comedy, and Contemporary Theory,' *Modern Philology* 104.1 (2006): 1-33.

the fragility of their systems of knowledge.<sup>59</sup> Though the many fools of Bell's study do, at times, feel decontextualised, Sam Hall's 2017 monograph offers a corrective to this ahistoricity.<sup>60</sup> Hall situates Shakespeare's fools in a twofold tradition: that of fifteenth-century humanism, with particular reference to the writings of Erasmus, More and Montaigne, and twentieth-century critical theory. Hall bridges this divide with a vision of folly which he perceives as common to both schools of thought and terms a 'negative capability.' The model of humanist folly emerging from this asserts 'that the condition of being in uncertainty is philosophically valid, whereas dogmatically insisting upon the universality of one's systems, categories and identities is intellectually indefensible and dangerously irrational.'<sup>61</sup> This focus on epistemology represents a profitable return to humanist experiments with the themes, tropes and language of folly, embodied in the legacy of the Silenus Box allegory. This thesis builds on this understanding of folly as an aesthetic inextricably bound with questions of thought and knowledge, while elaborating on exactly how folly's epistemological aspect – in the terms of interpretive allegory – had profound repercussions in the material world.

## Directions

This thesis maintains a view of the allegorical dimensions of folly – both as a rhetorical language, and as an embodied state – in order to assess the ways that Early Modern texts staged intersections between epistemic symbolism and material life. To this end, I seek to animate the fool in a variety of discursive fields: those of disciplinary debate, the politics of the Tudor court,

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<sup>59</sup> Bell, *Shakespeare's Great Stage of Fools* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>60</sup> Hall, *Shakespeare's Folly: Philosophy, Humanism, Critical Theory* (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>61</sup> Hall, *Shakespeare's Folly*, 7.

disability and mental illness and, finally, of the global periphery. Within each of these fields, the fool negotiates a strain between the epistemic and the material, between folly as interpretive allegory and folly as social and bodily difference. Some of these fields harness the epistemological legacy of folly to powerful satiric effect, while others use it to expand and reconfigure categories of knowledge altogether.

In the first two chapters of this thesis, I pursue the question of how the fool as an allegorical symbol might emerge as a uniquely useful tool of social criticism and reform. Through their ability to foreground the interpretive act, such symbolic fools could open a new satiric avenue, one engaging a subtler means of persuasion than straight mockery and bombast. Instead, they are persuasive because they demand an interpretive stance from readers/audiences, a stance which serves as a performative articulation of their social standing and exegetical skill. By leveraging depictions of interpretive failure in order to persuade, the texts in these chapters disclose the high stakes of interpretation, and indicate widespread anxieties about discursive exclusion.

In my first chapter, I examine the satiric action of the fool within the sphere of disciplinary debate, taking Erasmus' seminal *Praise of Folly* as an illustration of the ways the allegorical function of folly might advance or disqualify epistemic modes, particularly in light of early humanist tracts advocating the value of philology as a method of enquiry. Before looking at *The Praise of Folly* in detail, I survey some continental humanist texts which engage foolery in similar ways: Lorenzo Valla's *Encomium to St. Thomas* and Angelo Poliziano's praelectio *Lamia*. These works are vital precursors to the trope of the wise fool and articulate, in textual

form, the way folly can act as an interpretive allegory. With their playful Menippean ambivalence, these texts consciously stratify their own codification, and construct satellite interpreters in their paratexts.

The second chapter examines a more practical application of folly: its integration into the sphere of political counsel in the Tudor court. It does this through looking at the genre of the Tudor interlude, with its ability to speak to political power, during the reign of Henry VIII. John Skelton's *Magnyfycence* and John Heywood's *Play of the Wether* both produce Vice figures who spout oracular wisdom, an unlikely interface of rustic discourse and political insight that aligns them with the self-stylised folly of Skelton and Heywood as courtiers. In the grips of Reformation politics, these performances of folly figure as methods of counsel which foreground the interpreter (and the ramifications of interpretive failure), rather than the text itself, to minimise the threat of tightening sanctions.

The final two chapters of this thesis situate the fool in discursive spheres that dynamically reconfigure his interpretive symbolism: Chapter Three applies disability theory to *Twelfth Night* and *King Lear*, while Chapter Four reads seventeenth-century nonsense verse through the prism of world-systems analysis. A common feature of these chapters is the fact that the language of folly is issuing a dramatically changed interpretive challenge. While folly in the first two chapters challenges readers and audiences to performatively align themselves with the *correct* interpretation, the texts in these chapters begin to disclose an anti-interpretive bias. In the case of the Malvolio-Feste confrontation in *Twelfth Night* and the nonsense verse circuits during Jacobean years, poor exegetes reveal themselves by attempting to interpret works that playfully

resist unitary knowledge and conclusive literalism. Here it is not incorrect interpretation that the language of folly warns against, but the notion of interpretation itself as reified and singular.

In concert with this anti-interpretive turn, these chapters position the fool in spheres of embodiment that richly complicate his allegorical weight. Chapter Three applies disability theory to *King Lear* to examine the networks of sociability formed with Lear's Fool at their centre. While *Twelfth Night* depicts sociable networks forming around the mockery of a weak-exegete-turning-madman, Malvolio, *King Lear* models epistemic communities formed around shared embodiment rather than shared discourses. Chapter Four performs a similar manoeuvre, exploring sociable networks stratified through a shared epistemology of foolery, but then complicating them with the addition of global motifs. Moving from the nonsense poems in Jacobean travel literature to those emerging in the Civil War and Interregnum, this chapter explores how global motifs come to describe Civil War England as a dispossessed 'other'. Using disability theory and world-systems analysis, these final two chapters explore how manifestations of embodiment reconfigure Menippean discourse to produce plural, dynamic spheres of knowledge.

A vital continuity throughout all four chapters is the way that folly – courtesy of its allegorical legacy – is orbited by networks of interpreters. Each of my chapters stages a different confrontation between the interpretive demands of folly and interpreters who are, in some way, precluded from accessing it (from 'piercing the heart of the allegory') in a vivid illustration of the material stakes of interpretation. In the first chapter, this weak exegete comes in the form of the bumbling scholastic, Maarten van Dorp. In the second, this exegete assumes the form of two



analogues for Henry VIII, Skelton's *Magnyfycence* and Heywood's *Jupiter*. This daring political conceit stages Henry's misinterpretation of folly in *Magnyfycence*, followed by a redemptive interpretive act – figured through an embrace of ludic counsel – in *The Play of the Wether*. The third chapter brings the poor exegete into the sphere of the Shakespearean canon: *Twelfth Night's* Malvolio brandishes a hermeneutic of Puritan literalism which enables his downfall via Maria's letter and, finally, his maddening by Feste, Olivia's jester. In my final chapter, this excluded exegete emerges as the popular pamphleteer John Taylor, who – conscious of his positioning on the outside of circuits of sociable foolery – writes nonsense pamphlets suffused with global motifs that invert both the social hierarchies of London tavern culture, and the global hierarchies of core and periphery. It is a testament to the enduring weight of folly as interpretive symbol that each incarnation summons the presence of a weak exegete, a textual function morphing between these figures, each to different effect.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that folly is a fertile locus for considering the stakes of interpretation – for reconciling humanist philological culture with the real-world reverberations of the discursive circuits it creates. The fool is a prime access-point for considering the nexus between epistemology and materiality because he negotiates a tension between interpretive allegory and the stark socio-political realities of embodiment. Embodiment in this thesis takes a range of forms – provocative in the case of allegorical fools, debilitating in the case of weak exegetes, and dynamically mobile in the case of subaltern subjects. In different ways, these models of embodiment revitalise and reconfigure the legacy of Menippean culture.

# 1

## Humanism, Philology and the Menippean Revival

### Introduction

This chapter takes as its theme the humanist Menippean revival that might be styled a ‘pre-history’ of the Silenus Box allegory. Menippean texts are among a multitude of sources that foreground the interpretive demands of folly (others include medieval folklore, performative modes like the *sottie* and *commedia dell’arte*, and even Pauline biblical tradition), yet they offer a prime point of access because of their interpolation of high and low culture for consciously academic ends. Because of the scholarly nature of these texts – both in rhetorical form and in thematic focus – they portray the construction of epistemic circuitry, a process which draws heavily on the projection of internal and external interpreters. While the bulk of this chapter focuses on Erasmus’ *Praise of Folly*, first translated into English by Thomas Chaloner in 1549, it also surveys similar operations in two continental precursors: an encomium for Thomas Aquinas by Lorenzo Valla and Angelo Poliziano’s *Lamia*. In different ways, each of these texts uses Menippean irony to stage academic interventions: Valla problematises the tropes of scholastic disputation, Poliziano insists on the value of philological enquiry to philosophy, and Erasmus emphasises the importance of supplementing theological theory with praxis. The focus of this chapter is on how irony enables these satiric interventions to assume a highly complex form. By

projecting epistemic circuits – circuits that hinge on the reader’s ability to differentiate irony from literalism – these texts use concerns about inclusion to subtly persuade. They issue readers a challenge to ideologically conform with the humanist project in order to differentiate themselves from the weak exegetes who are constructed within the texts.

In fact, even the history of the Menippean revival raises questions of epistemological inclusion, which, for the humanists, often centered on the question of philological skill. The earliest recorded translation of Lucian’s *Timon* (undertaken in 1403 by Bertholdus) was received sneeringly by later humanists. According to Erasmus, the translation was so poor it invited suspicion that ‘the translator’s intention was to prove by doing so that he knew neither Greek nor Latin; indeed it would not be absurd to suppose that he was hired as a translator by Lucian’s enemies!’<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, in the aftermath of Bertholdus, translation efforts continued. Classicist Guarino da Verona is the first translator to dedicate sustained effort to translating Lucian’s canon. He produced translations of *De Calumniā* and *Muscae collaudatio gel explicitio*, retitled *Muscae laudes*, during his tenure in Constantinople from 1403 to 1408, and later translated *Parisitus* (1414-19) while in Venice.<sup>63</sup> Later translations by Giovanni Aurispa, Lapo da Castiglionchio, Aretino and Poggio solidified a slowly growing corpus.<sup>64</sup>

The appeal of Lucian to this small group of translators, and More and Erasmus a century later, was an ornate Greek style that came to be seen as prototypical. As philology grew in

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<sup>62</sup> Anna Peterson, ‘Dialoguing with a Satirist: The Translations of Lucian by Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas More,’ *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 27.2 (2020): 176.

<sup>63</sup> David Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins: Humor and humanism in the Early English Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 21-30.

<sup>64</sup> Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins*, 30-1, 35, 37-9; Irene Fantappiè, ‘Rewriting, Re-figuring. Pietro Aretino’s Transformations of Classical Literature’ in *Renaissance Rewritings*, ed. Helmut Pfeiffer, Irene Fantappiè and Tobias Roth (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 65.

prominence, Neo-Latinists praised the elegance of his style and embraced its pedagogic value. Rinuccio characterises Lucian as Greece's most renowned philosopher, while Giovanni Andrea De' Bussi praises Lucian's combination of volubility and *dictionis proprietates*.<sup>65</sup> Prior to his spurning in Reformation England as vitriolic and atheistic, Lucian's work was embraced as erudite and infused with moral value, a dual commendation that spurred a series of originals in the Menippean style. Examples include Bruni's mock encomium of 1407, *Oratio Eliogabali ad meretrices*, in which Antonius Heliogabalus addresses a group of prostitutes as a military unit.<sup>66</sup> Leon Battista Alberti made several contributions to the burgeoning Menippean mode, including *Musca* (an homage to *Muscae laudes*) and *Canis*. He later invoked the form in the second book of his magnum opus, *Momus*. Through the mid-Quattrocento, Lorenzo Valla penned several works in the Menippean style, including the provocatively-titled *De voluptate* in 1431, and his proficiency in this style sheds light on the elusive interweaving of praise and irony in his *Encomium to St. Thomas*.

This chapter has three main sections. In the first, I outline the ways in which Erasmus' pedagogic writings and the paratextual apparatus of *The Praise of Folly* produce an image of irony as socially codified. Then, I trace how the *Encomium of St. Thomas* and *Lamia* use irony to foreground the interpretive act. Finally, I suggest that *The Praise of Folly* invokes a Menippean tradition only to reconfigure it, by presenting an ironic interplay of theory and praxis as a repository for Christian revelation. The work of Valla and Poliziano centres on academic

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<sup>65</sup> Both tributes are catalogued by Keith Clemons Sidwell. See 'Lucian of Samosata in the Italian Quattrocento,' PhD Diss, (King's College, Cambridge, 1972), 77.

<sup>66</sup> David Marsh notes that the characterisation of Heliogabalus as an unreliable narrator is an important source for later experiments in the style. Most prominently, this narratorial instability is embodied in Moria herself, adding extra ambiguity to the Lucianic style. See 'Guarino of Verona's Translation of Lucian's *Parasite*,' *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 56.2 (1994): 419-444.

questions – in particular, the value of philology over disputation (the study of textual culture was viewed as vital by the humanists, but with some scepticism by the scholastic establishment).<sup>67</sup> Erasmus, however, seems to go beyond these academic quarrels to significantly lift the stakes. In *The Praise of Folly*, an inability to interpret irony problematises the reader's participation in the *Philosophia Christi*, viewed by Erasmus as the source of Christian truth: the wise folly of Christ himself.

### **Conceptualising Codified Irony**

In 1514, Dutch theologian Maarten van Dorp composed a critique of *The Praise of Folly* that opened him to ridicule. In an intellectual faux pas, Dorp's letter to Erasmus signals a miscomprehension of the text's action – its ludic ironies, paradoxes and slippery equivocations. Dorp's exegetical error seems to lie in literalism. Encouraging Erasmus to rectify the damage of his mock encomium by composing a 'Praise of Wisdom' – which he anticipates will be 'delightful and universally popular' – the letter suggests Dorp read *The Praise of Folly* as a straight endorsement of its theme.<sup>68</sup> Intriguingly, rather than attempting to discretely erase this misreading of his text, Erasmus was instrumental in both preserving and amplifying it. He appended Dorp's letter, and his own response to it, to editions of *The Praise of Folly* printed from June 1524 onwards.

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<sup>67</sup> For a history of this divide, see Jill Kraye, 'Philologists and Philosophers' in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Jill Kraye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 142-59.

<sup>68</sup> Maarten van Dorp, 'Ep 304: From Maarten van Dorp,' in *Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 298-445 (1514-1516)*, trans. R.A.B. Mynors and D.F.S Thomson, ed. James K. McConica (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 20.

There are some obvious explanations for this addition of Dorp's letter to the paratext of *The Praise of Folly*, not least of which is the opportunity it provided for Erasmus to preemptively defend himself from unsympathetic readings of a highly equivocal text.<sup>69</sup> However, I take this quirk in the text's editorial history as suggestive of a trend that rivets representations of folly to attempts, and failures, to interpret it. In fact, Dorp's letter introduces a suggestive vocabulary for describing these satellite interpreters: that of theological exegesis. Entreating Erasmus to soften his criticisms of the scholastics, he writes:

Then take the faculty of theology, for which it is so important to retain the respect of the common folk; what good did it do, indeed how much harm it will do, to attack so bitterly, however much we may grant at the same time that what you said about some individuals is the truth. And then Christ, and the life in heaven – can the ears of a good Christian endure to hear such foolishness ascribed to him, while life in Heaven, it says, is likely to be nothing but a form of lunacy? We know that it is not only what is false that is a stone of stumbling, but anything that may prove a cause of undoing for the weaker brethren for whom, no less than for great wits, Christ laid down his life.<sup>70</sup>

Dorp's concern for the 'weaker brother' draws on Pauline theology, particularly a warning against liberalism in First Corinthians. The 'weak brother' of Paul's description was a Christian with a weak conscience, who, blinded by legalism, failed to grasp the freedom of the 'New Covenant' inaugurated by Jesus' death. When Paul prohibits the consumption of food sacrificed

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<sup>69</sup> The extent to which Dorp himself may have been a willing participant in this process is a topic of speculation. Since Lisa Jardine's 'literary detective work', which highlighted Erasmus' systematic attempts at self-mythologising, many critics have reconceived Dorp's role. In the place of an obtuse proponent of Scholastic learning, some recent scholarship has reconfigured Dorp as a 'willing and sophisticated collaborator' in Erasmus' campaign against the scholastics. Brian Cummings, 'Erasmus and the End of Grammar: Humanism, Scholasticism, and Literary Language', *New Medieval Literatures* 11 (2009): 258. See Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters: The Construction of Charisma in Print* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>70</sup> Dorp, 'Ep 304,' 18-9.

to pagan idols, he does so, not on moral grounds, but to prevent the weaker brother's misunderstanding. When Christians fail to uphold this principle, Paul concludes, then 'through thy knowledge shall the weaker brother perish, for whom Christ died.'<sup>71</sup> We might view Dorp's deferral to Paul as a pointed one, orienting Erasmus towards his own Pauline *Philosophia Christi*. Yet this theme of legalism, literalism, or some intermingling of the two, precluding interpreters from grasping the ludic wisdom of folly – and, later, failing to 'penetrate to the heart of the allegory' – is one that endures into even more secular texts. Because of this, this thesis will frequently invoke 'weak exegesis' as a means of describing this phenomenon, and tracing it back to its vital New Testament genesis.

Dorp's criticisms, clumsy as they are, strike at a complex tension in Erasmian humanism. This is the curious marriage of pedagogic purpose and a complex Menippean style that seems to invite the reader in while, simultaneously, risking his misapprehension. Erasmus' publication of Dorp's letter, and his own response to it, indicate that this tension is one he sought to amplify rather than erase. In his commentary on Lucian's original satires – in dedicatory epistles accompanying his translations and later published, alongside those of More, as *Luciani opuscula* – Erasmus offers some insight into this paradox. These annotations suggest Erasmus viewed Lucian as a moral instructor who used pleasure to achieve educative ends. For instance, in his preface to his translation of *Toxaris*, Erasmus extols Lucian's didactic value to Richard Foxe: 'And this dialogue is sure to be no less pleasant than profitable, if the reader only observes the

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<sup>71</sup> 1 Corinthians 8:11, *The Geneva Bible, a Facsimile of the 1560 Edition*, ed. Lloyd E. Berry (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969). Most biblical references in this thesis will draw on the Geneva translation, so as to situate Menippean style within the vital linguistic and ideological contexts of the evolving early modern Church, both in the lead up to, and in wake of, the Reformation.

appropriate way in which its characters are treated.’<sup>72</sup> In a letter to Christopher Urswick prefacing his translation of *Gallus*, Erasmus articulates this moralism through vivid gustatory metaphor: ‘it pleases me, not only for the sake of its novelty and its rich colouring, beautiful shape, and fragrant scent, but also because it secretes a juice of sovereign potency for health.’<sup>73</sup> Erasmus’ defence of Lucian draws on two seemingly dissonant traits: moral instruction and hedonistic appeal. The allure of the ‘rich colouring’, beauty, and potent juices of Lucian’s works produces an Edenic scene poised on trespass. This allusion powerfully foregrounds epistemology – a theme fatefully embedded in the original Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – and positions Lucian’s works at a precarious intersection of moral education and carnal knowledge.

Disentangling educative intent from this paradox presents a critical challenge. Some scholars have suggested that Erasmus assumed an exclusively educated readership for *The Praise of Folly* based on the exposition of similar themes in a more accessible, didactic style in the *Colloquies*.<sup>74</sup> However this claim seems inconsistent with the text’s widespread circulation and

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<sup>72</sup> Erasmus, ‘Ep 187: To Richard Foxe,’ *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 142-297 (1501-1514)*, trans. R.A.B. Mynors and D.F.S Thomson, ed. Wallace K. Ferguson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 101-3.

<sup>73</sup> Erasmus, ‘Ep 193: To Christopher Urswick,’ *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 142-297 (1501-1514)*, trans. R.A.B. Mynors and D.F.S Thomson, ed. Wallace K. Ferguson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 114-117.

<sup>74</sup> Important research into the generic texture of the *Colloquies* – and their distinctness from *The Praise of Folly* – includes Jacques Chomarat’s *Grammaire et rhétorique chez Érasme* Vol. 2 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1981), 873-886; Franz Bierlaire, *Érasme et ses colloquies* (Geneva: Droz, 1977) and *Les Colloquies d’Érasme* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1978); Elsbeth Gutmann, *Die Colloquia Familiaria des Erasmus von Rotterdam* (Basel and Stuttgart: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1967); Martha Heep, *Die Colloquia familiaria des Erasmus und Lucian* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1927). Reinier Leushuis captures some common sentiments of this work and echoes Erasmus’ own mission statement in *On the Usefulness of Colloquies*: Erasmus ‘underlines the fundamental poetics of Renaissance dialogue that the genre of the colloquy activates for the purpose of infusing wisdom into the Christian reader’s inner nature.’ To achieve this purpose, most colloquies reject the ambiguities of *in utramque partem* conversation and instead make use of ‘the dissymmetrical Socratic model, which stages one dominant interlocutor leading another one step by step to the truth.’ See ‘The Paradox of Christian Epicureanism in Dialogue’, *Erasmus Studies* 35.2 (2015): 114. Another approach emphasising the distinctness of the *Colloquies* is advanced by Dennis M. Gilkey, who notes that the *Colloquies* were engineered for the classroom, and, unlike Erasmus’ more sophisticated satires, were intended for an audience of schoolboys. See ‘Erasmus “First Reader”: The *Colloquies* in Early English Pedagogy,’ *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* 10.1 (1985): 24-26.



translation into vernacular languages, a process Lisa Jardine demonstrates to have been engineered by Erasmus himself.<sup>75</sup> Even Erasmus acknowledges this paradox in a broad defence of his educational methods. The treatise ‘On the Usefulness of Colloquies’ positions both classical learning and ludic pleasure as enticements for the *studia humanitatis*:

As physicians do not always prescribe the most efficacious remedies for patients but make some allowance for their cravings, so likewise I thought it well to allure the young – who respond more readily to pleasing than to strict or harsh treatment – with this kind of bait.<sup>76</sup>

Geraldine Thomson paraphrases this defence in her own analysis of *The Praise of Folly*.

Thomson’s reading posits a ‘double pulse’ of pleasure and didacticism in Erasmus’ satire: ‘the aesthetic end is the creation of delight, usually through some comic agency, so that the response to the grimmest form of instruction, censure, may be delayed and tempered.’<sup>77</sup> For Douglas Duncan, on the other hand, this aesthetic pleasure serves a more vital purpose than that of softening critique. Asserting that Lucian provided a prototype for what he terms the ‘art of teasing’, Duncan argues that irony in humanist literature served educative ideals by testing moral and doctrinal tenacity. Through confronting readers with ambiguity, contradiction and paradox, this method provided the public with moral training through ‘attempts to undermine or confuse it.’<sup>78</sup> Several scholars working on *the Praise of Folly* have corroborated this theory, showing how

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<sup>75</sup> Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters*, 37.

<sup>76</sup> Erasmus, ‘On the usefulness of colloquies,’ *CWE: Colloquies*, trans. Craig R. Thomson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 1097. John M. Parrish traces this belief in the pedagogic utility of pleasure to More’s *Utopia*, and perceives it as a tenet of Erasmian humanism. See Parrish ‘Education, Erasmian humanism and More’s *Utopia*,’ *Oxford Review of Education* 36.5 (2010): 589-605.

<sup>77</sup> Geraldine Thomson, *Under Pretext of Praise: Satiric Mode in Erasmus’ Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 48.

<sup>78</sup> Duncan, *Ben Jonson and the Lucianic Tradition*, 2.

Menippean ambivalence cultivates scepticism.<sup>79</sup> Likewise, Rosalie Littell Colie suggests that *The Praise of Folly* offers philological instruction, because the form of the paradox is contingent on the precision of *verba*.<sup>80</sup> Arguing for a complicity of education and play, these critics situate Erasmus' work in a pedagogic system that feels remarkably modern.

This scholarship on Erasmus echoes a long-established function of ludic writing, and irony in particular. This is its ability to segment readers into parallel groups, those appreciative of the ambivalences of the joke, and those for whom an overly-literalist approach obfuscates the ironic voice. Søren Kierkegaard vividly describes this phenomenon:

The ironic figure of speech has still another property that characterizes all irony, a certain superiority deriving from its not wanting to be understood immediately, even though it wants to be understood with the result that this figure looks down, as it were, on plain and simple talk that everyone can promptly understand; it travels around, so to speak, in an exclusive incognito and looks down pitying from this high position on ordinary, prosaic talk.<sup>81</sup>

Linda Hutcheon has coined the term 'discursive communities' to capture the exclusive networks formed around the transmission and reception of irony. These communities are stratified through repeated ironic utterances, but, vitally, they also pre-date them, and serve as the very condition

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<sup>79</sup> See, for instance, Melinda A. Cro, 'Folly's Tyranny: Theatricality in Erasmus' and Labé's Portraits of Folly,' *Moreana* 49.3-4 (2012): 5-20; Dermot Cavanagh, 'Modes of Satire' in *The Oxford Handbook of English Prose 1500-1640*, ed. Andrew Hadfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 380-95; and W. David Kay, 'Erasmus' Learned Joking: The Ironic Use of Classical Wisdom in *The Praise of Folly*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 19.3 (1977): 249.

<sup>80</sup> Rosalie Littell Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon, 1976), 34-5.

<sup>81</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates*, trans. V. Howard and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 247-8.

for the effective transmission of irony.<sup>82</sup> Implied in these images of social intercourse are those whose exclusion underlies the unifying ironic utterance. Kierkegaard's quote suggests that the pleasure of irony is the pleasure of the in-joke – a point reiterated by the findings of Hutcheon and, slightly later, Adam Zachary Newton's *Narrative Ethics*.<sup>83</sup>

By presenting the ironic text as codified, and a catalyst for the formation of social and epistemic networks, both text and ironist gesture beyond themselves to their interpreters. This model of authorial self-effacement also pre-dates the Renaissance. As Joseph A. Dane has shown, an emphasis on the responder was central in the tradition of irony inherited from the Middle Ages, and institutionalised in works such as Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*, Arnulf of Orleans' annotations on Lucan's works, and the grammar texts of Donatus. The conflation of irony with allegory effected by this tradition led to a renewed focus, not on the text as a stable and autonomous semiotic object, but on the reader-interpreter as a producer of meaning.<sup>84</sup>

A goal of this thesis is to view closed social and epistemic networks not simply as a casualty of irony, but as a purposeful construction. In all the Menippean works explored in this chapter, weak exegetes are attached to the text as satellite interpreters. Because of the ability of irony to simulate parallel communities – one formed around shared knowledge, the other ejected by literalism – Menippean texts are subtly persuasive. Thus, satirists might trigger anxieties about discursive inclusion and interpretive failure in order to wield soft influence.

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<sup>82</sup> Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 18.

<sup>83</sup> Adam Zachary Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), 274. A dissenter to this school of thought is Wayne C. Booth, who moves away from an emphasis on irony's victim by suggesting that irony preferences 'the building of amiable communities' over exclusion, and is often guided by a spirit 'of joining, of finding and communing with kindred spirits.' See *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 27-8.

<sup>84</sup> Joseph A. Dane, *The Critical Mythology of Irony* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 52-5.

## Mock Thomism and Codified Irony: Valla's *Encomium of St. Thomas*

Lorenzo Valla's *Encomium of St. Thomas* was an oration delivered in 1457 to commemorate the Feast of Aquinas, at the invitation of Rome's Dominican Order. Despite this festive occasion the tone of Valla's encomium strikes a complex balance of praise and critique, a contradiction which demands interpretive negotiation from his audience. W. Scott Blanchard, citing the work's anti-Thomist invective, classes it in the tradition of the mock encomium:

Valla's work opens with praise for the encyclopedic learning of the famous saint, but ends by mocking the excessive ratiocination and complexity of his highly technical philosophy. In this lecture, Valla accomplishes nothing less than a thorough discrediting of scholasticism's overly determined systematization, appealing at the lecture's close to the simple and elegant expressions of St Paul and his sage advice to 'Beware philosophy and vain deceit' (Colossians 2:8) that students might encounter in the cumbersome instruments of late medieval dialectic.<sup>85</sup>

This same anti-Thomist zeal leads John O'Malley to label the oration an 'anti-panegyric' with a highly polemical tone.<sup>86</sup> Yet the circumstances of the oration's delivery pose classificatory problems. Could a panegyric marking a key liturgical date – and accompanied by grave injunctions against misdemeanor – afford to display Menippean irreverence? Blanchard and O'Malley point to the oration's satiric underside, but their final conclusions – integrating Valla's work into the tradition of the mock encomium/anti-panegyric – assume a conflation of Aquinas

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<sup>85</sup> Blanchard, 'Renaissance Prose Satire: Italy and England' in *A Companion to Satire*, ed. Ruben Quintero (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 122.

<sup>86</sup> John W. O'Malley, 'Some Renaissance Panegyrics of Aquinas,' *Renaissance Quarterly* 27.2 (1974): 174.

and Thomism that Valla himself seems keen to avoid. Instead, as Salvatore Camporeale insists, the historical particulars at work in the mid-Quattrocento accommodated a distinct separation of the two. Camporeale's research reveals the lengths Valla undertook to differentiate Aquinas from the Thomist establishment, a division partly enabled by a revision of Thomism in the late thirteenth century. This revision took the form of a subtle theoretical shift: the growing prominence of the *Summa Theologiae* over the *Sentences* which increased Aquinas' liturgical status, and grew Thomism into the prevailing doctrine of the Dominican tradition. Because of this, Camporeale claims, critiques of Neo-Thomism could assert a division between Aquinas as figurehead and Thomism as institution.

The *Encomium* is nothing other than the resulting critique of the extremes of Thomism's theological development in the century of humanism. It stands forth as a lucid and incisive call to arms to block and interrupt the (to Valla's mind decidedly regressive) course of Thomism's doctrinal development in particular and of theological study in general.<sup>87</sup>

Other critics have also maintained this separation of Aquinas and Thomism when interpreting Valla's invectives. Paul Richard Blum reads the *Encomium of St. Thomas* as a cautionary pronouncement, not against Aquinas' teachings, but rather the danger of a single figure monopolising patristic status.<sup>88</sup> Christopher Celenza suggests that Valla's invective 'emerges not against the *auctoritas*, in this case Aquinas, but rather against those who make uncritical use of his authority.'<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Salvatore Camporeale, *Christianity, Latinity, and Culture: Two Studies in Lorenzo Valla*, ed. Patrick Baker and Christopher S. Celenza (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 154.

<sup>88</sup> Paul Richard Blum, 'Truth Thrives in Diversity: Battista Mantovano and Lorenzo Valla on Thomas Aquinas,' *Verbum* 6.1 (2004): 255.

<sup>89</sup> Christopher S. Celenza, *The Intellectual World of the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 210.

This section contains a brief structural analysis of the *Encomium of St. Thomas*, adhering to this separation of Aquinas and Thomism to trace the ironies stemming from an interlocking logic of praise and censure. Valla's encomium deviates from the standard thematics of the mock encomium, specifically the praise of vice, disease and animals outlined in Annette Tomarken's typology of the mode.<sup>90</sup> More significantly, it departs from the simple inversive logic that governed the treatment of these themes, in which mock praise produced stinging complaint. In its place, Valla deploys a shadowy irony that never reveals its true intent – strung between the antinomies of praise and censure, Aquinas-as-individual, and Thomism-as-paradigm. In an annotation on the *Encomium*, Celenza captures the ambiguity of Valla's tone.

Valla admired the copiousness of Aquinas's writings in sincere terms of praise but he also marvels, he says, at something else Aquinas is supposed to have said: 'that he never read a book that he did not fully understand.' What is the audience to think? That Valla offers sincere praise? Or that he is instead subtly mocking Aquinas for vaunting an omnicomprehensive intelligence no human being could achieve? Or could audience members believe either of the two opinions, depending on their predilections, receptivity to possible irony, or even depending on Valla's delivery, something about which we cannot know anything definitively?<sup>91</sup>

This balance of complex irony and praise produces a codified edge. In the encomium, Valla maintains a sustained tension between these two elements – his earlier *narratio* and *probatio* in a panegyric tone, and a later polemical *refutatio* – that forces extremes of praise and criticism into

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<sup>90</sup> Annette H. Tomarken, *The Smile of Truth: The French Satirical Eulogy and its Antecedents* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>91</sup> Camporeale, *Christianity, Latinity, and Culture*, 9.

uneasy intercourse. The dialogue between these elements unlocks a veiled irony in Valla's tone: the audience is challenged to apply Valla's critiques of scholasticism to the devices by which he praises Aquinas in order to reveal his satirical voice. The reception of irony requires a participation in humanist epistemological circuits: thus to go beyond a literalist reading of the encomium requires a scepticism of Thomist method and sympathy with humanist critique.

Though Valla's work is distinctive because of the scale of its critique, it participated in a growing tradition of *encomia* praising Aquinas. The research of Paul Kristeller and John O'Malley has uncovered the burgeoning body of panegyric works surrounding Aquinas during the Neo-Thomist period.<sup>92</sup> *Encomia* delivered to mark the Feast of Aquinas during the Quattrocento and early Cinquecento established a panegyric tradition solidifying around familiar tropes including Aquinas' family and lineage, as well as prophetic foretellings of his life. *Comparatio* emerges as a popular structuring device, as illustrated most clearly in Martino de Viana's elevation of Aquinas over Solomon in terms of *nobilitas*, *sapientia*, and *religio* in an encomium in 1496. Familiar thematics also emerge from the tradition: Aurelio Lippo Brandolini (c 1490), Petrus de la Hazardière (1441), Albertus Hunacius (1504), Petrus Lazarus, and Laurentius Duliemus de Traversagnis (both undated), all praise Aquinas via the twin lines of learning and virtue, a division observed by Valla in his encomium.<sup>93</sup> In fact, Valla's work adopts

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<sup>92</sup> Kristeller, *Le Thomisme et la pensée italienne de la Renaissance* (Paris: Vrin, 1967) and O'Malley, 'Renaissance Panegyrics.'

<sup>93</sup> O'Malley provides an outline of these panegyrics in 'Renaissance Panegyrics' and elaborates on this tradition in a later essay. Noting that many of Valla's fellow panegyrists were also steeped in the *studia humanitatis*, he pushes back against the suggestion that Valla's encomium typified the humanist response to scholasticism. O'Malley's explanation for this disparity is twofold. Firstly, he suggests that 'Valla's originality and genius allowed him to see profound discrepancies that lesser minds did not perceive.' He follows this suggestion with a more satisfying explanation: 'there were qualities in Thomas' style that would give him an appeal to humanists that other scholastic authors lacked. Gothic though Thomas' writings were in their structure, method, and relentless attention to detail, they also possessed certain classical virtues like order, clarity, and simplicity of expression.' See O'Malley, *Religious Culture in the Sixteenth Century* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993), 22-23.

many of the tropes of this tradition, including motifs of prophesy and filial lineage, structuring devices of onomastics (praise via the etymology and history of personal names) and *comparatio*, and structuring themes of learning and virtue. The proceeding analysis looks at Valla's ironised use of several tropes to praise Aquinas: eisegesis, onomastics and *comparatio*.

In Valla's work, onomastic detail undercuts praise of Aquinas through the generation of complex intertextual ironies. Valla first draws on the name of Thomas as a marker of ecclesiastical significance, as he pictures Aquinas' gestation in near-messianic terms: 'When his mother was with child, a certain hermit, a man of God who had come precisely to bring her this news, congratulated her and told her she would bear a son whom she would call Thomas and who would be filled with the excellence of this name.'<sup>94</sup> The elusive 'excellence' of the name of Thomas receives shape earlier in the encomium. 'Thomas', Valla informs his audience, is a Hebrew word meaning *abyssus* [bottomless pit] and *geminus* [twin], a twofold definition that Valla presents as the bases for a series of dubious accolades. Even a cursory view of these definitions invites scepticism – neither *abyssus* nor *geminus* seems unequivocally positive – but a study of Aquinas' *own* writings reveals another layer of irony at play here. As Valla's devoutly Thomist audience may have realised, to praise the name of Thomas is to invoke Aquinas' own writings on the theme. In his commentary on John's gospel, Aquinas characterises the Apostle Thomas through etymological analysis.

The disciple who is absent is first identified by his name, *Thomas*, which means 'twin' or 'abyss.' An abyss has both depth and darkness. And Thomas was an abyss on account of the darkness of his disbelief, of which he was the cause. And again there is an abyss, the

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<sup>94</sup> Camporeale, *Christianity, Latinity, and Culture*, 305. My discussion of Valla will draw on Camporeale's translation.



depths of Christ's compassion, which he had for Thomas. We read: *abyss calls to abyss* (Ps 42:7). That is, the depths of Christ's compassion calls to the depths of darkness in Thomas, and Thomas' abyss of unwillingness calls out, when he professes the faith, to the depths of Christ.<sup>95</sup>

Aquinas' reference to *abyssus* invokes the lexical adjacency of 'Thomas' to the Hebrew word תְּהוֹם (*tehom*): 'the deep', that is, the primordial emptiness described in Genesis 1:2. Aquinas divides *abyssus* into two defining traits – darkness and depth – and attributes the former to the apostle and the latter to Christ. Aquinas' *abyssus* is a site on which opposites converge: Lord and sinner, miracle and sceptic, saviour and saved. Yet even if Thomas and Christ meet in *abyssus*, the abyss conveyed by the name of Thomas/*tehom* is distinct from that characterising Christ: where the latter signifies depths of compassion, the former is described in terms of darkness. According to Aquinas' allegory, the abyss of *tehom* consists of a kind of essentialist absence – the absence of light and faith – that demands fulfilment. Thus Christ emerges as the divine supplement to the apostle's abyss, even as he supplemented and transformed the matter of the first, primordial *tehom*: 'In the beginning was the Word...All things were made by it, & without it was made nothing that was made' (John 1:1-3). The *abyssus* signified by Thomas, then, is characterised not by abundant depths but an emptiness demanding supplementation.

So in praising Aquinas through the name of Thomas, Valla invokes a body of work on this theme by the saint himself. The 'excellence' Valla reads in the name of Thomas echoes Aquinas' theology of the abyss, according to which the name of Thomas marks a void demanding mercy. The *abyssus quaedam scientiae* [abyss of knowledge] marked by the name of

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<sup>95</sup> Thomas Aquinas, 'Commentary on the Gospel of John,' trans. Fr. Larcher and ed. Aquinas Institute, *Aquinas Institute*, accessed 19 November 2018, <https://aquinas.cc/188/190/~1>.

Thomas, according to Aquinas himself, is nothing but the darkened absence of belief. Valla's subversive intertextual allusions are threaded through his praise of the name of Thomas. In one such instance, Valla invokes another Thomas – St Thomas Beckett – in a passage of *comparatio*, writing of Aquinas:

That he is not inferior is further demonstrated by the following argument: although both men have the name of Thomas, our Thomas received it not by human but by divine will, since the meaning of Thomas in Hebrew is both 'bottomless pit' (*abyssus*) and 'twin' (*geminus*). And Thomas Aquinas truly was such a one: a kind of bottomless pit of knowledge, and a twin due to the pairing of knowledge and virtue in him, both of which were without parallel and beyond belief.

(303)

Valla's argument is humorously eisegetical in tone, falsely applying Aquinas' own theology to transform *abyssus* into infinite knowledge, and *geminus* into the unparalleled union of knowledge and virtue. Shifting the meaning of Thomas into a platform for hyperbolic praise, Valla's interpretation of *abyssus* and *geminus* ironically contrasts with their literal translations: the absent and the mimetic. Valla's subversive use of onomastics twists the panegyric trope into an interface of praise and critique.

This intertextual irony is furthered by structural tensions in the encomium – in particular, between the complimentary *narratio* and *probatio* and the satiric *refutatio*. Camporeale reads the *probatio* through a 'rhetorical grid system,' and offers the following dissection of Valla's rhetorical strategy:

The horizontal axis is syntagmatic and relational and is composed of the hagiographic, charismatic, and prophetic topoi of birth (*ortus*), life (*vita*) and death (*mors*). The vertical axis, on the other hand, is systematic and correlational and articulated by means of typological biblical figures representative of the kind of life to which God manifestly calls his elect.<sup>96</sup>

In service of the first, horizontal, axis is a biography of Aquinas with teleological undertones. In service of the second, vertical, axis is a passage of *comparatio*, invoking Castilian priest and founder of the Dominican Order, Dominic de Guzmán. Camporeale's terminology is a useful portrait of the way the two broad parts of the encomium pursue different effects. Yet a close examination of these two 'axes' reveals that they not only fulfill different ends, but actively complicate each other. The axes never quite harmonise; instead, a subtle tension between the two advances a cryptic irony.

Valla opens by invoking divine prophesy in order to position Aquinas' life as the fulfilment of Aristotelian *télos*:

Justly was he destined to be foretold to the world before he was born, his birth prophesied, his life predicted, even his death announced. For when his mother was with child, a certain hermit, a man of God who had come precisely to bring her this news, congratulated her and told her that she would bear a son whom she would call Thomas and who would be filled with the excellence of this name. God, whenever he has resolved to give something extraordinary and new to the world, is wont to announce it with signs and prophesies.

(305)

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<sup>96</sup> Camporeale, *Christianity, Latinity, and Culture*, 170.

Aquinas' greatness stems from two qualities: he is the manifestation of unfolding teleology, and he is 'extraordinary' and 'new.' This latter source of glory is marked, Valla notes, by the 'excellence of his name.' This divine christening emerges as a nexus for satiric inversion as Valla continues to invoke the name of Thomas to ironic effect. The qualities of *geminus* and *abyssus* problematise the greatness imputed to the saint, and his 'extraordinary newness' is undercut by the derivative quality of *geminus*.

The praise of Valla's horizontal axis is further destabilised by the vertical axis. This axis, which consists of an extended exercise in *comparatio*, mocks claims of Aquinas' individuation by nature of the rhetorical form. These recurrent comparisons also complicated Aquinas' status as a realisation of *télos*.

In the same way the greatness of the blessed Dominic, the founder of this family, was foretold to his mother when she was pregnant. I will not say which prophesy was more extraordinary, in order to avoid (to the extent possible) the appearance of a contest between father and son. Let the prophecies about each man be equal, equal the merits of both their lives.

(305)

Valla draws focus to his desire to avoid hierarchising Aquinas and Dominic, but, in doing so, only accentuates the natural asymmetry of father and son. By positioning Aquinas as Dominic's descendant, Valla portrays Aquinas' contribution to Dominicanism as one of reduced impact:

So then, Dominic founded the house of the preachers; Thomas covered its floors with marble. Dominic built its walls; Thomas decorated them with the finest paintings.

Dominic was the pillar of the brothers, Thomas their shining example. Dominic planted; Thomas gave water. The one shunned and resisted the honors and episcopacies bestowed upon him; the other fled nobility, wealth, kinsmen, and parents as if they were sirens. The one imitated the chastity and continence of Paul, the other the virginity of John the Evangelist. Of the one nothing was more admirable than his humility (which the Greeks more meaningfully call *tapeinophrosynē*). The other had so much humility that he was even astonished at the boasting and bragging of others; he never felt this vice in himself, as he frankly confessed to some brothers, although he still recognized his own greatness and numerous talents.

(305)

By structuring the *comparatio* through a logic of filial asymmetry, Valla positions Aquinas as the lesser of the two saints. Where Dominic establishes, erects, and roots, Aquinas decorates and embellishes. Valla concludes this unflattering comparison of the two with an ironic assertion of Aquinas' greatness: 'I highly praise the exceptional simplicity of St. Thomas's writing; I admire his carefulness; I am amazed at the fullness, the variety, the completeness of his teachings' (309). Praising Aquinas according to traits of *subtilitas* [subtlety], *copia* [fullness], and *absolutio* [absoluteness], Valla contradicts his earlier claims. According to the architectural metaphor laid out above, Aquinas' efforts show none of the modest simplicity of *subtilitas* but are intricately decorative, laying marble and hanging fine paintings. By this same token, Aquinas' efforts have neither the fullness of *copia* nor the completion of *absolutio*; they are instead ancillary extensions of Dominic's core ecclesial structure.

As Valla turns his attention to traits shared between the saints – humility, chastity, and aversion to worldly honours – Aquinas remains a diminished figure. Where Valla casts Dominic's modesty as a site of militant resistance, Aquinas' is one of castration: he flees from

the feminine power of the sirens. Dominic's sexual purity suggests a platonic triumph of mind over body, while Aquinas' invokes a scene of reluctance described in his own prologue to John's gospel where he presents John as 'one of the disciples of the Lord, who was chosen by God as a virgin, whom God called from his wedding, when he wished to marry.'<sup>97</sup> Dominic's humility takes the form of Pauline *tapeinophrosynē* (as used in the epistles to the Philippian and Ephesian churches),<sup>98</sup> while Aquinas' is a site of highly ironic self-delusion: 'astonished at the boasting and bragging of others [and having] never felt this vice in himself.'

The sustained asymmetry of this comparison has forceful impact. With the belittling *comparatio* of Valla's horizontal axis, both traits imputed to Aquinas by the *topos* of the vertical axis become disrupted. Aquinas is not 'extraordinary and new' but derivative, a fact ironically captured in his name, and augmented through the comparison with Dominic. This derivative quality ruptures prophetic *télos*: in the unfolding ecclesiology described by Valla, Aquinas figures less as a building crescendo than a diminutive offshoot. I suggest that the subversive play between Camporeale's vertical and horizontal axes acts to ironise both the Thomist precept of *télos* and its figurehead.

Valla's praise of Aquinas through the encomium displays a pattern: the invocation of familiar scholastic and eulogistic tropes which are then subtly undermined, in the examples here through onomastics and *comparatio*. As Valla proceeds into his *refutatio*, his criticism devolves

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<sup>97</sup> Aquinas, 'Commentary on the Gospel of John.'

<sup>98</sup> In Philippians, Paul goes so far as to position this mode of humility as the heart of the resurrection: Christ, 'Who being in the forme of God, thought it no robbery to be equal with God: but he made him self of no reputation, and toke on him the forme of a servant, and was made like vnto men, and was founde in shape as a man. He humbled him self, and became obedient vnto death.' Philippians 2:6-8.

from subtle irony into outright polemic. He attacks the canonised methods of the scholastics, ‘the deep-set opinion, held by so many, that no one can become a theologian without the precepts of the dialecticians, metaphysicians, and the other philosophers’ (307). In place of these methods, Valla prefers philology and close textual exegesis, heralding the Apostle Paul as architect of the ‘the genuine mode of theologizing.’ What, exactly, is the relationship between this invective and the subtle irony of Valla’s praise earlier in the encomium? We could view these anti-Thomist jibes as an unlikely complement to the *probatio*. The outright critiques of the *refutatio* supplement the rest of the encomium, which enacts a subtler mockery through ironic eisegesis, onomastic praise and teleology. Because of this, the irony of Valla’s encomium both advances and *requires* a scepticism of Thomist systems. Similarly, to participate in the discursive community mobilised by the encomium demands a sympathy with humanist critique.

### **Codified Irony and the Embodied Exegete: Between Valla and Poliziano**

If Valla’s ironic voice depends on a sympathy with humanist critique, his encomium also begins to engage with the division between supporters and detractors in meta-critical terms.

Some people seem to me to be objecting and just about throwing up their hands, crying, ‘What are you saying? What are you aiming at with this hyperbole of yours, which is the friend of the foolish, enemy of the prudent? Will you have no regard for the truth, for your own conscience, or for your audience, which is composed of numerous men of the greatest importance and wisdom? Are you not content to make Thomas Aquinas the equal of martyrs and to prefer him to many of them? Must you raise him up to the level of Cherubim, above whom God sits? Must you also compare him to the very Seraphim, the highest order of angels? What more will you accord to the apostle Thomas? What

more to Paul, the teacher of the Gentiles – that he is one of the Cherubim? What more to John the Baptist – that he is one of the Seraphim?’

(303)

Valla claims to defend himself against objections, but whether this defence is the product of an interactive dialogue or a premeditated rhetorical strategy is unclear. He appears to refute dissent – and, given the incendiary nature of his material, a scene of protest is possible – but it is equally possible that Valla himself is the source of these objections, imputed to otherwise reticent viewers. The orator himself, in engaging with them, seems to shift between observation, inference, and strategic fabrication.

Yet Valla’s humorous tone in delivering this defence suggests that the appearance of protests – if not the reality – is key to the rhetorical strategy of the encomium. Valla’s combination of contracting syntax and ascending referents when he ventriloquises these objections – moving from Aquinas, to Paul, to John the Baptist – presents the audience as hysterically outraged. This act of prosopopoeia captures audience objections, whether vocalised or not, and amplifies them to a parodic pitch. With this substitution of reasoned objection with frantic hyperbole, Valla pre-empts and nullifies dissent. He also constructs an audience impervious to the irony of his speech, scandalised by a misapprehension of Menippean ambivalence. We can begin to see how the discursive communities formed around irony – and aligned through humanist sympathies – are amplified in text. More significantly, through constructing exegetes on the outskirts of these discursive systems, Valla pursues a satiric strategy centred on questions of (and anxieties about) epistemic inclusion.



In 1492, Florentine humanist Angelo Poliziano deployed a similar strategy. He penned a scathing *praelectio* (introductory lecture) titled *Lamia*, to deflect criticisms of his appointment to teach a course on Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*. These criticisms centred on a standard humanist-scholastic dispute – Poliziano's preference for philology over dialectics as a conduit for philosophical truths – and are ventriloquised ironically in *Lamia*. Poliziano's oration is an eclectic mix of invective, ontological theorising and mythopoeia. Its premise is withering: Poliziano transforms his opponents into lamias, female vampires with dislocating eyes.<sup>99</sup> An image borrowed from Plutarch's *De curiositate*, the lamias attach their eyes as they wander through town so as to scrutinise each passing object, but remove them in the comforts of their own homes. *Lamia* is a suggestive study for two reasons: firstly, because its persuasive strategy rests on the construction of dual audiences – one composed of weak exegetes and the other of sympathetic supporters. Secondly, because it begins to configure weak exegetes through an intensification of embodiment. In their selective blindness, the lamias are conscribed by a bodily form that is gendered and disabled.

Poliziano takes the identity of the philosopher as his key theme, and his work has a triadic structure suggestive of syllogism. His progression, first outlining the nature of the philosopher and secondly arguing for the benefits of being one, gestures towards the arrival of a pre-conceived conclusion. This conclusion never comes. Poliziano disrupts his own syllogistic course by refusing to take the label of philosopher for himself, despite aligning himself with each

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<sup>99</sup> A Latinized version of 'lamias' would observe the standard nominative plural inflection of 'ae.' In this thesis, I follow the editorial decision of Celenza and provide an Anglicised version of the word, pluralised as 'lamias.' See Poliziano, *Angelo Poliziano's Lamia: Text, Translation, and Introductory Studies*, ed. Christopher S. Celenza (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

of the criteria outlined in his first premise. Instead, after probing the nature of the philosopher – an exercise that advertises his credentials – he rejects the label, exclaiming ‘I wish I were he!’<sup>100</sup>

Like Valla, Poliziano uses prosopopoeia to give voice to tacit dissent. Yet *Lamia* advances Valla’s model by engaging critics via a sustained vocative address. Through repeating direct challenges to the audience, passive bystanders are forced to ally themselves with one of two adversarial sides. The first consists of the hyper-critical lamias. The second is a group of Florentine insiders associated with the late Lorenzo de Medici, who oversaw Poliziano’s appointment. Poliziano addresses each in turn, and opens with a direct challenge:

I ask you, Florentine countrymen, haven’t you ever seen Lamias like this, who know nothing about themselves and their own business but are always observing others and their own affairs? Do you deny it? Yet they are still common in cities and even in yours; but they march around, masked. You might think they are human beings, but they are Lamias.

(199)

With this challenge, autoptic experience, considered by the Neoplatonists the most secure form of sensory knowledge, seems threatened on both sides. The lamias have an obvious impairment in their blindness to introspection. Yet, Poliziano suggests, Florentine intellectuals are equally vulnerable, and he positions the classification of lamias as a literal blind-spot endangering their intellectual autonomy. With this mythopoeic stand-off, Poliziano polarises his critics and confronts neutral onlookers: by casting the lamias as an epistemic threat, Poliziano suggests that the identification and disavowal of his critics is essential for autoptic certainty.

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<sup>100</sup> Poliziano, *Lamia*, 38. References are taken from Celenza’s translation, and will appear in text.

With the construction of these adversarial sides, the audience is issued with a direct provocation, to align themselves with either the conclave of blinded lamias or the ‘fair-minded’ Florentine insiders. This challenge is driven by a further epistemic imperative: not only do the lamias lack self-knowledge, by Poliziano’s account they also lack the interpretive skills to perceive his ironic register.

(68) And yet: once again I seem to hear those Lamias, as they offer brief, stinging responses to the things I have been discussing, which have ranged far and wide. Here is what they say: ‘Poliziano, you labour in vain when you argue and declaim to your listeners that you are no philosopher. You have nothing to worry about. No one is so stupid that he believes this about you! When we were saying that you were “so quick to call yourself a philosopher” (a word that really burns you up, as we see), even we didn’t believe that you were in fact a philosopher. We are not so perversely ignorant that we would accuse you of philosophy. No, this is what got us angry: it is that you would behave somewhat presumptuously (not to use a stronger word), since for three years now you’ve been calling yourself a philosopher, even though you had never paid any attention before to philosophy. This is the reason we also called you a “trifler” since for a time you have been teaching things you don’t know and never learned.’

(69) So now I really hear and understand what you are saying, what you mean, good Lamias. But if you can make the time, just listen to me for a second. I confess I am an interpreter of Aristotle. How good I am at it is inconsequential to say but, yes, I do confess that I am an interpreter of Aristotle, not a philosopher. I mean, if I were an interpreter of a king, I wouldn’t, for that reason, consider myself a king.

(241)

Through Socratic irony, Poliziano suggests that the error of his critics lies in a misconstruction of the philologist's role. Yet his rebuttal also relies on an argumentative fallacy, and in his false equivalence of philosopher and king Poliziano tackles his detractors with reductionism. Later, Poliziano invokes Plato's allegorical cave to issue an interpretive challenge:

Now I would interpret the sense of this image if I weren't speaking among you, Florentine men, who are endowed with such great intelligence and eloquence. I will suggest this much: those who were bound in the darkness were none other than the crowd and the uneducated, whereas that free man, liberated from his chains and in the daylight, is the very philosopher about whom we have been speaking for a time.

(241)

With this patronising explanation, Poliziano ironises his praise of his audience's intellect. The interpretation he offers is not, as promised, a 'suggestion', but instead a blunt allegorical reading. With this careful exposition of common knowledge, Poliziano builds on the Socratic irony of his previous passage to position his audience as weak, dependent exegetes.

Later, Poliziano turns from his critics to address supporters:

(75) These Lamias are really getting to me. So I won't deal with them now, but with you, who will be fairer to me, I think. I won't adduce now the strong friendships I have always had with the most learned philosophers. I won't cite my bookshelves, filled to the rooftops as they are with ancient commentaries, especially those of the Greeks, who usually seem to me the most outstanding of learned men. (76) But let me make a deal with you: if none of my writings or orations bear the odor of philosophy, let no one think I studied with philosophers or approached their books. If, however, there are found many

things in my writings that savor a certain sect, then go ahead and believe that I did not myself bring forth such things, but that I at least got to know them from learned men.

(249)

Having already segmented his audience into halves, Poliziano channels this division into two different modes of address. Third-person allusion marginalises Poliziano's critics, while vocative address inducts his sympathisers into an ostensible cabal of shared knowledge. Igor Candido suggests these modes of address result in dual levels of signification, with only Poliziano's supporters capable of perceiving 'what his critique of institutionalized philosophy represented: a manifesto of Poliziano's ongoing cultural transformation and one of the programmatic texts of late Florentine humanism.'<sup>101</sup> Yet the construction of these dual audiences within the text emerges as a vital persuasive strategy; through an apparent codification of irony, Poliziano positions sympathy with his cause as an interpretive challenge.

### **Erasmian Folly and the *Philosophia Christi***

The goal of this chapter so far has been to sketch the evolution of discursive communities – and the crafting of paratextual interpretive agents – through some Early Modern Menippean texts. In the case studies of Valla and Poliziano, the construction of codified irony strengthens humanist critique by presenting sympathy with the orator's position as a statement of interpretive skill. The audience of Valla's *Encomium of St. Thomas* unlocks his ludic tone and mock eisegesis through applying his critique of Thomist method. Several decades later, Poliziano's praelectio sheds light on the discursive communities stratified through irony. In a suggestive meta-

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<sup>101</sup> Candido, 'The Role of the Philosopher in late *Quattrocento* Florence: Poliziano's *Lamia* and the Legacy of the Pico-Barbaro Epistolary Controversy,' in *Angelo Poliziano's Lamia*, 95-129.

commentary, Poliziano embeds seeing and unseeing audiences into his text in order to elicit agreement.

In *The Praise of Folly*, exegetes excluded from discursive networks gain an avatar in Maarten van Dorp. However, if Dorp continues a Menippean tradition of attaching interpretive networks to ironic texts, his construction is notably different. The weak exegetes constructed by Valla and Poliziano share a common defect: an inability to assume the humanist hermeneutical stance by which the complex irony of the works become apparent. In *The Praise of Folly*, the identity of the uncomprehending exegete, and the nature of the methodologies that blind him, seem more complex. Two considerations illuminate the identity of Erasmus' weaker brother. The first is Erasmian philological practice, which has attracted a large body of scholarship.<sup>102</sup> This work produces a familiar picture of humanist textual practice, one which asserts the primacy of language and rhetoric over *a priori* reasoning, and applicable homiletics over speculation. Drawn largely from Erasmus' translations of the Greek New Testament, his epistolary writings, an exegetical manual titled *Ecclesiastes*, and grammatical works such as *De ratione studii* and *De copia*, scholarship on Erasmian exegetics tends to marginalise his fictive writings. When critics do treat Erasmus' fiction alongside his exegetical manuals, the colloquy *Convivium religiosum* proves a popular reference point due to its allegorising and hermeneutical themes. Although readings synthesising Erasmian scholarship and satire are uncommon, Geraldine Thomson argues that they produce fruitful results.

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<sup>102</sup> See, for instance, Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, *Erasmus on Language and Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977); Mary Jane Barnett, 'Erasmus and the Hermeneutics of Linguistic Praxis,' *Renaissance Quarterly* 49.3 (1996): 542-572; and Manfred Hoffman, *Rhetoric and Theology: The Hermeneutics of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

Erasmus' satire rarely lends itself, it is true, to an obscure or recondite reading, and because of this, it is tempting to shrug aside any discussion of the exegetical modes acceptable to the medieval and early Renaissance writer. Two considerations, however, militate against such a by-passing. The first is that Erasmus himself has much to say on this topic, and although what he says is applied directly to scriptural readings, the general tenor of his attitude to teaching and writing is revealed in these comments. And the second is that, although he does not laminate his fiction in such a way as to permit uncovering obscure allegorical meanings, he does provide nourishment in these writings for all of Christian man's modes of thinking and acting and being.<sup>103</sup>

Although the *The Praise of Folly* is no exegetical manual, a reading of it is enriched by a dialogue with Erasmus' interpretive ethos. The encomium invokes his *Philosophia Christi* – a philosophy clearly articulated in his *Paraclesis* (1516) – which emphasises humility, piety and active devotion. In fact, although Erasmus' anti-scholastic commentary echoes that of the continental humanists, his concern seems less in asserting the primacy of philological exegetics than in disavowing an over-emphasis on intellectualism, gesturing his reader away from theory towards a model of Christian praxis. The weak exegete constructed in *The Praise of Folly*, then, seems less likely to be the scholar who prizes dialectics over philology, but instead the scholar whose very scholarly endeavours distract from the imperatives of active Christian living.

The persona of Dorp himself furthers this theory. With the publication of Dorp's letter, the theologian is imported into *The Praise of Folly* as a model of the exact methodologies that hinder participation in the *Philosophia Christi*, and its resulting discursive systems. Dorp appears characterised by a Scholastic mindset – described by Erasmus as that 'mean and muddled

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<sup>103</sup> Thomson, *Under Pretext of Praise*, 25.

schooling'<sup>104</sup> in his response to the letter – prizing dialectics, metaphysics and syllogistic logic. Yet in *The Praise of Folly*, the scholastic impulse seems to be broadened into an uncritical embrace of theory over humble Christian praxis. As such, the temptation towards serious theoretical disputation in *The Praise of Folly* is continually elided in favour of the active piety of the *Philosophia Christi*.

So the paratextual interpreter constructed by Valla and Poliziano undergoes a radical revision in Erasmus' treatment. In *The Praise of Folly*, the main barrier to entering the discursive community of the *Philosophia Christi* is not a weak epistemic framework, but rather an over-reliance on epistemology altogether. The weaker brother represented by Dorp is misled by his own learning to read as an instructive, theoretical text, what is instead an invitation to Christian praxis. If the weaker brother stumbles precisely because of his over-reliance on scholastic learning, then *The Praise of Folly* invokes the Saturnalian spirit identified by Walter M. Gordon as a tenet of Erasmus' 'ludic theology'. According to Gordon, Erasmian satire draws on a vision of 'topsy-turvydom that logically follows from a belief in the incarnation of Christ and the folly of God.'<sup>105</sup> Primary among these carnival inversions is the vision of undone hierarchies in Christ's Sermon on the Mount: the poor made wealthy in heavenly riches, mourners comforted, the meek as inheritors, and so on.<sup>106</sup> The spirit of these inversions is captured in Christ's later thesis on the theme: 'But manie that are first, shalbe last, and the last *shalbe* first' (Matthew 19:30). Propelling this inversion in rank is a beatific spirit that, for those impoverished in

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<sup>104</sup> Erasmus, 'Ep 337: To Maarten van Dorp,' in *Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 298-445 (1514- 1516)*, trans. R.A.B. Mynors and D.F.S Thomson, ed. James K. McConica (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 129.

<sup>105</sup> Gordon, *Humanist Play and Belief: The Seriocomic Art of Desiderius Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 84.

<sup>106</sup> See Matthew 5.



worldly terms, prompts a humble reliance on Christ. Intellectualism emerges as the stumbling block barring the theologian from fundamental spiritual truths.

This insistence on praxis seems to be inscribed into the form of the encomium itself: *The Praise of Folly* is a text that resists both overt didacticism and a unified tone. These sins against decorum are embodied in Erasmus' textual persona, Moria: the personification of folly. Moria's erratic shifts in tone have generally been parsed into three main sections, and have led critics to establish a tripartite flow to *The Praise of Folly*.<sup>107</sup> The first part is regarded as typically Menippean in style, as Moria engages complex irony to eulogise the scale of her influence. The second section echoes the content of the first – again, Moria takes the ubiquity of folly as her theme – but shifts in mode from ironic praise to invective. Finally, in a short peroratio, Moria offers a theological defence of folly that culminates in a vision of *ekstasis*: a disembodied consummation of the soul with the spiritual realm.<sup>108</sup>

These askew parts, and the meanings generated by their friction, present a stimulating study. Structural analyses of *The Praise of Folly* often consider the shifts in Moria's tone a nexus for Erasmus' didactic impact. This pattern of criticism traces a unitary message at the heart of the encomium, typically born of the theological musings of the final section. The assumption of these readings is that Moria's stylistic pivots not only leave meaning intact, but actively advance a didactic cause. Wayne Rebhorn's assertion that the sections form an 'intricate,

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<sup>107</sup> This segmentation, Wayne A. Rebhorn writes, is typically viewed by critics as either an emulation of Quintilian classical structure, or an affective structure that guides the reader through Moria's many metamorphoses. See 'The Metamorphoses of Moria: Structure and Meaning in *The Praise of Folly*,' *PMLA* 89.3 (1974): 463.

<sup>108</sup> M.A. Screech has pioneered this understanding of the final section of the text. His work explores understandings of Christian mysticism that influenced Erasmus, and led him to represent Moria's final utterances as indicative of transportive *ekstasis*: an out-of-body consummation of human soul and divine spirit. See Screech, *Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly*.

dialectical movement' drawing the reader into conversion by exposing him to 'the ambivalent, inadequate, futile character of life on this earth, and then [leading] him beyond that comitragic vision to a fuller, more all-encompassing one' typifies this approach.<sup>109</sup> While Rebhorn embraces pluralistic forms, he insists on a singularity of message; he curbs the possibility of multiple, quietly germinating worlds by reducing the ludic disorder of the text to a cautionary backdrop for Moria's spiritual realisation in the final section. This reading aims to stay alert to the possibilities of both plural truths and, more broadly, the fracturing of singularity caused by indecorum: the abrasive contact of competing styles, claims and voices. While Moria's experience of *ekstasis* in the final section is often positioned as Erasmus' ultimate didactic object, her status as a vessel for spiritual truths is problematic. Moria's wanderings between irony, invective, and conviction, her production of deluded self-aggrandisement and searing insight in turn, all disqualify her as Erasmus' mouthpiece. Regardless of how closely Moria's musings in the final section come to resemble Erasmus' own Pauline theology, their errant form seems to defy serious biblical exposition.

The very resistance of unitary truth presents the encomium as a praxis of Christian folly, one that propels the reader into participation. To view the encomium as praxis produces precisely the shift in perspective that allows the critic to circumvent the problem of meaning, whether plural or unitary. It enables a passage beyond questions of meaning and into those of experience and suggests that the text's many misshapen parts are intended, not to be bound into coherent

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<sup>109</sup> See Rebhorn, 'The Metamorphoses of Moria,' 472. A similar tendency is demonstrated by Clarence Miller, who reads the middle section as an invocation of the Medieval satire of estates, and claims its destructive cynicism guides the reader towards the redemptive paradox of the final section. 'Some Medieval Elements and Structural Unity in Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*,' *Renaissance Quarterly* 27.4 (1974): 499-511. In a similar vein, Geraldine Thomson identifies an underlying theological theme, and finds in the confluence of these sections a cyclical rhythm whereby 'the wisdom of one part is repeatedly made the folly of the next – or, if we use Moria's inversions, the follies of each part become the wisdoms of the next.' *Under Pretext of Praise*, 62.

theory, but instead to ignite the very experience of disembodied *ekstasis* achieved by Moria in the final pages. The only certainty left to a Christian awakening from ecstatic madness, says Moria, is ‘that whiles their minds so roued and wandred, thei were most happie and blisfull, so that they lament and wepe at theyr retourne unto theyr former senses.’<sup>110</sup> According to this theology of *ekstasis*, an over-reliance on reason is at odds with the participation in experiential Christian truths. The resistance of unitary meaning, then, is fundamental to the text’s strategy when considered in terms of humanist praxis. In the following analysis I probe the ways in which the tripartite structure of the encomium moves the reader from a stance of dialectical reasoning to one of experience. The nullification of reason, as a basis of theological enquiry and as a means of comprehending the text, is key to enabling this transition. Because of this, *The Praise of Folly* establishes an epistemological circuitry which resists dialectical study, and excludes theorists – embodied by Dorp – from its discursive sphere.

### **1. Natural Reason at the Temple of Folly**

Some of the most intriguing theological reflections in *The Praise of Folly* actually precede the discussion of heavenly *ekstasis* in the final section. Earlier in the encomium, while making grand boasts about the scale of her influence, Erasmus’ orator crafts an apologetic which finds subtle forms of worship throughout human culture. This apologetic – provocatively reminiscent of the Paul’s defence of the Hebrew God in the Areopagus in Acts 17 – begins to yield a theology of natural revelation.

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<sup>110</sup> This reading is based on Thomas Chaloner’s 1549 translation of Erasmus’ text. See Erasmus and Chaloner, *The praise of folie. Moriae encomium a booke made in latine by that great clerke Erasmus Roterodame. Englisshed by Sir Thomas Chaloner knight* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1549), sig. Tiii<sup>v</sup>. Future references will be in text.

But no man (saie they) maketh sacrifice unto folie, nor buildeth hir a temple. Now surely I mervaile not a little, (as afore I saied) at such ingratitude of men. But yet of my gentilnesse I take this also in good part. Albeit to saie the trowth I fynde no want therof at all. For why shoulde I require, *either frankensence, or levained meale, or a gote, or a hogge* for my sacrifice? Whereas all moratll men, in everie region, doe yelde me that woorshipping, which evin by these scripture doctors is wonte to be moste approved? Unlesse perchance I shoulde envie *Diana*, because hir altars ar besprent with mans blood. Naie, I think my selfe to be than moste amplie, and religiously worshipped, whan everie where, all men beare me (as they dooe) in theyre hertis, expresse me in theyr maners, and represent me in theyr lyvyng. Whiche kynde of woorshipping is not verie rife, no not amongis *Christians*.

(sigs. Ki<sup>r</sup>-Ki<sup>v</sup>)

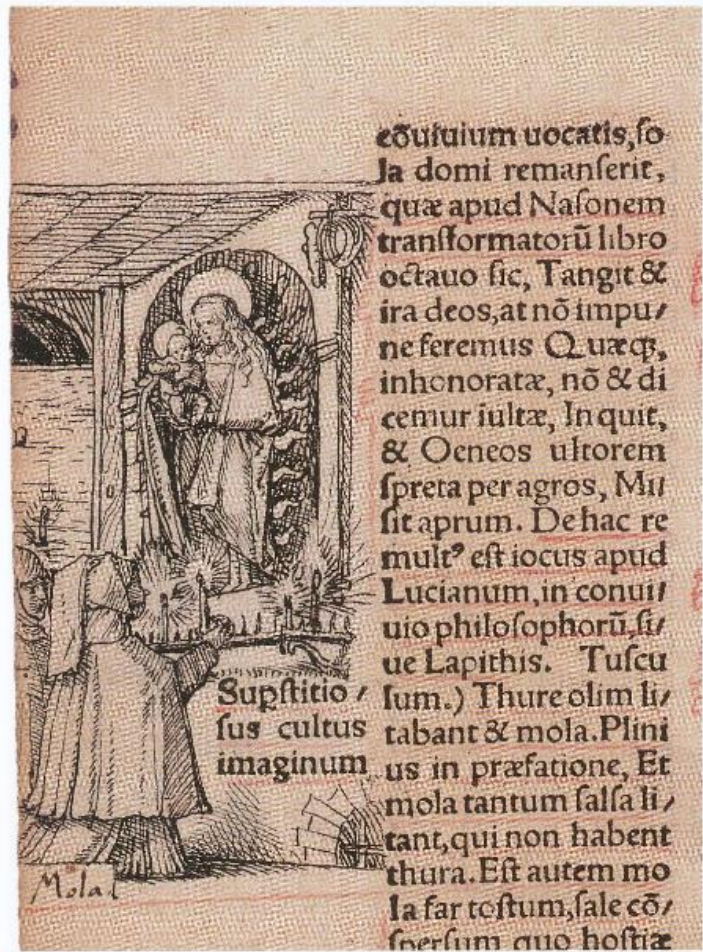


Figure 4. Hans Holbein, marginal drawing in *The Praise of Folly*, 1515.

In this speech, Moria rejects material tokens of worship – from pagan idols to liturgical relics and sacrifices – in preference of a naturalistic form of praise. Moria insists she has no envy of deities who receive this material worship, specifically citing *Diana*'s blood sacrifices and candles burnt to the *Virgin Mary* (vividly rendered by Hans Holbein in Figure 4). Instead, she argues that the most profound praise is imitation, even unconscious imitation, a form of worship through which humankind hails her

as the superior deity. Thus in the place of material tokens, Moria claims creation as a shrine to her: the world is her temple, humankind its priests and the faces of man divine effigies. She continues, protesting:

Moreover, why shoulde I fynde lacke of a temple, seeing all this worlde is in maner of a temple most goodly (as I take it) unto me? And as for priestis of my law, and other ministers of my religion, I am sure I want none in any place, wheras men want not. Than, I am not altogether so foolish, to demaunde any graven or peincted images representing me, whiche rather shoulde derogate than advance my honour wheras oftentimes I see many doltis and fatteheddis woorshippe in suche stockis, instead of the sanctis them selves, wherby I might chance to be served, as they that are thruste out of theyr rounes, by theyr deputies.

(sig. Ki<sup>v</sup>)

The bold claims Moria makes in this section echo an apologetic delivered by Paul in Athens, which countered Pagan belief by pointing to the created world as evidence of God's divinity. This is an incident that Erasmus later overtly invokes in *The Praise of Folly* as a mocking defence of eisegesis: 'For whan Paule saw at *Athenes* an *Altare* dedicated to the *Goddis*, the entitling wherof he thought good to bringe in for a prouffe and corroboracion of the christian beleefe, leauyng all the rest that made against his purpose, he toke onely the two latter words of the same, (which were these) *to the unknowne god*' (sigs. Ri<sup>r</sup>-Ri<sup>v</sup>). Writing in a later text, his *Paraphrases* (1524), Erasmus provides a lengthy gloss on this account from Acts. Expanding on Paul's argument against idols, he writes:

Since God is in some sense absolute mind, everywhere present but without being confined to any space, it is not right to think he dwells in temples built by the hands of

men or in images crafted by the skill of mortals, nor is it true devotion to worship him with animal victims, as though he either has need of, or takes pleasure in, anything done by human hands.<sup>111</sup>

In Erasmus' rendition of this passage, the language of Paul's dismissal of religious rites closely mimics that he attributes to Moria. Paul argues that created symbols and sacrifices are both arbitrary and undesirable to God, as a Being divinely self-sufficient. Instead, Erasmus' Paul and Moria both identify the 'entire world' as temples and, rather than relying on the mediation of material artefacts, insist on the role of creation in testifying to God's character. Erasmus continues his paraphrase of Paul's speech by insisting that God engendered the world, 'this well wrought structure, for us to look upon, so that the people dwelling in it might perceive from such a marvellous work the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of the workman.'<sup>112</sup> In *The Praise of Folly*, Moria ventriloquises Paul on a further point: that amongst created things, man himself is the clearest manifestation of the divine. Thus she claims: 'so many imageis are erected in my name, as there be living men, bearyng the lively representacion and image of me about them, will they, or will they not' (sig. Ki<sup>v</sup>). Likewise, in *Paraphrases*, Erasmus' Paul asserts that God 'is worshipped through purity of mind, since he himself is mind.'<sup>113</sup>

Moria's apologetic of natural revelation also echoes two other biblical sources, both of which position nature as evidence of a creative god. The first is a passage from Psalms, in which David traces the glory of God through the testimony of a silent witness.

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<sup>111</sup> Erasmus, 'Paraphrase on Acts,' *CWE*, trans. John J. Bateman and Robert D. Sider (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 108.

<sup>112</sup> Erasmus, 'Paraphrase on Acts,' 109

<sup>113</sup> Erasmus, 'Paraphrase on Acts,' 109.

The heauens declare the glorie of God,  
And the firmament sheweth the worke of his hands.  
Daie vnto daie vttereth the fame,  
And night vnto night teacheth knowledge.  
*There is* no speache nor language,  
*Where* their voice is not heard.  
Their line is gone forth through all the earth,  
And their words into the ends of the worlde.

(Psalm 19:1-4a)

The testimony of creation carries an implied demand: if the glory of God is manifest to the ends of the world then the spectator, faced by this universal testimony, is compelled into beatific response. This unspoken imperative is explicated by Paul in the second source, a passage in Romans. ‘For the wrath of God is reueiled from heauen against all vngodlines, and vnrighteousnes of men, which withholde the trueth in vnrighteousnes,’ he writes to the Roman Church,

Forasmuche as yt, which may be knowen of God, is manifest in them: for God hathe shewed it vnto them. For the invisible things of him, that is, his eternal power and Godhead, are seene by the creation of the worlde, being considered in *his* words, to the intēt that they shulde be without excuse.

(Romans 1:18-20)

If the psalmist focuses on the testimony of creation, Paul shifts his emphasis to the spectator’s ability to form conclusions from this data. He insists that the qualities of God ‘have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made’: Paul deems his subject rational and discerning, first seeing and then understanding, and processing the testimony of creation through

powers of mind predisposed to locate a divine creator. Combined, these passages form the basis for a theology of general revelation: that is, the explication of divine truths through *a posteriori* principles. General revelation takes as its predicate natural reason, and the ability of the human mind to corroborate the existence of God without reference to direct, scriptural revelation.

Syncretic approaches blending Christianity with Platonism, and embracing its premise that the material world gestures to an unseen Demiurge, established the primacy of natural reasoning for the early Church: Augustine writes in *The City of God* that Platonism is the system that draws philosophers closest to divine truths, while Boethius executes this theory in his *De consolazione philosophiae*, a treatise on natural reason which rests on Platonic precepts rather than scriptural reference. Paul himself supports this syncretic view in his speech in the Areopagus, noting to the Athenians that, ‘in him we liue, and moue, and haue our being, *as also certane of your owne Poetes haue said*, For we are also his generacion’ (Acts 17:28) [italics mine]. In the Middle Ages, the doctrine of general revelation was revitalised with the resurgence of Aristotle’s works, his metaphysics emphasising the powers of natural reason, even apart from observable reality. St. Anselm’s ‘Ontological Argument’ in the twelfth century, an *a priori* case entirely divorced from empirical bases, captures this introspective shift.<sup>114</sup> Aquinas ultimately arrived at a mid-point in his argument for natural reason in the *Summa theologiae*. He identifies both ontological arguments and observable reality as grounds for God’s general revelation, though ultimately his emphasis falls on *a posteriori* reasoning. Proceeding from the premise that

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<sup>114</sup> As expounded in the *Proslogion*, Anselm uses a complex dialectical style to suggest that ideation of God is itself a proof for God’s existence. See Anselm, *Proslogion*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001).



‘when an effect is better known to us than its cause, from the effect we proceed to knowledge of the cause,’ Aquinas outlines five proofs for God’s existence based on causal logic.<sup>115</sup>

In *The Praise of Folly*, this view of direct revelation finds an enthusiastic advocate in Moria, who views the world as her temple. Even as Moria concludes her first section by aligning the practice of folly with a kind of idolatry, earlier in the piece she positions herself as a divine, generative source. In fact, from her opening remarks, Moria asserts her influence over her disciples – the fools of the world – through the suggestive language of ‘proofs’.

Howe so evermen commonly talke of me (as pardie I am not ignoraunt what lewde reports go on *FOLIE*, yea even amongis those that are the veriest fooles of all) yet that I am she, I onely (I saie) who through myne influence do gladde both the Goddis and men, by this maie it appeare sufficiently: that as soone as I came forth to saie my mynd afore this your so notable assemblie, by and by all your lokes began to clere up: unbendyng the frounyng of your browes, & laughing upon me with so merie a countinaunce.

(sig. Ai<sup>r</sup>)

Rendered in English as ‘by this maie it appeare sufficiently’, the Latin *argumentum* summons the tenets of natural reason. It roughly translates to ‘evidence’, invoking the terminology of ontological proofs used by Aquinas and Anselm. In Moria’s opening, she goes on to make a causal argument – echoing Aquinas’ arguments of motion and efficient cause – to position herself as the generative source of human well-being. This apologetic is made more effective in its acknowledgement of dissent: Moria invokes her own sceptics – who make ‘lewd reports’

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<sup>115</sup> Aquinas, ‘Summa theologiae,’ trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote and ed. The Aquinas Institute. *Aquinas Institute*, accessed 17 January 2019, <https://aquinas.cc/56/57/1>.

about folly, despite their own status as ‘the veriest fooles of all’ – to acknowledge her disrepute. Yet this paradox of vocal scepticism and (unconscious) behavioural tribute aligns with Paul’s apologetic in Athens. It moves toward a form of worship and testimony stemming from unconscious behaviour rather than proclamation.

As Moria scans humankind to claim it as testimony to her glory, Erasmus deploys a classic Menippean trope. He positions his orator in a God-like, panoramic stance, with an omniscient view of human nature. Moria determines to bypass a simple discussion of ‘vulgar people’, since the ‘many veines of Folie they abounde in’ make them too easy a target (sig. Bii<sup>r</sup>). Instead, cataloguing humankind in their diversity only to equalise them in their folly, Erasmus projects a panoramic perspective reminiscent of the *danse macabre* and ship of fools.

Good lorde, what a *Theatre* is this worlde? How many, and divers are the pageantes that fooles plaie therin? For I also not seeldome am wont to sitte amonges the Goddis to marke mens dooyingis. One man see they redie to die for love of a woman, and the lesse he is beloved, the more hotely to pursue hir. An other marieth the goodis, not the widow. He settis his wife to sale. An other jealous wretch lyke *Argus*, kepeth his in mewe.

(sigs. Bii<sup>r</sup>-Bii<sup>v</sup>)

Moria adds to this expansive view of folly snide comments about some choice professions. Merchants she calls ‘a kynde of men most foolisshe and filfthy, and whose trade and occupacion beyng in deede the vilest that can be, and therto handled by them after as vile a maner, with liying, forswearing, bribing, begylyng, and shiftyng’ (sig. Biii<sup>r</sup>). In a trope of humanist satire, Moria’s speech continues to attack clerical hypocrisy. Viewing churchmen as complicit with the

greed of merchants, Erasmus' orator condemns 'these blinde minions, these friers, [that] can so faunyngly upholde them in their sermons to the people, calling them worshipfull, and venerande maisters, in hope that some porcion of those evill gotten goodis, maie somewhat in compensacion of theyr golden glosyng, fall unto theyr covent' (sig. Biii<sup>r</sup>). Finally, the text provides a nihilistic summary.

Briefely, if one (as *Menippus* did) lokyng out of the moone, behelds from thence the innumerable tumultis, and businesses of mortall men, he shoulde thynke verily he saw a meny of *fliēs, or gnattes, braulyng, fighting, begilyng, robbying, playing, living wantonly, borne, bredde up, decaying, and dying*: so that it is scant belevable, what commocions, and what *Tragedies*, are sterred up, by so littell, and so short lived a vermin as this man is. For sometimes a small storme of warre, or pestilence, swopeth awaie and dispacheth many thousands of them together.

(sig. Biii<sup>v</sup>)

Erasmus references Lucian's *Muscae encomium*, but we might also detect a less explicit source. In all the Menippean-style vistas invoked by this section, I suggest that Moria echoes Erasmus' Matthean scholarship. In his Paraphrase on Matthew 11:25-30, Erasmus praises God for revealing arcane knowledge to the foolish rather than 'the proud and haughty,' before offering a suggestive prelude to Jesus' call to the weary and burdened in verse 28.

Here Jesus reflected upon the great calamity of the human race: that some were oppressed by poverty, others in turn were even more gravely vexed by concern for money; that some were afflicted by disease, others by old age; that some were tormented by love, others were even more grievously racked by hate; that many wandered about in various mazes of false opinions; that many were being inwardly lashed by the knowledge of their

misdeeds; and that there was no one to act as a faithful and effective pastor, though countless men were acting as priests out of pride, commending themselves by the name of Rabbi, and exacting tithes. Moved by pity, Jesus summoned them all to him, freely promising solace and relief to everyone, if only they would approach him with simple and sincere hearts, shaking off the yoke of this world, a yoke by far the most pitiful and troublesome, and receive the yoke of gospel teaching.<sup>116</sup>

In Erasmus' gloss, Jesus assumes a panoramic view and surveys the world in its wretched state. Jesus and Moria observe similar themes: love, avarice, infirmity, greed, deception. Both note the deception of religious leaders; where Erasmus' Jesus condemns those 'acting as priests' to exact tithes, Moria accuses friars of similar duplicity: they hail merchants as 'worshipfull, and venerande maisters' in order to gain a portion of their wealth. According to the narrativisation of Matthew in the *Paraphrases*, Jesus' view of this dismaying scene leads to pity and the offer of salvation. Universal suffering seems to lie at the heart of the salvation theology on display here: Jesus' promise of relief builds on a state of brokenness experienced, and acknowledged, by the broken. To this stark perspective, Jesus offers a balm: the 'yoke of gospel teaching.' In *The Praise of Folly*, Moria too surveys a similar scene of anguish, and offers a balm: herself. Name 'any part of this life there is, not heaueie, not unpleasant, not urksome, not unsavoury, unless ye put *Pleasure*, that is to saie, the *Saulce of Folie* unto it?' Moria challenges the stoics (sig. Bii<sup>v</sup>). In the face of suffering, she positions herself as a source of epicurean consolation, commenting of man: 'the farther, and farther he is retired from me, the less, and lesse he liveth, until at last, *tedious olde age* dooe crepe upon hym, not onely urksome to others, but hatefull also to him selfe' (sig. Biii<sup>r</sup>). In Erasmus' accounts, Jesus and Moria assume Menippean heights to survey

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<sup>116</sup> Erasmus, 'Paraphrase on the Gospel of Matthew,' *CWE*, ed. Robert D. Sider (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 190.

disarray, but their antidotes are in stark contrast. Where Jesus offers the solace of salvation, Moria prescribes numbing hedonism.

The comparison between Erasmus' Paraphrase on Matthew and *The Praise of Folly* presents an antithesis between the pleasurable illusions of folly, and the stark clarity leading to salvation. This view of illusion as a balm for pain complements a broader scepticism about general revelation on display in the mock encomium. This scepticism can be detected in two forms: in the first place, the ease with which the doctrine of general revelation can be misapplied, as flamboyantly evinced in Moria's apologetic. In the second place, through the susceptibility of the mind to illusion: where the pleasure of folly presents an enticing alternative to the clarity of the *Philosophia Christi*, the 'natural reason' through which humans interpret general revelation becomes suspect.

By interrogating the limits of natural reason, *The Praise of Folly* problematises the radical experiments of Boethius and Anselm. Instead, the philosophy on display here finds an unlikely proponent in Aquinas, who insists on the limits of natural reason in locating God's essence, and places general revelation as secondary to its scriptural counterpart: 'it is not the case that everything said about God – even if it cannot be investigated by reason – should be immediately reject as false, as the Manicheans and other unbelievers thought.'<sup>117</sup> An over-reliance on natural reason may produce dangers of its own, including a rejection of those truths which resist dialectical enquiry: foremost among them, the direct revelation, via scripture, through which God's incarnation is disclosed. To experience the *ekstasis* of faith, *The Praise of*

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<sup>117</sup> Aquinas, 'Summa Contra Gentiles,' trans. Fr. Larcher and ed. The Aquinas Institute, *Aquinas Institute*, accessed 18 February 2019, <https://aquinas.cc/188/190/~1>.

*Folly* suggests, requires a shift from reasoning and a plunge into the precarity of scriptural revelation.

## 2. From General to Direct Revelation

In the first section of *The Praise of Folly*, Moria surveys her influence and channels her claims into a theology of general revelation. Moria's account of her own significance is reminiscent of the Psalmist's exaltation and, as the clamouring voices of her devotees go out into the earth, Moria crafts an apologetic reminiscent of Erasmus' gloss on Acts 17. The first section of *The Praise of Folly* betrays a twofold preoccupation: that of Moria with an ironically-misapplied theory of general revelation, and that of Erasmus with interrogating its corollary, natural reason.

If the first section exposes the limits of natural reason, subsequent parts of the encomium drive the reader to its complement: direct, scriptural revelation. This view of the primacy of scriptural revelation over dialectical reasoning is core to Erasmus' humanist ethos. In the *Paraclesis*, Erasmus gives a mission statement for the *Philosophia Christi* that places scripture, and the Christian's contemplation and enactment of it, at the heart of Christian living. 'He is not a Platonist who has not read the works of Plato,' he asserts,

And is he a theologian, let alone a Christian, who has not read the literature of Christ? He who loves me, Christ says, keeps my word, a distinguishing mark which He himself prescribed. Therefore, if we are truly and sincerely Christian, if we truly believe in Him who has been sent from Heaven to teach us that which the wisdom of the philosophers could not do, if we truly expect from Him what no prince, however powerful, can give,

why is anything more important to us than His literature? Why indeed does anything seem learned that is not in harmony with his decrees?<sup>118</sup>

The power of scripture is to bring the Christian face to face with Christ; in fact, Christ is so deeply manifest in his word that Erasmus declares that He ‘stands forth especially in this literature, in which He lives for us even at this time, breathes and speaks.’<sup>119</sup> This argument builds to an incarnation theology that interweaves Christ and scripture, as expounded by John’s gospel: ‘And the Worde was made flesh, and dwelt among vs’ (John 1:14). If, as the apostle asserts, the incarnation sees the revelatory word become flesh, then Erasmus takes this premise to its logical conclusion: that the word bestowed on Christians is capable of harbouring the essence of Christ as flesh. Thus the *Paraclesis* compares the scripture with another token of Christ’s life, relics, to argue that while the latter can only invoke Christ’s body, scripture has the power to relay ‘the living image of His holy mind and the speaking, healing, dying, rising Christ Himself, and thus render Him so fully present that you would see less if you gazed upon Him with your very eyes.’<sup>120</sup> Citing passages in the *Enchiridion* as well as the *Paraclesis*, James Kearney suggests that Erasmus’ preference for scripture invokes a Pauline dichotomy of body and soul that prioritises the transcendent spirit of the word over the materiality of relics.<sup>121</sup> Yet this division of body and soul seems one of Erasmus’ central gripes in the *Paraclesis*. In fact, Erasmus resuscitates yet another dichotomy, that of the *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa*, in order to insist that the spiritual transformations enacted by the scriptures are meaningless without

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<sup>118</sup> Erasmus, ‘The Paraclesis’ in *Christian Humanism and the Reformation: Select Writings of Erasmus*, trans. John C. Olin (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987), 103.

<sup>119</sup> Erasmus, ‘The Paraclesis,’ 105.

<sup>120</sup> Erasmus, ‘The Paraclesis,’ 108.

<sup>121</sup> James Kearney, *The Incarnate Text: Reimagining the Book in Reformation England* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press: 2009), 60.

material tokens of devotion. The tenets of the *Philosophia Christi* are such, writes Erasmus in the *Paraclesis*, that:

If anyone under the inspiration of the spirit of Christ preaches this kind of doctrine, inculcates it, exhorts, incites, and encourages men to it, he is truly a theologian, even if he should be a common labourer or weaver. And if anyone exemplifies this doctrine in his life itself, he is in fact a great doctor.<sup>122</sup>

Far from insisting on entrenched divisions of body and soul, *verba* and *res*, or the active and the contemplative, Erasmus seems to view the incarnation – the word become flesh and then, again, manifest as word – as the site on which opposites are reconciled.

Erasmus' view of the word as mediative correlates with the humanist fetishisation of rhetorical form. Studies of Erasmian Christology often invoke the work of Friedhelm Krüger, who argues that Erasmus sees the incarnation as an act of accommodation between the visible and the divine.<sup>123</sup> Manfred Hoffman, for instance, argues that allegory and tropology serve a mediative function comparable to that of Christ, through conveying divine mysteries in material form.<sup>124</sup> Hoffman's summation furthers the union of Christ and scripture: 'we see Erasmus' hermeneutic as governed by the idea of language as mediation. Language, especially God's speech in scripture, draws the reader into the truth through the process of interpretation.'<sup>125</sup>

Likewise, Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle finds this resemblance of Christ and *logos* – which she

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<sup>122</sup> Erasmus, 'The Paraclesis,' 102.

<sup>123</sup> Friedhelm Krüger, *Humanistische Evangelienauslegung* (Heidelberg: Mohr Siebeck, 1985), 244.

<sup>124</sup> Hoffman's language echoes Krüger's theory of accommodation: 'scriptural language reveals the divine truth because in it Christ mediates between the letter and the spirit by accommodating himself to the human condition while remaining at the same time fully divine. As the supreme mediator, Christ is incarnate in the word.' *Rhetoric and Theology*, 11.

<sup>125</sup> Hoffman, *Rhetoric and Theology*, 6.



transcribes as *sermo* – the source of Erasmus’ rhetorical strategy. ‘When a man speaks well,’ she writes, ‘God may admire the mirrored image of his own oration, Christ. The divine *Logos* is the archetype of human discourse.’<sup>126</sup>

For rhetoric to assume this powerful mediative role, in the incarnation and, again, in scripture, may require a reevaluation of the exact function of language in Erasmian thought. Mary Jane Barnett ventures a model of ‘linguistic praxis’ to explain this function and argues for a rhetorical tradition that privileges ‘the active accommodation of praxis over the precision of pure signification.’<sup>127</sup> She writes that ‘linguistic praxis Erasmian-style marries form to content and meaning to utility. Language as praxis is language in action, language always in the process of exchange and negotiation, language that aims primarily at performance, not representation.’<sup>128</sup> The linguistic-praxis model captures something of the mystery Erasmus locates in the union of language, divinity and flesh effected by the incarnation. Further, viewing this triad in terms of praxis seems to underlie Erasmus’ philosophy of folly. As the work of Screech and, more recently, Walter Gordon attests, Moria’s ludic voice invokes an experience of divine madness reminiscent of Plato and culminating in *ekstasis*: an image of spiritual consummation borrowed from Origen’s commentary on the *Song of Songs*.<sup>129</sup> Like the scriptures, the writing of folly enacts this synthesis of God, word and flesh; Erasmus’ reader, viewing the divine insights sprinkled amidst Moria’s confused ramblings, seems to view a reversed incarnation, as the folly of the flesh permutes into word.

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<sup>126</sup> Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle, *Erasmus on Language and Method*, 41.

<sup>127</sup> Barnett, ‘Linguistic Praxis,’ 551.

<sup>128</sup> Barnett, ‘Linguistic Praxis,’ 545.

<sup>129</sup> For Erasmus’ use of Origen see Screech, *Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly*, 21-3.

If, in the first section of *The Praise of Folly*, Moria's faulty reasoning disqualifies natural reason and general revelation, an alternative has grown in its wake. This is the insistence on direct revelation made in the final section of the encomium, as well as the building model of praxis – performed, engaging, engendering – filling the vacuum of disputation and theory. Where human reasoning is found wanting, it is supplemented by an incarnation theology that preferences the mystical word-flesh union through a praxis of folly. Yet bridging these two sections – the flawed natural reasoning of the first and embrace of ecstatic direct revelation of the third – is a tirade of invective that has long puzzled critics. With a virulent tone absent from the first and third sections, Erasmus' rhetorical technique here seems both its least subtle and its least discriminating; Moria's vitriol targets professions and preoccupations across the standard scholastic and humanist divide, and seems to condemn the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* in turn. With these wide strokes, *The Praise of Folly* problematises the stable binaries that are undone in incarnation theology. In an effort to revitalise the mystery of the incarnation in text, Erasmus seems to insist on a convergence of the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, the divine and the foolish, and theory and praxis that actively guides the reader towards the *ekstasis* of redemptive folly. He ultimately offers a mission statement from the book of Hebrews in a critique of the scholastics.

But turne you to whiche sect of them ye will, and ye shall prove the same to be so cunning, so difficult, and so full of hiegh *Misteries*, as I wene the apostles them selves had nede to be enstructed by a new sprite, in case upon these matters they were compelled to argue with this new kynde of doctours. Paile coulde expresse what faieth was: yet when he saied thus, *faieth is the substance of thynges to be hoped after, and an evidence of thynges not yet appearyng*. This *Diffincion* (saie they) was not *Magistraliter* (*idest*) doctor like sette forth by hym. And, as paule coulde verie well teache what was

*Charitee*, so did he not yet (saie thei) *halfe lyke a Logicien either diffine, or devide the same*, in the fyrst epistle, and .xiii. chapitte to the *Corinthiens*.

(sig. Mi<sup>v</sup>)

This invocation by the Hebrews writer, who Erasmus here identifies as Paul, transmutes the abstract into the material: faith and hope into substance, and ‘*thynges not yet appearyng*’ into evidence. So it is that Erasmus can hail Paul and the apostles as exemplars of the *Philosophia Christi*, juxtaposing their ‘living faith’ with the dense metaphysical theorising of the scholastics. He goes on to mock the tortured asceticism of the grammarians, and their love of scholarly endeavour.

Adde also hereunto, this kynde of delite they have, as often as any of them chaunceth in some olde boke to fynde out the name of *Anchises* mother, or some other Latine woorde not commonly used, as *Bubesqua Bouinator, Manticulator*, or diggeth up some gobbet of an olde stone graven with Romaine or greke letters somewhat defaced, (Lorde) then what exultacion, what triumphes, what commendacions make they of it? As if they had wonne all of *Afrike*, or taken the great cite of *Babylon*.

(sig. Kiv<sup>v</sup>)

This military metaphor does more than advance mocking hyperbole. Through continually invoking extremes of the *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa* – here, antiquarian discovery and imperial combat – the text satirises both and moves towards a reconciliation of contrasts. Erasmus extends this militaristic motif by casting the speculations of the scholastics as an impermeable buttress:

While they are hedged in on all sides, with such a guard of *Magistral diffinitions, conclusions, corollaries, explicite and omplicite proposicions*, with so many starting holes, as not *Vulcanes nettis* were able so fastly to holde them, but they wolde wynde them selves out againe with *Distinctions*, wherewith they carve al knottes asunder, as smothely as a rasour dooeth the heares of a mans beard. Such a noubre of newfounde monstrous terms have they thicke and threefolde invented.

(sig. Liv<sup>v</sup>)

Erasmus issues an attack on two familiar fronts: the pedantries of the scholastics (and the general self-indulgence of the *vita contemplativa*) on the one, and the futility of warfare on the other. The ethos left in the wake of these nullified extremes is a kind of active pacifism condensed into the ‘living faith’ of the apostles.

As the tirade of the middle section continues, speculation and abstraction emerge as continuous targets, pitted against the spirit-inspired praxis of the *Philosophia Christi*. Schoolmasters, grammarians, poets, rhetoricians, writers, lawyers, philosophers and, finally theologians, all come under Moria’s criticism. The theorising of the literary establishment, which Erasmus positions as an anti-incarnational severance of word and flesh, is considered in particularly humorous terms. Moria locates the folly of rhetoricians in their attempts to render bodily response immaterial:

Moreover *Oratours*, and *Rhetoriciends*, notwithstanding that a little they seeme to swarve from me, cleuyng to the philosophers, yet I can prove them also to be of my faction, as well by other arguments, as by this, that in the preceptes of they arte, amonges divers other trifles, they have written so largely and exactly, *how to provoke laughter in an audience, and of the cast, or meanes of scoffyng*.

(sig. Li<sup>v</sup>)

The theoretical calculations that go into provoking laughter – an involuntary bodily effect – is an object of Moria’s scorn. Even Quintilian, an intriguing target in a humanist satire, is viewed as complicit in this self-defeating theorising: Moria casts him as ‘the veryie headman of this ordre, [who] in his book of the *institucion of an Oratour*, hath made one chapitre all of laughter sterryng, lenger I wene that is *Homers Iliade*’ (sig. Li<sup>v</sup>). The text continues to construct two types of writers. The first, strained and meticulous, who become overwrought in their labour: how continually ‘thei are faine to writhe their wittes in and out, in puttyng to, in chaungyng, in blotting out, in laying theyr woorke aside, in overuewyng it againe, in shewyng it to some for a prouffe, and yet keypyng it in theyr handis whole nyne yeres together, so that they are never satisfied with them selves’ (sigs. Li<sup>v</sup>-Lii<sup>r</sup>). In place of this painstaking labour, Moria prefers the authenticity of *extemporare*: ‘what so ever toie lighteth in their head, or falleth in their thought, be it but theyr dreame, they doe put the same straight into writing, with small dispence or not, sauynge waste of paper?’ (sig. Lii<sup>v</sup>). In contrast to the artifice of the first, Moria’s writer, engaged in the praxis of folly, is poised to convey spontaneous spiritual epiphany. The reader seems invited to recollect Erasmus’ own account of the encomium’s composition in his prefatory letter to Thomas More: since ‘the time seemed hardly suited to serious thinking, I chose to amuse myself by composing an encomium of Folly.’<sup>130</sup> Erasmus positions his own textual practice in a binary of intuitive spontaneity and laboured artifice, the former manifest in the praxis of the *Philosophia Christi*, the latter in dialectics.

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<sup>130</sup> Erasmus and Clarence H. Miller, *The Praise of Folly* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 1.

### 3. From Direct Revelation to Inspired Praxis

Moria reserves her most heated invective for figureheads of the liturgical establishment: priests, popes, and theologians. She concludes this second section with a droll aside: ‘But (hola) it is best for me to stoppe here, seying I toke not upon me to bould out the maner of bishops and priestes livynges not a daies: lest any man shoulde deme how I rather entended to ratle up theyr vices, then to sprede myne owne praise’ (sig. Piv<sup>v</sup>). However, the criticisms of Erasmus’ orator do not entirely taper off. Instead, they metamorphose into a subtler form: they evolve from theory *into* praxis. That is, Moria shifts from critiquing scholastic methodology to executing it. In her ensuing argument, Moria draws on proverbial wisdom and biblical analysis to advance her own praise. Woven through this section are two complementary strands: the first, eisegetical analysis that decontextualises and distorts the source-text, and the second, a meta-analysis in defence of her methodology. The basis of this defence is a mock appeal to authority; Moria’s eisegesis, she insists, is borrowed from the scholastic textbook.

That woulde god I might properly take a new countenance, and were claddle in a doctourlike apparaile: sauynge I feare lest some of you woulde laie thefte to my charge, as though I had privily pried our *maister doctors* cunning out of theyr study deskes, because I can so much *Diuinitee* without boke. But have ye no mervaile though my continuall and daiely conversacion amonges doctors, maketh me to beare awaire come one woorde or another. Seying the *fygtree image of Priapus coulde in processe* of tyme, as his maister redde *Homer*, marke and remember some *Greke vocables*. And likewise *Lucyans cocke* through longe continuaunce and conversing amongis men, did learne so perfectly theyr speche.

(sig. Qii<sup>v</sup>)

Having positioned herself as the authority on folly thus far, Erasmus' orator suddenly assumes the stance of apprentice. In a cutting swipe at the theologians, Erasmus shows Moria confronted with an expertise she cannot match, but only seek to learn from, aligning herself with Priapus and Lucian's cock.

Moria then hastens to brandish the theology she has learned from the scholastics, consistently reminding her audience of its source. Her analysis begins with an examination of *Ecclesiasticus*, which, in its dry cynicism, provides rich material to be twisted into a praise of folly. Moria declares that 'Furthermore, *Salomon* in his .xxv. chapitre saieth: *Folie maketh fooles gladde*: wherein he confesseth plainly, that nothing in this life can be sweete or pleasant, unlesse that folie yelde the dame unto you' (sig. Qiii<sup>v</sup>). Moria's argument becomes further strained, as she demonstrates the value of folly to Solomon.

That in case ye small beleue myue, marke I praie you his owne wordis in the fyrst chapitre: *And I haue applied my hert* (saieth he) *to know wysedome and learning, and lykewyse to know errours and folie*: wherein ye must note this well, how it maketh muche for my dignitee, that he putteth folie in the latter place, namely seyng the *Ecclesiaste*, or churche preacher wrote it, and pardie ye know how the church ordre willeth, that who so is first in dignitee, shall goe last in place, to the ende, that how ever in other pointes, yet herein at lest he dooe observe the precepte of the gospel.

(sig. Qiii<sup>v</sup>)

The 'precepte of the gospel' in question is the transmogrification of piety anticipated in the Sermon on the Mount whereby the first become last. Applying these teachings to Solomon's

study of ‘wysedome and learning... errours and folie’, Moria insists that the positioning of folly at the end of the sentence cements her significance. Erasmus references William Durand’s *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, which elaborates on the significance of processional order but, as Miller points out, Erasmus’ invocation of the ‘gospel precept’ is likely his own addition to this theory.<sup>131</sup> Erasmus’ ironic application of scholastic work is bolstered by Moria’s act of eisegesis, in which Christ’s teachings – his anticipation of the inversion of worldly hierarchies in the second coming – are decontextualised to endorse folly, now metamorphosed into a dignitary.

This enthusiastic eisegesis later gives way to a defence of methodology, one which anticipates the charge of decontextualisation. Here, Erasmus pins Moria’s eisegetical practice to a precedent set by scholastic error. In defence of her method, Moria protests that ‘all doctors take it commonly for theyr privilege, to stretche out heaven (that is to saie) holy writte lyke a cheverell skynne?’ (sig. Ri<sup>r</sup>). She then elaborates on a precedent set by Paul himself, in his address to the Athenians at the Areopagus.

For whan Paule saw at *Athenes* an *Altare* dedicate to the *Goddis*, the entitling wherof he thought good to bringe in for a prouffe and corroboracion of the Christen beleeve, leauyng all the rest that made against his purpose, he toke onely the two latter words of the same, (which were these) *to the unknowne god*, yet in some part he was content to change them to: for the whole superscripcion was set up in this maner. *To the gods of asia, Europe, and Africa, to the Unknowne, and estraunge Gods*. So upon this example of Paule I wene it procedeth, that commonly at these daies *my faire broode of doctors* do enterprise to nippe of here and there, foure or five wordis of the whole, yea and those some thing altered and corrupted (if it stande them upon) to applie the same so botched together to theyr owne sense and commoditee.

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<sup>131</sup> Miller, ‘Some Medieval Elements,’ 499-511.



After this, Erasmus' orator cites a number of additional examples bolstering her case. Instances of eisegetical creativity by scholastics include an interpretation of God's destruction of the Midianites' tents in Habakkuk as an allegory for St. Bartholomew's flayed skin (likely advanced by Jordanus von Quedlinburg in his *Sermones de sanctis*);<sup>132</sup> and a merciless argument for the burning of heretics extrapolated from Exodus: 'Thou shalt not suffer a witche to liue' (22:18). Moria points to these examples as a final word in her own defence: 'Seing those divine maister doctors durst take upon them to wrest and mistake scripture in suche sort, than muche more I must be borne with, beyng but a younge doctresse' (sig. Riv<sup>v</sup>).

### **Beyond Theory: Knowledge, Faith and the Menippean Text**

As eisegesis and methodological meta-analysis alternate, *The Praise of Folly* enacts a motion away from theory and towards praxis. This motion is created by the shifting modes of the argument, but also reinforced by the broader structure of the encomium. In each of the three major sections, Erasmus activates a vital transition from theory and into praxis: in the first, a theory of general revelation is expounded and then applied to rationalise Moria's significance; in the second, criticism of the scholastic method devolves into its execution; finally, in the third, theories of Pauline and Platonic madness ultimately give way to Moria's own experience of disembodied *ekstasis*. This movement from theory to practice is replicated in the relationship

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<sup>132</sup> Erasmus and Miller, *The Praise of Folly*, 126.

between the three sections, as Moria progresses from a doctrine of natural reason, to one of direct scriptural revelation, and finally to a praxis of redemptive Christian folly.

This emphasis on spirit-inspired praxis represents an interesting juncture in a Menippean tradition unafraid to wade into highly-theoretical disciplinary debate. *The Praise of Folly* follows the examples of Valla and Poliziano in using irony to construct ludic form as an interpretive object, and animating discursive communities composed of satellite interpreters. These interpreters divide into seeing and unseeing audiences, humanist exegetes and weaker brothers. Yet where Valla and Poliziano use this focus on interpretive failure to assert the primacy of humanist method, Erasmus' concern seems to centre on salvation themes. The weaker brother who emerges from *The Praise of Folly* is one who emphasises theory in the place of praxis, and whose Manichean self-reliance obscures the humble folly of Christian *ekstasis*.

Through animating allegorised folly, or, at least, its embryonic Menippean form, in the sphere of disciplinary debate, this chapter has attempted to show its satiric potential. This potential ultimately rests on the construction of weak exegetes – a construction which, in the case of Poliziano's *Lamia*, renders interpretive failure through a suggestively embodied form. The weak exegete, constructed on the margins of Menippean discursive communities, figures as an exemplar of social and epistemic exclusion. Yet the pedagogical theory of Erasmus, and the textual practice of Valla and Poliziano, suggest that this emphasis on the interpretation of irony has didactic ends. Through constructing and stratifying discursive communities, Menippean writers can meta-critically engage with their own texts and challenge readers to align themselves with the epistemic framework in question. Perhaps most significantly, this emphasis on

interpretation powerfully effaces the role of the satirist, instead centering audiences as arbitrators of meaning. With this pointed deflection, allegorical folly emerges as a tool for evading sanctions, a feature which emerges as vitally potent in the deliverance of political counsel.

## 2

# Ludic Counsel in the Tudor Interlude

### Introduction

The Pauline concern with praxis advanced by *The Praise of Folly* encourages readers to consider the satiric action of folly in more practical ways. This chapter investigates the ways that allegorised folly, with its focus on an interpreter, might animate political change through centring the vital humanist ideal of self-knowledge. It takes the Tudor interlude, with its ability to speak directly to power, as a case study in the ways foolery might simulate anxieties about the absence of courtly (even monarchic) self-awareness, before dramatising moments of sudden, redemptive epiphany. This structure stages the concerns of the *specula principum* ('mirror for princes') genre, which provided instruction for princes on matters ranging from just rule to courtly decorum. Erasmus' *Institutio principis Christiani* (1516) is a notable example of this genre, with its pragmatic emphasis demonstrating the vitality of civic engagement for the early humanists. The publication of a number of these manuals in the early sixteenth-century – seminal works including Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (1528) and Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1532) – reveals the deliverance of civic counsel to be a dynamic and quickly-spreading humanist concern. Significantly, John Skelton too wrote a book in this genre, titled simply *Speculum principis* (1501) for the instruction of the young Henry VIII. Approximately twenty years

later,<sup>133</sup> Skelton's *Magnyfycence* (c. 1519) provides counsel in the alternative form of courtly drama, which softened its delivery through the use of staged allegory rather than direct instruction.<sup>134</sup>

This chapter takes *Magnyfycence* and John Heywood's *The Play of the Wether* (c. 1533) as case studies for the power of ludic counsel.<sup>135</sup> In different ways, these texts both problematise traditional modes of knowledge, preferring instead the heterogenous and slippery wisdom of foolery. They also represent quasi-realist analogues for Henry VIII, on-stage princes who are confounded by an interplay of the material world and the allegorical and symbolic forms of folly. Both *Magnyfycence* and *The Play of the Wether* present exegetical skill as a pillar of humanist governance, and emphasise the dangers of interpretive failure. Deft textual analysis emerges as the catalyst for self-knowledge, and poor exegesis its enduring obstacle. Thus these princes also figure as staged exegetes – themselves critical spectators of the action – and their interpretive failure is captured via sensations of embodiment: *Magnyfycence* becomes maddened, while Heywood's Jupiter is politically and dramaturgically impotent.

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<sup>133</sup> Earlier scholarship disputed the dating of *Magnyfycence* based on a timeline of topical references. John Scattergood, for instance, once extrapolated a reference to 'King Lewes of Fraunce' (280-2), who died in 1515, as a suggestion that the interlude was composed prior to this date. See John Skelton and John Scattergood, *The Complete English Poems of John Skelton* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 433. However, as Scattergood later clarified, more recent scholarship tends to consolidate around a 1519 composition date, given that the play seems to address the 'expulsion of the minions' which took place that year. Scattergood, *Occasions for Writing: Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Literature, Politics and Society* (Portland: Four Courts Press, 2010), 213. This event is discussed in more detail on pages 100-02, and 110-11.

<sup>134</sup> Readings which position *Magnyfycence* as a 'governance' play include Phoebe S. Spinrad, "'Too Much Liberty': *Measure for Measure* and Skelton's *Magnyfycence*," *MLQ* 60.4 (1999): 431-449, Greg Walker, *Writing Under Tyranny: English Literature and the Henrician Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), and Ivan Lupač, *Subjects of Advice: Drama and Counsel from More to Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 49.

<sup>135</sup> While dating of *The Play of the Wether* has sometimes been debated, my reading follows the work of Axton and Happé, which – based on the interlude's extended innuendo as well as references to a new parliamentary head – suggests that it was composed at a later date than was previously thought. Preferring a composition date in 1533 (possibly in the lead-up to the revelation of Anne Boleyn's pregnancy in Easter 1533), they argue that Heywood's 'most ambitious play is also his most politically audacious.' *The Plays of John Heywood* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991), 52.

These texts engage a richer and more diverse tapestry of sources than simply those of classical satire – a fitting move given the Menippean preference for generic instability and amalgam. In particular, this chapter investigates the use of French *sottie* and Marcolfian folklore to thicken the epistemic circuits forming around foolery. The network of sources influencing the Early Modern fool produce him as an evolving and porous allegorical body that co-opts and negotiates a multitude of forms – be they temporal, linguistic, or geographic.

## Reading the Interlude

The exact satiric power of the interlude has been a topic of historical debate. The form of the interlude – an intimate performance generally held in a domestic space – has led some scholars to problematise its potential for serious political satire. James Simpson exemplifies one approach to the issue of form in his argument that the material conditions of the interlude, which typically took place in the private dining rooms of aristocratic patrons, created a powerful dependence on patronage which, in turn, curbed contentious subject matter. This dependency ensured that ‘even when [the interlude] expressed criticism of royal policy, it was nevertheless extremely careful in its alignment with royal interests.’<sup>136</sup> Other critics have ventured a more complex vision of the interlude than one of entertainment curtailed by propagandism. Instead, they suggest that the very nearness of the interlude to governing powers charges it with subversive potential. John McGavin and Greg Walker make a case in this vein, asserting that the venue’s intimacy allowed for an anti-mimetic entanglement of character and spectator which brought a ‘special saturnalian

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<sup>136</sup> James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 541.

license' to the centre of courtly life.<sup>137</sup> Thomas Betteridge makes a similar argument for the sophistication of the form, citing *Magnyfycence* and the anonymous *Godly Queen Hester* (ca. 1525-29) as evidence of the interlude's power to deliver bold political critique.<sup>138</sup> The form of the interlude then, while not politically unproblematic, presents itself as a rich nexus for the destabilisation of the containment:subversion binary. The intimacy of the interlude and its closeness, at once perilous and advantageous, to governance enable possibilities ranging from deferent counsel to sanctioned subversion. One obvious point stands out from this wide interpretive ambit: if the interlude figures as a means of political critique in the lion's den, then it demands an approach with more subtlety than that shown by theatre in the public playhouses. The dramatic strategy of both Skelton and Heywood might broadly be considered a type of courtly persuasion softened by play, and is one configuration of this demand for subtlety. In the case of Heywood in particular, his style of merriment and humour – integrated into his courtly persona as well as his dramatic praxis – enabled him to offer political counsel in almost disarming terms.

The effectiveness of this strategy is partially due to the legacy of Medieval dramatic theory. Early Modern playwrights inherited an operating assumption as to the power of drama to offer instruction and self-knowledge clearly evinced in the Medieval morality play. These narratives of fall and redemption invited spectators to view themselves in universalised protagonists, besieged by personified Vices and Virtues. Although moralities were originally

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<sup>137</sup> John J. McGavin and Greg Walker, *Imagining Spectatorship: From the Mysteries to the Shakespearean Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). Walker makes a similar argument in *The Politics of Performance in Early Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>138</sup> Thomas Betteridge, 'John Heywood and Court Drama,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Literature: 1485-1603*, ed. Mike Pincombe and Cathy Shrank (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 174.

preoccupied with theological themes and questions of conscience, the growing predominance of humanist thought led to a new emphasis on education, epistemology and secular governance, ultimately exemplified by plays like John Redford's *Wit and Science* (ca. 1535).<sup>139</sup> *Magnyfycence* and *The Play of the Wether* are both important products of this new preoccupation, transforming morality protagonists from anonymous 'Everymen' into monarchs, and specific analogues for Henry VIII. Another legacy of dramatic theory – this time, sourced from antiquity – made interludes particularly effective in their deliverance of royal counsel. The tenets of classical drama, writes Walker, positioned theatre as a 'moral mirror in which princes might view both good and bad examples and judge their own behaviour by analogy.'<sup>140</sup> A key contribution of Walker's scholarship has been his demonstration of how the critiques of Henrician courtiers, including those delivered in dramatic form by Skelton and Heywood, reinforced a central tenet of Henry's regal persona. This was the ideal of the consultative, collaborative prince – hearing and justly mediating disputes – popularised by humanist discourse.<sup>141</sup> When tailored and performed for a king, the interlude was well-placed as an ingratiating means of reinforcing this persona: both through offering counsel via didactic narratives, and through producing heavily idealised analogues of the King himself on the stage. Interpretations of *Magnyfycence* and *The Play of the Wether* generally view these purposes as tactically converged. In the case of *Magnyfycence*, Skelton's portrait of a prince's corruption by intimate courtiers, though not immediately flattering, is idealising in its depiction of repentance and a consolidation of authority in its aftermath.<sup>142</sup> *The Play of the Wether*, meanwhile, produces

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<sup>139</sup> Ivan Lupić argues that this turn in the morality play saw its concerns merge with the tradition of Senecan drama: 'moral counsel is already transformed into its political counterpart.' *Subjects of Advice*, 89.

<sup>140</sup> Walker, *Writing Under Tyranny*, 111.

<sup>141</sup> Walker, *Writing Under Tyranny*, 104.

<sup>142</sup> Given the monarch's initial fall, *Magnyfycence* at times feels more offensive than idealising, a distinction which determines the potential danger of staging the interlude. Even as they acknowledge this ambivalence, a number of key critics have insisted that Skelton's portrait is, ultimately, complimentary. Alistair Fox has suggested that the



an image of the prince as a reflective and consultative mediator: Heywood depicts Jupiter hearing petitions about a change in the weather, which he then justly mediates, ultimately deciding in favour of the meteorological status quo. Through depicting this process of just and cautious adjudication, one popular scholarly narrative suggests, Heywood was subtly enforcing the value of mediative and consultative governance in the face of a troubling consolidation of regal power in the period between the Eltham Ordinance (1526) and the *Act of Supremacy* (1534).<sup>143</sup>

Since it underlies a view of the interlude as *specula principum* dramatised, a note should be made on the material logistics of Henry's spectatorship. In *Writing Under Tyranny*, Walker cites courtly convention and the status of Skelton and Heywood as evidence that the interludes were both performed at court: *Magnyfycence* in 1519, and *The Play of the Wether* around Eastertide of 1533.<sup>144</sup> More recently, the likelihood of this hypothesis has been complicated in

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interlude is an expression of anxiety about extravagant military spending but, with it, an instructive and ultimately validating portrait of the prince's reformation via good guidance. See *Politics and Literature in the Reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 139-40. Greg Walker argues that Henry would have been unoffended by the portrait because Skelton linked it to his response in the aftermath of the expulsion of the minions. Walker writes that 'The crucial point to note is that, if he was dramatizing the expulsion of 1519 after the event, Skelton was appealing to the "redeemed" Henry, the King who had himself implied criticism of his own conduct during the ascendancy of the minions, through his declaration that he would "lead a new life" thereafter. Thus Skelton, in dramatizing such criticism, was doing no more than mirroring the King's own publicly expressed position.' See *Plays of Persuasion: Drama and Politics at the Court of Henry VIII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 73-4.

<sup>143</sup> Peter Happé, for instance, writes that *The Play of the Wether* was intended to exhort 'the king to avoid extremes and partiality, and yet to assert his authority in the traditional manner and to deal fairly with all claims.' See "'Rejoice ye in Us with Joy Most Joyfully": John Heywood's Plays and the Court,' *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 72.1 (2007): 4. Candace Lines suggests that *Wether* promotes 'a hermeneutic based in textual and collective tradition, sceptical of individual interpretation', a move which amounted to Heywood's rejection of increasingly centralised governance. See Lines' "'To take on them judgement": Absolutism and Debate in John Heywood's Plays,' *Studies in Philology* 97.4 (2000): 406.

<sup>144</sup> *Writing Under Tyranny*, 109, 105. Though Axton and Happé refrain from speculating about the possibility of court performances in *The Plays of John Heywood*, Happé has independently supported the likelihood of a court performance. He writes 'it was more likely intended for a court performance, though there remains a possibility that it was meant to be given in the house of an eminent person who might have influenced court matters obliquely.' See 'Laughter in Court: Four Tudor Comedies (1518-85) from Skelton to Lyly,' in *For Laughs(?): Puzzling Laughter in Plays of the Tudor Age*, ed. Roberta Mullini (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002), 111.

light of a 2009 experimental staging of *The Play of the Wether* at Hampton Court, one goal of which was to ascertain the probability of Henry's spectatorship. As Elisabeth Dutton summarises, this complexity centres on the placement of the King's dais: were the dais to be placed across from the stage space, the audience would be faced away from Henry, a clear violation of royal protocol. The solution to this would be a placement of the dais in line with the stage, either behind the stage or vaulted above it. Yet the signification of stage space makes this placement a perilous affair. In *Magnyfycence*, the prince's locus of power is presented off-stage, so a vital separation of on-stage prince – Magnyfycence – and Henry would be preserved. In *The Play of the Wether*, however, a royal locus exists statically on stage in the form of a veiled throne; a placement of the dais in line with this locus would enact a dangerous elision of the line between Henry and Jupiter.<sup>145</sup> While the project did not nullify the possibility of a royal spectatorship, it raised awareness of the previously ungauged difficulties this event would have created.

However, despite the speculative nature of Henry's spectatorship, this reading assumes that it can be taken as a basis for an interpretation of royal interludes. This is not because of its historical certainty, but because the very structure of the interlude indicates a transmission of royal counsel, between Skelton and Heywood as courtiers and Henry as their benefactor. This act of counsel is embedded in both their narratives – with Magnyfycence and Jupiter as didactic analogues of Henry – and the theatrical inheritance of the interlude form: the notion of drama as a mode of counsel perpetuated by its mimetic function.<sup>146</sup> As such, the spectatorship of Henry, as

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<sup>145</sup> Elisabeth Dutton, 'John Heywood, Henry and Hampton Court Palace,' in *Performing Environments*, ed. Susan Bennett and Mary Polito (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 42-6.

<sup>146</sup> Walker, *Writing Under Tyranny*, 111.

the key recipient of this counsel, is assumed and incorporated into the fictive texture of the interlude itself. What can be gained from taking Henry's spectatorship as an assumed, if never actualised, paratextual feature of the interlude? Here I offer readings of *Magnyfycence* and *The Play of the Wether* which suggest that the symbolics of folly centre the interpreter in order to animate concerns about princely self-knowledge. The interpretive current running between the fool – as arcane symbol – and viewer-interpreters, both on-stage and off, sustains the energy of the interlude.

## **Folly in *Magnyfycence*: Between the Morality Play and the *Sottie***

### **1. Apothegm and Performative Wisdom**

*Magnyfycence* emerges at a fascinating juncture in the evolution of the morality play genre, one which begins to channel historical particulars into a previously allegorised form.<sup>147</sup> It draws on a highly recognisable generic canon, including the typical morality structure with its narratives of pathos, fall and redemption, and its cast of personified Vices and Virtues. Yet it appears to be one of the first morality narratives riveted to a specific political event: the 1519 expulsion of the 'minions' – a group of young courtiers – from a fledgling and prestigious role, the Gentleman of the Privy Chamber of Henry VIII.<sup>148</sup> Thus *Magnyfycence* represents an evolving emphasis for the

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<sup>147</sup> Lupić, *Subjects of Advice*, 89.

<sup>148</sup> While the play was once seen as an anti-Wolsey satire, the view that the Minions were its primary target has become widely accepted. David Starkey, *The English Court: from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War* (London: Longman, 1987). For more on this view see Greg Walker, *Persuasive Fictions: Faction, Faith, and Political Culture in the Reign of Henry VIII* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), 35-48; and *Plays of Persuasion*, 65-76; and Alistair Fox, *Politics and Literature*, 239-40. While my reading follows this view, it is not without its dissenters. Peter Happé argues that Skelton's failure to show the exact mechanisms of *Manyfycence*'s downfall means that 'even if the play does carry political meaning there is no direct allegorical link between the minions and the evil characters who work to bring things to their own advantage in despite of *Magnyfycence*.' "'Pullyshyd and Fresshe is your Ornacy":

morality genre, shifting its focus from individual conscience to secular governance. With his daring representation of Henry on stage, Skelton is credited with inspiring a number of later interludes, including John Rastell's *Gentleness and Nobility*, R. Wever's *Lusty Juventus* and a number of works by John Heywood.<sup>149</sup>

Through its concern with explicitly courtly matters, *Magnyfycence* emerges as a play preoccupied with both the deliverance of counsel and the interrogation of its particular forms. Skelton's work produces a meta-analysis of the forms of counsel: the way popular channels of counsel can be exploited, while more unlikely channels can generate new insights. With this meta-critique, Skelton problematises typical forms of wisdom – including proverb and his own morality tradition – and paves the way for the assertion of folly as a mode of political counsel. Skelton's use of proverbs is a fertile avenue for considering the status of wisdom literature in *Magnyfycence*. While allegory is not apothegmatic in a technical sense, the morality play and the proverb share significant common ground. Each acts as a capsule for the transmission of common wisdom – one narratorial, the other aphoristic – and combines observational tone with didactic intent. In *Magnyfycence*, this adjacency is taken a step further: as Paula Neuss has demonstrated, the key moral message of the interlude is, itself, proverbial. The maxim that 'measure is treasure' (125) is the premise of Skelton's action, repeated in various proverbs through the play and ultimately vindicated in *Magnyfycence*'s fall and redemption.<sup>150</sup> Neuss identifies *Magnyfycence* as the first in a series of moralities whose central action revolves around

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Madness and the Fall of Skelton's *Magnyfycence*,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama*, ed. Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 486.

<sup>149</sup> Peter Happé, 'Skelton's *Magnyfycence*: Theatre, Poetry, Influence' in *Interludes and Early Modern Society*, ed. Peter Happé and Wim Hüskén (Rodopi: Brill, 2007), 71-94.

<sup>150</sup> Paula Neuss, 'Proverbial Skelton,' *Studia Neophilologica* 54.2 (1982): 245.

a dramatisation of proverbial material, and traces its influence to Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure* in the seventeenth century.<sup>151</sup> This tradition of 'proverbial' plays collapses micro and macro forms of wisdom literature in interesting ways.

Neuss's research suggests that the key moral regime of *Magnyfycence* is apothegmatic. Yet this conclusion seems to contradict critical perspectives on proverbs within *Magnyfycence*, and within the morality tradition more broadly. In fact, Robert Kinsman creates a hierarchy of Vices in *Magnyfycence* according to the frequency of their proverbial utterances, a measure by which he concludes that Fausy is the 'most active and influential' of the Vices.<sup>152</sup> In doing so, Kinsman invokes a typology established by B.J. Whiting, which suggests that Medieval Vices can be classified through their intensive use of proverbs.<sup>153</sup> If proverbial utterance demarcates Vice, then the role of apothegm in morality plays is more complex than the didacticism of the form would suggest. Happé believes Skelton's use of proverbs assigns them a double purpose: 'they can encapsulate wisdom and present valuable idea [sic] in a memorable way; but also by the crafty wisdom which they so often exhibit they can draw attention to moral ambiguity.'<sup>154</sup> Kinsman's conclusion is similar; he finds these slippery maxims signifiers of 'an atmosphere of vicissitude and reversal.'<sup>155</sup> Happé and Kinsman locate an awkward tension between the overarching moralism of *Magnyfycence* and its apparent suspicion of apothegmatic wisdom on a smaller scale. This tension may be inherent to the morality genre; Whiting's typology certainly suggests this to be the case. However, it is intensified in *Magnyfycence*, as the first in a series of

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<sup>151</sup> Neuss, 'Proverbial Skelton,' 245.

<sup>152</sup> Robert S. Kinsman, 'Skelton's *Magnyfycence*: The Strategy of the "Olde Sayde Sawe",' *Studies in Philology* 63.2 (1966): 115.

<sup>153</sup> B. J. Whiting, *Proverbs in the Earlier English Drama* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938), 66.

<sup>154</sup> Peter Happé, "'Pullyshyd and fresshe",' 491.

<sup>155</sup> Kinsman, 'Skelton's *Magnyfycence*,' 102.

morality to be proverbial not simply in dialogue but also in its dramatic premise. My reading of *Magnyfycence* understands this suspicion of proverbial matter as indicative of a broader destabilisation of traditional modes of wisdom literature and civic counsel.

One result of the tendency to view the Vices as the primary mouthpiece for apothegmatic wisdom, corrected in part by Neuss, is that it frustrates a broader analysis of proverbs in the play. In fact, it is not Vice figures, but *Magnyfycence*'s three princely Virtues, Felycyte, Lyberte and Measure, who animate proverbs in the first portion of the interlude. In their opening dialogue, these characters set up Skelton's foundational premise, the value of measure, through a series of intensifying maxims. Measure is first to herald his own praises, arguing that 'with every condycyon measure must be sought' (115), 'by measure all thyng is wrought' (118) and 'measure is treasure' (125).<sup>156</sup> The other Virtues corroborate these maxims, with Felycyte proclaiming that 'Measure is worthy to have domynyon' (127). *Magnyfycence*, too, endorses Measure with a repeated proverbial refrain: 'Measure is a [mery] meane' (188, 380). As these examples suggest, Skelton's use of proverbs complicates any simple correlation of apothegm and Vice: while Vices spout proverbial wisdom, so too, do Virtues. These maxims defending measure finally culminate in a clear testament to the moral slipperiness identified by Happé and Kinsman: *Magnyfycence*, contemplating the erratic excesses of *Fansy*, admits him into his court on the basis that 'Largesse is laudable so it be in measure' (278). With this statement, the apothegmatic build-up established by Measure climaxes in a severe error of judgement, one which is a stronger indictment of the proverb than either Happé or Kinsman suggest. In fact, it appears that proverb *accommodates* *Magnyfycence*'s seduction by Vice: Measure's insistence

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<sup>156</sup> All references are taken from John Skelton and John Scattergood, *The Complete English Poems of John Skelton* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015).

that ‘by measure all thyng is wrought’ makes room for Fany’s erratic extremes in a model of good governance.

A reading of the proverbial utterances assigned to the Vices, as undertaken by Happé and Kinsman, suggests the vulnerability of apothegmatic wisdom to moral ambivalence at best, and deliberate exploitation at worst. A reading of the proverbial utterances assigned to the *Virtues*, however, produces a more complex portrait. The proverbial ethos of moderation in all things seems to inhibit the sharpness of judgement needed for Magnyfycence to dismiss Fany/Largesse out of hand. Thus Skelton’s key proverbial premise is undermined by this paradox of largesse in moderation and, by accommodating his own antinomies, Measure paves the way for his undoing by excess. Apothegm itself appears suspect, substituting critical thinking with platitudes and analysis with a kind of intellectual sedation.

Skelton’s subversive use of morality archetypes is the topic of existing scholarly discussion. In particular, Magnyfycence’s misidentification of Vices and Virtues seems a key means by which Skelton generates meta-theatrical commentary. Jane Griffiths’ study of the fluidity of Skeltonic authorship considers the Vices’ disguises as among several challenges to ‘the allegorical assumption that there is a stable, mimetic relationship between words and matter.’ In place of this, Griffiths asserts that ‘the Vices’ practice gives free rein to anxieties over the ability of words to reconstitute rather than reflect reality.’<sup>157</sup> John Scattergood offers a similar reading focused on the specific conventions of the morality play and the historical particulars of the Tudor Court:

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<sup>157</sup> Jane Griffiths, *John Skelton and Poetic Authority: Defining the Liberty to Speak* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006), 73.

The names the Vices have in *Magnyfycence*, as in more moralities, are descriptive names which are meant to convey something accurate about the bearer of the name, but here this process is subverted: evil characteristics are described as good. In circumstances where identity is fluid, Skelton appears to be saying, it is difficult for a nobleman to know exactly with whom he is dealing, who was being allowed into his presence.<sup>158</sup>

If the ability of Vices to masquerade as Virtues challenges the representational tenets of the morality genre, Lyn Forest-Hill identifies a mirroring source of instability. This is the attribution of transgressive language to *Magnyfycence*'s ostensible Virtues, Lyberte, Felycyte and Measure, a complication of verbal signifiers which renders the characters morally ambiguous.<sup>159</sup> Skelton's subversive play with genre prompts a kind of proto-Brechtian estrangement, whereby the audience, unanchored from familiar generic cues, is prompted to make meta-theatrical judgements of their own.

In this provocation of interpretive judgement, the audience has an essential aid: a diegetic model of precisely *what not to do*. As Griffiths, Scattergood and Forest-Hill all note, the flawed character assessments of *Magnyfycence* are a key nexus for dramatic tension and Skelton's didactic finish, emphasising the necessity of sound political judgement.<sup>160</sup> A number of false signifiers conspire in leading *Magnyfycence* astray: the disguises of the Vices, the attribution of transgressive and courtly language out of turn, and the play's misleading proverbial premise. Yet *Magnyfycence* seems unusually prone to these errors in judgement. As Happé and Kinsman have

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<sup>158</sup> John Scattergood, "Familiar and Homely": The Intrusion and Articulation of Vice in Skelton's *Magnyfycence*, *Medieval English Theatre* 27 (2005): 42.

<sup>159</sup> Lyn Forest-Hill, *Transgressive Language in Medieval English Drama* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 119.

<sup>160</sup> Griffiths, *John Skelton and Poetic Authority*, 77; Scattergood, "Familiar and Homely", 43; Forest-Hill, *Transgressive Language*, 111.



both noted, this poor judgement is just one facet of a character portrait with unusual psychological complexity, a portrait which manifests Magnyfycence's inner instability through a vivid depiction of his seduction and fall into madness.<sup>161</sup> This instability can be attributed to two sources of vulnerability: Magnyfycence is, firstly, conscious of himself as an object of intense, voyeuristic scrutiny and, secondly, naively misled by the signifiers of wisdom and wisdom literature. Fanny exploits both these weaknesses when he attempts to ingratiate his way into the prince's court:

*Magn.* But largesse is not mete for every every man.

*Fanny* No. But for your grete estates  
Largesse stynteth grete debates;  
And he that I came fro to this place  
Sayd I was mete for your grace.  
And in dede, syr, I here men talke –  
By the way as I ryde and walke –  
Say howe you excede in nobleness,  
If you had with you largess.

*Magn.* And say they so in very dede?

*Fanny* With ye, syr, so God me spede.

*Magn.* Yet mesure is a mery mene.

*Fanny.* Ye, syr, a blaunched almonde is no bene.  
Measure is mete for a marchauntes hall.  
But largesse becometh a state ryall.

(369-383)

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<sup>161</sup> See Happé, “‘Pullyshyd and Fresshe’ and Kinsman ‘Skelton’s *Magnyfycence*’.

Magnyfycence's perception of himself as a courtly persona, as well as his paranoia about social surveillance, leaves him vulnerable to Fany's misleading counsel. With this representation, Skelton produces Magnyfycence, not simply as a meta-theatrical consciousness but, more specifically, as a princely consciousness. If Magnyfycence does not perceive himself as an actor within a morality, he certainly conceives of his circumstances as akin to its conventions: he is a singular protagonist inundated by counsel, some well-intended, some malign. With references to 'every man' – the archetypal protagonist of the morality genre – and the popular performance venue of Merchant's Hall, this dialogue explicitly references its generic framework. Skelton seems to narrate the very innovation he brings to the morality tradition: the shift from the universal everyman to the elevated monarch, from accessible and 'popular' performance venues ('merchauntes hall') into select aristocratic households ('state ryall'). Magnyfycence's key weakness, then, seems his overly meta-theatrical consciousness: his cued response when Fany appeals to morality conventions. The circumstances of Magnyfycence's fall incriminate the very modes of counsel Skelton repeatedly invokes: key among them proverbs and the morality tradition.

## 2. Skelton's *roi des sots*

Magnyfycence's primary exegetical error may be a misreading of genre: where he fancies himself to be in a morality play, riddled with apothegmatic wisdom, at times Skelton's interlude seems closer to a *sottie*. Leigh Winser and Peter Happé have both extrapolated links between *Magnyfycence* and the *sottie* genre at some length.<sup>162</sup> With a *mise en scene* reminiscent of the

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<sup>162</sup> See Leigh Winser, 'Magnyfycence and the Characters of *Sottie*,' *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 12.3 (1981): 85-94 and Peter Happé, 'Fany and Foly: The Drama of Fools in *Magnyfycence*,' *Comparative Drama* 27.4 (1993-94): 426-52.

French form, including the costuming of the Vices, they assert, Skelton engages with the broader philosophy of the *sottie*, including themes of deception and exposure, and a broader ambivalence of meaning.

Skelton's invocation of the *sottie* presents some ironies, the chief of which is highlighted by the research of Greg Walker. Where historians and critics have offered a number of explanations for the expulsion of the minions from the privy chamber – including their sympathy for French diplomatic interests and resistance to the influence of Wolsey – Walker suggests a theory at once more mundane and more amusing: the minions offended by parading brazen Francophilia through the court.<sup>163</sup> Edward Hall cites this sin in his *Chronicle*: 'they were so high in love with the frenche courte, wherefore their fall was litle moned among wise men.'<sup>164</sup> Like the original minions, Skelton's Vices are not above charges of Francophilia. The fetishisation of Frenchness, if not the chief end of their villainy, is undoubtedly one of its key markers. As he persuades Magnyfycence of the merits of largesse, Fany invokes his familiarity with the French court: 'largesse is he that all prynces doth avaunce; / I reporte me herein to Kynge Lewes of Fraunce' (279-80). This preoccupation with French culture is matched by a penchant for the French language, particularly egregious on the parts of Clokyd Colusion and Courtly Abusyon. Even the corruption of Magnyfycence is articulated in terms of encroaching Frenchification, as the prince compares himself to 'Cherlemayne, that mantenyed the nobles of Fraunce' (1501).

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<sup>163</sup> Walker goes into detail about the historiographic trends that have led to the overlooking of this cause for the expulsion in *Persuasive Fictions*, 39-50. He provides a reading of *Magnyfycence* in relation to this in *Plays of Persuasion*, 60-100.

<sup>164</sup> Edward Hall, *Chronicle* (London: 1809), 597-8.

The association of Vice with Francophilia advances the moralism of *Magnyfycence*, a play which ultimately disavows the Vice-minions on the grounds of both. However, the *sottie* is an intriguing frame for this disavowal: what might otherwise read as a clear affirmation of English prejudice is complicated by Skelton's experiments with an originally French form. If this irony yields little in analytical terms it is, at least, suggestive of the complex operations of the *sottie*, which generates both didacticism and humour in subtle and self-reflexive ways. Happé observes an ambivalence in the *sottie* quite distinct from the morality play genre:

The *sots* were sometimes victims of these things, sometimes critics, and sometimes perpetrators of the follies they attacked; and it is this combination of apparently conflicting roles that made the *sotties* such an effective weapon of social criticism at the same time as they offered entertainment through conflict. But the roles also made for a certain ambiguity which may have been a mixture of clarity and trouble.<sup>165</sup>

Unlike the typical morality play, the *sottie* features, not a single Vice, but a large cast of *sots*, competing to humiliate, expose, and incriminate each other. One purpose of this vast stage of fools was to illuminate a universal folly in a style similar to the *danse macabre*. However, this widespread folly presents an interpretive challenge: that of distinguishing between Skelton's fools, and locating the role of each in his dramaturgy. Leigh Winser meets this challenge with her typology of *sots* in *Magnyfycence*, through which she identifies three key types of 'knave'. She categorises Courtly Abusyon, Counterfet Countenance and Crafty Conveyance as *gorrier*, *galant*, and *gen nouveau* types, characters marked by modish style and sycophantic posture. Clokyd Colusyon she classes as an *agent double*. Finally, she considers Foly as a *roi des sots* (or

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<sup>165</sup> Happé, 'Fancy and Foly,' 431-2.

*mère-folle*), an ‘ascendant fool’ whose folly domineers and triumphs over that of his peers, normally through exposing and aggravating their follies.<sup>166</sup>

Wanser’s typology unveils a surprising aspect of Skelton’s structure: Foly, though the Vice with the sparsest dialogue, may also offer the most interesting study. In narratological terms, Skelton’s introduction of a character named Foly to a *sottie* indicates a kind of meta-theatrical commentary: Foly consolidates and reigns atavistically over the vast stage of fools. As *roi des sots*, Foly’s goal is not the courtly influence craved by his fellow Vices, but instead the anarchic play that is the by-product of their schemes. Foly revels in the exposure of folly, and acts as a catalyst for the revelation of Vice and rectification of natural order. Of all the Vices, his on-stage pseudonym comes closest to his true identity: the name Consayte denotes affectation on the one hand and on the other, more aptly, ingenuity and tricks. Foly, then, is the most visible invocation of the *sottie* genre, his characterisation at odds with the conventions of the morality play around him.

Unlike the other Vices and Virtues, Foly refrains from a lengthy explanation of his allegorical essence. This may partly be due to a *sot* costume which marked his origins through a visual symbolism more potent than exposition. Equally, however, this lack of introduction may signify Foly’s allegiance to a different set of generic conventions. In fact, Skelton’s *roi des sots* seems to reject his own status as synecdoche in order to implicate the entire court in greater degrees of folly. When Foly tricks Fany into giving him his purse, a conceit typical of court jesters and fools, he responds by transposing folly onto his ‘brother’:

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<sup>166</sup> Wanser, ‘*Magnyfycence* and the Characters of *Sottie*,’ 88-90.

Ha, ha, ha! Herke, syrs, harke!  
For all that my name hyght Foly,  
By the masse, yet art thou more fole than I.

(1109-1111)

In a later discussion with Crafty Conveyance, Foly again unleashes charges of foolery:

*Foly*            In fayth, I can make you bothe folys, and I wyll.  
*Cra. Con.*      What hast thou on thy fyst? A kesteryll?  
*Foly*            Nay, iwys, fole. It is a doteryll.  
*Cra. Con.*      In a cote thou can play well the dyser.  
*Foly*            Ye, but thou can play the fole without a vyser.

(1173-1177)

Foly's mock exchange of falcon for plover is a basis for Crafty Conveyance's label of 'dyser'. Yet Foly's proverb taps into the common anxieties over distinctions between natural and artificial fools: alleging Foly can 'play well' the dyser (1176), Crafty Conveyance undermines the very allegorical essence of Foly as a Vice. In contrast, Foly accuses Crafty Conveyance of a deeper current of folly, one not restricted to artificial playing but essential to his nature. The pair later return to this theme of pretence:

*Cra. Con.*      And for a fole a man wolde hym take.  
*Foly*            Nay, it is I that foles can make;  
                    For be he cayser or be he kynge,  
                    To felowshyp with foly I can hym brynge.

What begins to emerge from Foly's dialogue is not an outright rejection of the label of folly, but instead, in the style of the *roi des sots*, the use of overt foolery to expose its more covert counterparts. With playful incriminations reminiscent of Moria, Foly disrupts the wisdom of those around him, either by exposing them as fools or galvanising them to adopt folly.

The collusion of Fany and Foly as twin fools has been a focus of Happé, who considers them a combined representation of the dialectics of folly.<sup>167</sup> Because of this, their relationship is defined by complementarity – Fany is gullible, Foly crafty – a logic reinforced through their stichomythic dialogue. Happé shows that this dialectic represents the great variance of folly, and the specific shades of foolery nurtured by their shared 'scole' (1065). Ultimately, however, Happé presents a less satisfying reading of the differences between Fany and Foly according to 'moral criteria and the exigencies of the plot':

The latter is meant to show that fancy and folly are very close to one another – brothers here – and that the pursuit of fancy leads people into the deeper and more sinful toils of folly, where punishment and retribution, not to mention the harshness of Fortune, become appropriate. Thus it is necessary for the play to define and isolate the differences between them.<sup>168</sup>

In Happé's schema, fancy is the gateway drug to foolery. This conclusion is, admittedly, invited by Skelton himself, and explicitly drawn out in a soliloquy of Crafty Conveyance:

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<sup>167</sup> Happé, 'Fany and Foly,' 442-5.

<sup>168</sup> Happé, 'Fany and Foly,' 439-40.

Foly and Fansy all where every man dothe face and brace.  
Foly fotyth it properly, fansy ledyth the dawnce,  
And next come I after, Crafty Conveyance.

(1335-1337)

On closer examination, however, Crafty Conveyance's chronology seems suspect: the fancy-foly-crafty sequence assumes that folly evolves into calculated strategy. Instead, Winsor's model of the *roi des sots* advances a more complex portrait of Foly: a character with biting self-awareness and a purposeful goal of contagion, Foly is less the endpoint of Fansy than his antithesis.

This characterisation of folly problematises the assumptions of the morality play genre. Questions about the artificiality of Foly's performance complicate the allegorical essentialism of the other characters. Each Vice in *Magnyfycence* is involved in a pretence, of course, but Foly is alone in provoking questions, not just about his pseudonym, but about his very allegorical identity. As Foly accuses other Vices of a greater folly than himself, and Crafty Conveyance emphasises his artifice by musing that 'for a fole a man wolde hym take', Skelton severs the relation between signifier and allegorical essence assumed by the morality genre. As the most visible legacy of the *sottie* tradition, then, Foly does not merely see the genres blend, but threatens the representational tenets of the morality play.

### **3. Magnyfycence Undone: Generic Instability and Interpretive Error**



This tension between the morality genre and the *sottie* is one foregrounded by the closure of the play, as *Redresse*, *Cyrcumspeccyon* and *Perseveraunce* summarise the preceding action.

*Cyrcumspeccyon*      A myrroure incleryd is this interlude,  
This lyfe inconstant for to beholde and se:  
Sodenly awaynsyd, and sodenly subdude;  
Sodenly ryches, and sodenly poverté;  
Sodenly comfort, and sodenly adversyte;  
Sodenly thus Fortune can bothe smyle and frowne,  
Sodenly set up, and sodenly cast downe.

Sodenly promotyd, and sodenly put backe;  
Sodenly cherysshyd, and sodenly cast asyde;  
Sodenly commendyd, and sodenly fynde a lacke;  
Sodenly grauntyd, and sodenly denyed;  
Sodenly hyd, and sodenly spyed;  
Sodenly thus Fortune can bothe smyle and frowne,  
Sodenly set up, and sodenly cast downe.

(2524-2537)

Skelton's invocation of a mirror captures the action of *specula principum* genre. The content of the mirror in question, however, stands out from the generic status quo: the interlude seems less a conduct manual for princes than an insight into a kind of ludic realism. This mirror reveals a world in which topsy-turvy foolery prevails over the established order, and suddenness is the echoing refrain. *Perseveraunce* responds to *Cyrcumspeccyon*'s lament with eschatological terms: 'Today a lorde, tomorrowe ly in the duste: / Thus in this worlde there is no erthly truste' (2543-4). The funereal tone of these lines is matched by biblical resonances: the certainty of life

returning to dust espoused in Job and Ecclesiastes, as well as New Testament prohibitions about building treasures on Earth, where ‘the mothe & canker corrupt’ (Matthew 6:19). By gathering this transience under a biblical paradigm, these final lines offer a theology of folly, in which folly is both the prevailing state of the world and the primary hermeneutic for grasping it. Earlier, Redresse suggests a knowledge of this carnivalesque reality is the source of wise leadership: ‘comprehendynge the wolde casuall and transytory, / Who lyst to consyder shall never be begylyd’ (2511-12). He drives this point home repeatedly.

Redresse	<p>Nowe well, nowe wo, nowe hy, nowe lawe degre;          Now ryche, nowe pore, nowe hole, now in dysease;          Nowe pleasure at large, nowe in captyvyte;          Nowe leve, nowe lothe, nowe please, nowe dysplease;          Now ebbe, now flowe, nowe increase, now dycrease;          So in this worlde there is no syknesse,          But fallyble flatery enmyxed with bytternesse.</p>	(2517-2523)
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This twisting, anaphoric verse is a rustic vehicle for Skelton’s finish. The description of life’s transience in these final lines adopts a form reminiscent of folly, and the *specula principum* flagged by *Cyrcumspeccyon* seems to devolve into a *speculum stultorum*.

The rustic language of these final stanzas sheds light on the morality:*sottie* tension throughout the play, as well the role of Foly as *roi des sots*. Early in the interlude, language emerges as a weakness in Magnyfycence’s judgement: behind his vulnerability to seduction by bombast, a vulnerability to seduction by the extravagances of Francophilia is strongly implied.

Magnyfycence finds the language of Courtly Abusyion – a *gorrier* figure and, according to Winsor’s typology, the most flamboyantly French character – particularly beguiling. He compliments Courtly Abusyion’s language as ‘so well devysed; Pullyshyd and freshhe is your ornacy’ (1530-1) and, later, ‘as pleasant as though it were pend’ (1538). Courtly Abusyion’s elaborate speech, and Magnyfycence’s seduction by it, are microcosms of the broader behaviour of the Vices, who mimic courtly style in the presence of Magnyfycence and devolve into crass colloquialism behind his back. Foly stands out from this masquerade; even when adopting the persona of Consayte, he accentuates, rather than disguises, the peculiarities of his speech. Magnyfycence’s response to Foly is one of bemusement: ‘thy wordes hange togyder as fethers in the wynde’ (1818). On the basis of Foly’s nonsensical language, he proves the only one of the Vices that Magnyfycence actually manages to identify as such, labelling him ‘a fyne mery knave’ (1826).

A closer inspection of Foly’s language, however, suggests that this (mis)identification by Magnyfycence is linked with the prince’s fall into madness. Further, the interactions of Foly and Magnyfycence return the issue of apothegmatic matter and its signification to sharp focus. After the two meet and Magnyfycence asks for tidings, Foly abandons formalities to describe a scene of seduction and ensnarement:

*Foly*            By our lakyn, syr, I have ben a hawkyng for the wylde swan.  
                    My hawke is rammysse, and it happened that she ran –  
  
                    Flew, I should say – in to an olde barne  
                    To reche at a rat – I coude not her warne.  
                    She pynched her pynyon, by God, and caught harme.

It was a ronner; nay, fole, I warant her blode warme.

*Magn.* A, syr, thy jarfawcon and thou be hanged togyder!

(1806-12)

Foly's tale is a thinly-veiled analogue for Magnyfycence's downfall. The regally-symbolic hawk is distracted from her true pursuit, a swan, by the allure of a rat. The description of injury that follows seems prophetic and speaks of dire immediacy; the blood of the victim, Foly warns, is still warm. So comparable are the tales that Foly seems to stretch the line between analogue and subject. Foly misspeaks that the eagle 'ran' before abruptly breaking off, and the textual indentation before Foly corrects himself is indicative of a meaningful pause during which the eagle threatens to anthropomorphise into Magnyfycence himself. Magnyfycence seems to recognise the parabolic value of the story with his response, but fundamentally misinterprets its subject. Instead, he substitutes Foly for the eagle, in an act of significant interpretive failure.

This allegory, however, is not a standalone incident. It invokes a set of tropes introduced in a previous dialogue between Fany and Courtly Abusyon:

*Cou. Ab.* What the devyll hast thou on thy fyste? An owle?

*Fan.* Nay. It is a farly fowle.

*Cou. Ab.* Me thynke she frowneth and lokys sowre.

*Fan.* Torde! Man, it is an hawke of the towre.

She is made for the malarde fat.

*Cou. Ab.* Me thynke she is well becked to catche a rat.

(922-927)

Their exchange demonstrates the ways foolery challenges taxonomies of meaning: where Courtly Abusyon sees a limp owl only suited for rat-catching, Fany insists his bird is a hawk of the tower, feasting on game. As Lyn Forest-Hill notes, this dialogue speaks to semiotic fluidity and challenges the hierarchies of value attributed to birds according to the utility of their prey. Despite this challenge, Forest-Hill sees this ludic symbolism as fulfilling a conservative purpose: due to the laughable incongruity of the object on stage and Fany's references to it, the bird indicates 'the stability of some forms of identity, in spite of attempts to change them.'<sup>169</sup> While Forest-Hill is right to see this exchange as a use of misrecognition for comic effect, considered as a backdrop for Foly's climactic dialogue with Magnyfycence it becomes more complex. The bird, now absent from the stage, is channelled into allegorical matter to become an abstract representation of Magnyfycence. Whether the bird is a hawk or an owl remains meaningfully ambiguous. With the transition between these two dialogues, Skelton shows a process of allegorical creation. The conservative affirmation of status quo flagged by Forest-Hill morphs into something more ambiguous: Skelton introduces a signifier that detaches from a concrete objects and morphs into floating allegory.

Foly seems to create a kind of apothegmatic matter, but its content is so corrupted that Magnyfycence dismisses it out of hand. Following his initial exchange with Magnyfycence, Foly begins to describe visions of an increasingly grotesque world. He observes 'a foxe sucke on a kowes ydder' (1814), as well as a scene of inverted hunting: 'the houndes ranne before, and the hare behynde' (1823). These distortions of the natural order see prey morph into predators to

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<sup>169</sup> Forest-Hill places her argument in opposition to Neuss's assertion that the bird captures Fany's own inconstant imaginings, yet the two arguments seem to complement each other well. Where Neuss identifies a psychological dimension to Fany's ramblings, Forest-Hill emphasises meanings generated from dramaturgy. See Forest-Hill, *Transgressive Fictions*, 114.

usurp the hierarchies of the chain of being. Intermingled with these disturbing images are Foly's own attempts at unmasking a true order: one in which distinctions – of species, of Virtue and Vice – dissolve into homogeneity. He asks Magnyfycence, 'tolde I not you howe I dyd fynde / a knave and a carle and all of one kynde?' (1819-20), before recollecting that the sight of 'the gander and the gose bothe grasyng on one grave' led him to begin raving (1830-31). The images conveying Foly's prophesy of collapse clearly link with Skelton's overall use of proverbs. Scenes from the animal world invoke fable and folklore, and his speech contains at least two proverbial resonances identified by Neuss: 'to chase as hound does the bare' and 'to eat of the goose that grazes on your grave.'<sup>170</sup> So Foly uses the standard apothegmatic form, but his grotesque inversions lead Magnyfycence to reject them outright. Despite this, Skelton positions Foly as a voice of oracular truth: the anaphoric preface 'I saw' governs his observations of an apocalyptic scene.

Skelton seems to establish two different moral clusters: Vice/wisdom literature/apothegm/deception on the one hand, and folly/corrupted apothegm/grotesque truth on the other. It is less in Foly's utterances themselves than in Magnyfycence's responses that a clear reading of his downfall emerges. Magnyfycence, sandwiched between the hollow bombast of Courtly Abusyon and the corrupted apothegms of Foly, misunderstands both. He lauds empty rhetoric on the one hand, and on the other dismisses Foly's grotesque prophecy as madness. In readily identifying the most blatant Vice-figure, Foly, as such, Magnyfycence adheres to the expectations of the morality play; he fails, however, to appreciate the conventions of the *sottie*,

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<sup>170</sup> Neuss, 'Proverbial Skelton,' 240.

or to register Foly's role in exposing Vice as *roi des sots*. Though Foly's prophecies come too late to prevent Magnyfycence's corruption, they accommodate and precede its full revelation:

*Magn.* Cokes bones! Harde ye ever suche another?

*Foly* Se, syr, I beseche you, Largesse my brother.

(1839-40)

Foly incriminates Fany, under his pseudonym Largesse, as a fool, and in doing so sets the stage for Fany's courtly façade to crumble. Right on cue, a tear-streaked Fany disrupts the scene, telling Magnyfycence that he has been undone.

Skelton's work advances a humanist philosophy of folly which encourages scepticism in the face of worldly wisdom, and prefers the anti-dogmatic stance nurtured by negotiating ludic play. In the lead-up to Magnyfycence's downfall, we see a prince lost amidst symbolic clusters and genres he fails to read. Skelton uses this intersection of materiality and allegory to highly educative effect. As a *specula principum*, the play warns against the dangers of manipulative counsel, which it suggests is enabled by philological and interpretive error. However, this interrogation of apothegmatic wisdom and the morality format is not entirely nihilistic. Instead, it opens avenues for more ludic forms of counsel.

## **Folly and the Works of John Heywood**

If *Magnyfycence* interrogates traditional avenues of counsel, *The Play of the Wether* realises its alternative, showing the potency of folly in aestheticising political concerns. These ideas calcify in the character of Merry Report, identified in the list of players as a 'vyce', whose sexual and

scatological humour undercuts the stabilising authority of Jupiter. Merry Report, in his playful jesting with authority, offers an obvious analogue for Heywood's own ludic persona as a Henrician courtier. An even more suggestive, though ultimately speculative, link binds the pair: the proposal of Richard Axton and Peter Happé that Merry Report was likely written to be performed by Heywood himself.<sup>171</sup> Although hard to corroborate, this possibility enables a range of interpretations, and raises an intriguing question: if the fool is the dramatic proxy for the playwright, how is the discourse of folly in the play augmented via its most overt authorial mouthpiece?

Despite the possibilities enabled by this potential casting, scholarship considering Merry Report presents slim offerings. On the one hand, this absence may be due to a tendency to take at face value Heywood's positioning of Merry Report as a Vice, an assumption that presents the figure more as archetype than protomodern character. On the other, attempts to move beyond the Vice characterisation embrace in its place a kind of anachronistic realism that risks overlooking the legacy of other folkloric traditions underpinning the figure. David Bevington is one critic who attempts to move beyond the morality play paradigm by contextualising Merry Report in a future oeuvre, aligning him with the sanctioned folly of Lear's Fool, rather than looking to earlier traditions.<sup>172</sup> Candace Lines views Merry Report as an embodiment of public scepticism, while Greg Walker reads him as 'a representation of contemporary worries concerning the unruly court "hanger-on" as a source of both social and sexual misrule.'<sup>173</sup> Each approach highlights an important dimension of Merry Report's character, yet taken together they indicate a

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<sup>171</sup> Axton and Happé, *Plays of John Heywood*, 13, 26.

<sup>172</sup> David M. Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics: A Critical Approach to Topical Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 66.

<sup>173</sup> Lines, 'Absolutism and Debate,' 422; Walker, *Writing under Tyranny*, 106.



trend that either relegates the symbolics of folly to the Vice tradition – a tradition separate from, if interlinked with, that of the fool<sup>174</sup> – or ignores them altogether in favor of strictly historicised, and even realist, approaches. This bypassing of the symbolics of folly is all the more surprising in light of Heywood’s own reflections on the theme in his earliest interlude, *Wyttly and Witless* (ca. 1525-33). In what follows, I explore Heywood’s vision of folly through the legacy of Medieval folklore, which is brought into focus by his alignment of his Vice figures with the folkloric rustic Marcolf. Beginning with *Wyttly and Witless* and applying its disputations of folly to *The Play of the Wether*, this section argues that Heywood uses folly as a catalysing vehicle for princely self-knowledge in order to offer a subtle, mimetic form of counsel.

### **1. Reading *Wyttly and Witless*: Between Marcolfian Folklore and the Tudor Court**

*Wyttly and Witless*, Heywood’s earliest interlude, offers an exploration of folly in a style reminiscent of humanist dialectics.<sup>175</sup> Opening in medias res, the interlude features two characters, James and John, disputing a highly Erasmian question: whether the life of the witless is better than the life of the witty. If Heywood’s use of the terms ‘witless’ and ‘witty’ in place of their more obvious synonyms, ‘foolish’ and ‘wise’, seems surprising at first, it ultimately serves to progress the narrative in fundamental ways. In refusing to inflect either wit or witlessness with the moralism of wisdom and folly, Heywood facilitates the intervention of a third figure, Jerome,

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<sup>174</sup> While it is commonly believed that the Elizabethan fool evolved from the Vice, Preiss provides an interesting counternarrative by tracing the fool to the Jack-a-Lent festival; see *Clowning and Authorship*, 9.

<sup>175</sup> All quotations of *Wyttly and Witless* and *The Play of the Wether* are taken from Axton and Happé’s edited collection, with line numbers given parenthetically. Dating of *Wyttly and Witless* has generally hinged on its most concrete contemporary reference: to Henry’s jester Will Somer(s). Hence the assumption that the jester arrived in court in 1525 is offered by Axton and Happé as evidence for a first performance date that same year; see *Plays of John Heywood*, 219. Recently, in acknowledgment of a growing consensus that Somer(s) became employed at court at a date later than previously supposed, Darryll Grantley has suggested the interlude may have been composed as late as 1533. *English Dramatic Interludes, 1300–1580* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 380.

who conclusively shifts the terms of the debate. This intervention takes place after James convinces John of the merit of witlessness following a debate that addresses the comparative pleasure of body, pleasure of mind, and assurance of salvation of both the witty and the witless. On James' moment of triumph, Jerome enters the scene and adds a third variable to the mix, asserting the value of wisdom over both. Jerome, whose name contains suitably authoritative resonances, emerges as a supreme mediator who shifts the debate into moralistic terms. Without the temperance of wisdom, Jerome asserts, both wit and witlessness are morally neutral categories, whereas 'wysdome governth wytt alwey vertu to use. / And all kynds of vyce alway to refewse' (423–24).

What at first seems a disputation on the merits of folly, then, concludes as an interrogation of the distinction between wit and wisdom. Nonetheless, *Wytt and Witless* offers several points of entry for an analysis of Heywood's use of foolery. The first is disclosed in the structural progression of the text. With Jerome's addition of wisdom to the debate, Heywood enables a movement beyond the simple antithesis of wit and witlessness, a movement that, while not quite conflating these categories, certainly problematises any diametric placement of them. Complementing this narrowing of binaries is a highly suggestive change in textual form. With the entrance of Jerome, the style of the debate changes from that of an expository disputation to something subtler and more playful: through riddling, wordplay and testing, rather than dialectical reasoning, Jerome edges John toward his ultimate conclusion. This shift into a ludic space can be discerned in the conceptual basis of Jerome's argument, which is presented, from the outset, as a paradox.

*John*           Why, what dyffrens betwene wyse and wytty?  
*Jerome*         As muche sometyme as betwene wysdom and folly.  
*John*           Man can in nowyse be wyse wythe owte wytt.  
*Jerome*         No, and man may have gret wytt and wysdom nowhyt.

(413-16)

John first articulates this paradox by challenging Jerome's distinction between wisdom and wit, a challenge which Jerome further complicates, rather than solving, in his enigmatic response: 'as muche sometyme as betwene wysdom and folly.' As the exchange continues, compiling alliterative phrases and verbal leashes complement Jerome's conceptual paradox – the union of wit and foolishness – with ludic wordplay.

His paradoxical premise established, Jerome begins to persuade John through a series of riddling questions.

*Jerome*         Ye schall when we have done not trow but know;  
For entre wherto, I pray ye, answer me  
A question or twayne, or mo if nede be.  
And fyrst unto thys, answer as ye can:  
Whether wolde ye be a resonable man  
Or an unresonabyll beast?

(446-51)

Jerome introduces his line of questioning with a bold promise: through grappling with his riddles, he asserts, the audience will no longer 'trow but know.' Here riddles are presented as a means of epistemic refinement, and the basis for a movement from speculation to certainty.

Jerome considers this passage in spatial terms and his invocation of an ‘entrance’ into knowledge touches on ideals of esoteric induction: penetrating the secret and enclosed. With his first challenge Jerome touches on a favoured humanist theme – the distinction between rational man and animals – over which the theological thesis of Pico Della Mirandola’s *Oratione* looms large.<sup>176</sup> Yet if the first rendition of Jerome’s question draws on elite humanist themes, he reissues it several lines later in a considerably more rustic form: ‘Ye woolde rather be a maltman, – ye, a myller, / Rather than a mylhorse?’ (455-6). It is easy to discern a shift between these questions, one that moves Jerome’s challenge from an abstract, philosophising space into one more suited to his ludic form: a rustic, folkloric scene of manual labour.

Jerome’s conclusion affords the fool few favours. He aligns the drudgery of manual labour and physical chastisement suffered by fools with the lot of beasts, leading John to concede, ‘I grawnt the wyttles and the beast thus as one’ (519). Finally, with the assumption that ‘There are in hevyn dyvers degrees of glory / To be recyvyd of men acordyngly’ (563-4) both men agree that the combination of wit and wisdom affords a theological advantage over witlessness. In the process of reaching this orthodox conclusion, however, Heywood leaves his audiences with a considerably more complex vision of folly. This vision takes root in Jerome’s problematisation of the wit:witless binary, enabled through his assertion of wisdom over both. From this platform, wit, witlessness and wisdom



Figure 5. Frontispiece from *Dialogus Salomonis et Marcolfi*, c. 1500.

<sup>176</sup> Pico’s *Oratione* articulated a key theme of the humanist project: the unfixed place of mankind within creation and, with it, the possibility of quasi-platonic ascension through learning.

begin suggestively to intermingle, their most notable coalescence taking the form of Jerome's own speech. With his entrance, the dialogue shifts from academic disputation to something considerably more ludic: Jerome deploys a method of persuasion based on riddles and rustic adages, a method that both reflects and delights in the paradox of the argument.

The nature of this ludic mode becomes clearer with a suggestive repeated reference: the Medieval trope of the dialogue between the Hebrew King Solomon and a rustic named Marcolf. This Medieval figure, a mainstay of the wisdom contest genre, was first popularised in England with the translation of the Latin dialogue, the *Dialogus Salomonis et Marcolfi*, in 1492. The *Dialogus* presents a dialectical standoff between the two men, developed through rhetorical contrast and sharpened through their visual juxtaposition in accompanying woodcuts (Figure 5). Each man represents a contrary epistemic regime: abstract, philosophical wisdom on the one hand, gruelling materiality on the other. The contests are characterised by an ongoing stalemate between these rivalling modes.

Heywood's invocation of Marcolf and Solomon is first placed in the mouth of James, as he concludes his argument in favour of the witless: 'Thys wyll I byde upon: / Better be a sott Somer than sage Salamon' (439-40). Towards the end of the dialogue John, having been persuaded into a new perspective by Jerome, inverts these lines:

Where my mate, my lords, sayde, that ys gone,  
Better be sot Somer than sage Salomon,  
In for sakyng that I wolde now rather be  
Sage Saloman than sot Somer, I assewre ye.

Several aspects of Heywood's use of this trope are worthy of note. The first is its rhetorical positioning: initially at the close of James' argument, and then to mark John's conversion. At both points, Heywood invokes the trope in the manner of apothegmatic wisdom intended to close the argument. A second point of note is the absence of Marcolf himself, and the substitution of a more contemporary figure: Henry's jester Will Somer(s). While Marcolf hovers around the text as the unspoken corollary to Solomon's wisdom, Heywood ventures a bold transposition of this trope from rustic folklore into the Tudor Court.

A closer inspection of the *Dialogus* itself sheds light on Heywood's use of this trope, both in passing reference in *Wyty and Witless*, and in Merry Report's praxis of folly in *The Play of the Wether*. The intellectual contest between Marcolf and Solomon in the *Dialogus* traverses five different literary forms: genealogy, proverbs, riddles, propositions, and finally argumentation *in utramque partem*.<sup>177</sup> Marcolf and Solomon bring to each their respective antinomic spheres: Solomon engages with the authority of biblical tradition and wisdom, Marcolf subverts these with carnivalesque and often scatological humour. Yet the relationship between these two spheres is not one of rebuttal but of supplementation. So insists Nancy Mason Bradbury who, drawing on a framework developed by Helen Solterer, classes these discursive opposites as contrary rather than contradictory.<sup>178</sup> The key distinction at play is that, where contradictory forces seek to nullify and exclude, contrary forces co-exist and bring balance to a

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<sup>177</sup> Bradbury, 'Rival Wisdom,' 346.

<sup>178</sup> Bradbury, 'Rival Wisdom,' 344. Bradbury draws on the work of Helen Solterer on the nature of thematic oppositions in Medieval dialogues. See Solterer, *The Master and Minerva: Disputing Women in French Medieval Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

heterogeneous whole. The relation between Solomon's wisdom and Marcolf's folkloric bawdiness, then, is essentially dialogic, as the two mutually enrich and sustain each other.

In *Wyttly and Witless*, the substitution of Will Somer(s) for Marcolf offers a nexus between the foolery of carnivalesque folklore and the increasingly prohibitive Tudor court. In Heywood's later *Play of the Wether*, this analogue lingers suggestively over Heywood's representation of the relation between Henry and his two rival jesters, Somer(s) and Heywood, through the characters of Jupiter and Merry Report. The Solomon-Marcolf archetype provides a model of folly in dialogue with authority that, in the character of Merry Report, seems to have permeated the Vice tradition. A further observation from Bradbury yields insight into the precise ways the foolery of the Marcolfian figure acts as a supplemental balm to authoritative wisdom:

Deeply ingrained in medieval proverb tradition is the idea that a prideful lack of self-knowledge tips the *sapiens* into the category of the *follus*... [and] Marcolf draws persuasively upon proverb tradition's preference for the self-aware *follus* above the self-aggrandizing *sapiens*.<sup>179</sup>

The role of the fool as embodied by Marcolf is to invoke redemptive self-knowledge in a sovereign on the slippery threshold between *sapiens* and *follus*. It is this precise function that Merry Report, hurtling through Heywood's fictive court with explosive sexual and scatological themes, serves in relation to the blindly-pompous Jupiter. With this invitation to self-knowledge, Heywood's fool offers a mode of euphemistic counsel in which the counsellor himself is effaced, leaving the prince with a mimetic imprint of his own wisdoms and follies. The fool within this

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<sup>179</sup> Bradbury, 'Rival Wisdom,' 351.

scheme acts as a kind of embodied riddle, the interpretation of which facilitates the audience's assumption of self-knowledge.

## 2. Reading *The Play of the Wether: Sex, Scatology and Self-Awareness*

Heywood's characterisation of Merry Report is one that foregrounds a Marcolfian ability to induce self-knowledge. Following Jupiter's lengthy opening monologue, Merry Report enters the scene with all the detonative energy of the Vice tradition. Establishing a stable essence at the heart of this frenetic energy (as linguistic as it is physical), seems a challenge for Jupiter, who tries, and fails, to ascertain the Vice's precise identity. Instead, from his first moments on the stage – prompted by Jupiter's general desire for a 'cryer' – Merry Report is configured as a complex puzzle demanding interpretation.

*Mery Report* Brother holde up your torche a lytell hyer!

Now I beseche you my lorde, loke on me furste.

I truste your lordshyp shall not fynde me the wurste

*Jupiter* Why, what arte thou that approachyst so ny?

*Mery Report* Forsothe, and please your lordshyppe it is I.

*Jupiter* All that we knowe very well, but what I?

*Mery Report* What I? some saye I am I perse I.

But what maner I, so ever be I,

I assure your good lordship I am I.

(98-106)

The Vice's opening appeal to the torch-bearer marks him as a visual enigma, requiring the penetration of symbolic light in order to be looked on and deciphered. The enigma deepens as



Merry Report answers Jupiter's enquiry – 'what I?' – with slippery equivocation. With the riddling repetition of 'I,' he gleefully problematises his own identity. He invokes, on the one hand, folkloric tradition and rumour ('some saye I am perse I') and on the other biblical history, echoing God's description of himself to Moses as 'I AM THAT I AM' in Exodus 3:14. Suggestively, this performance anticipates a similar response in Heywood's later sectarian allegory, *The Spider and the Flie*; a Catholic fly, ensnared by a merciless Protestant spider, responds to his interrogation with twisting repetition of the personal pronoun. Given Heywood's own deeply-held sympathies for the Catholic cause, Merry Report may offer an early prototype for the demarcation of marginalised but ultimately redeemed figures via the moral ambivalences of wordplay.

To follow the editorial suggestion of Happé and Axton and assume that Heywood himself was cast as Merry Report only enriches the humour and complexity of the fool's characterisation.<sup>180</sup> There is obvious irony in the idea of Heywood, as the most recognisable figure in a theatrical troupe largely consisting of choirboys, embracing a cryptically anonymous on-stage persona.<sup>181</sup> Yet undercut by this pointed estrangement of actor and character is an interrogation of Heywood's own identity. With each riddling 'I,' the interface of actor and character grows more complex, and the familiar and anonymous become more deeply entangled. If Heywood truly did perform as Merry Report, then, this performance seems a vehicle for his own textualisation of identity and with it a mystification of both Heywood as courtier and Merry Report as Vice. A final possibility resides in Merry Report's exuberant repetition of the personal

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<sup>180</sup> Axton and Happé, *Plays*, 13.

<sup>181</sup> It is widely speculated that the cast was drawn from the Chapel Royal or the St Paul's Choir School. See, for instance, McGavin and Walker, *Imagining Spectatorship*, 62.

pronoun, one that sheds light on the exact function of the fool-figure as the interlude progresses: given Heywood's penchant for punnery, the 'I' of this verbal play may also invoke the seeing eye. This possibility positions Merry Report not simply as a riddle to be decoded, but as a means of sensory perception and, through it, the attainment of knowledge.

Heywood invokes questions of interpretation as Jupiter and Merry Report's dialogue devolves into an exploration of the pitfalls and merits of merriment. Jupiter considers the fool's 'lyghtness' of manner with scepticism, leading to a bitter retort:

*Mery Report* Well then, as wyse as ye seme to be,  
Yet ye can se no wysdome in me.  
But syns ye dysprayse me for so lyghte an elfe  
I praye you gyve me leve to prayse my selfe.

(119-22)

With a rhetorical twist, Jupiter's assessment of Merry Report's lack of wisdom is inverted to interrogate the god's *own* claim to wisdom. This pivot represents a kind of mimesis in which Jupiter's belief in Merry Report's folly refracts to expose his own. Correspondingly, Jupiter's intellectual gravitas moves from a matter of fact to one of semblance: 'as wyse as ye seme to be.' Merry Report continues to invoke a familiar prototype for this paradox of 'lyghtness' and wisdom, Erasmus' Moria, as he begs leave to 'prayse my selfe.'

The naivety of Heywood's Jupiter – laughably apparent in his belief that he could mediate a change in the weather – is cemented in this bewildered exchange. The god's dismissal of Merry Report's lightness, coupled with his own inability to decipher precisely who or what he

is, betrays a lack of self-knowledge that demands rectification in the resolution of the play. Propelled by this need, Jupiter's assumption of wisdom transforms the narrative into something of a bildungsroman in which the god progresses from a desire for arbitrary and divisive change to a regal pronouncement in favour of continuity at the interlude's close. Merry Report plays a key role in Jupiter's initiation into self-knowledge, acting as the catalyst through which the dialectical tension of *follus* and *sapiens* is resolved in an endorsement of the god's sovereignty. The scene for this resolution is set with Merry Report's despairing summary of the various contradictory suits, and the difficulty of reconciling them.

*Mery Report* Your fyrst man wold have wether clere and not wyndy;  
The seconde the same, save cooles to blow meanly;  
The thyrd desyred stormes and wynde most extermely;  
The fyft no water, but all wynde to grynde;  
The syxst wold have none of all these, nor no bright son;  
The seventh extremely the hote son wold have wonne;  
The eyght and the last, for frost and snow he prayd.  
Byr lady, we shall take shame, I am a frayd!  
Who marketh in what maner this sort is led  
May thynke yt impossyble all to be sped.  
This nomber is smale – there lacketh twayne of ten –  
And yet by the masse, amonge ten thousand men  
No one thyng could stand more wyde from the tother.  
Not one of theyr sewtes agreeth wyth an other.

(1104-1116)

*Jupiter* Son, thou haste ben dilygent and done so well,  
That thy labour is ryght myche thanke worthy.  
But be thou suer we nede no whyt thy counsell,

For in our selfe we have forsene remedy,  
Whyche thou shalt se.

(1123-1127)

Self-evidently, this exchange narrates a transference of knowledge between Merry Report and Jupiter. Jupiter views this transference as the product of a new *self*-knowledge as he dismisses Merry Report's counsel: 'for in our selfe we have forsene remedy.' The blind pomposity of Jupiter's initial pronouncement is remedied by this introspection, reinforced by a dialogue which echoes and inverts his first meeting with Merry Report. With the fool's concession that the issue 'passeth [his] braynes' (1122) the scene reverses the interlude's opening: Merry Report, once a cryptic riddle, now submits to a new intellectual authority. Jupiter augments this shift as he addresses the fool as 'son' – an indication of newfound familiarity with what was, initially, an enigma. With this assertion of a new congenital link between the two, Jupiter seems to symbolically subsume the puzzle that previously taunted his limitations. If the scene's primary focus is on Jupiter's assumption of wisdom, then Merry Report is a key catalyst in this shift: as the unknown becomes intimately known, Heywood indicates a new self-knowledge through which Jupiter gains authority to resolve the problem of his own making.

Although Merry Report is an active participant in this transfer of knowledge – advising Jupiter that 'yt is a great folly' to trust him (1121) – we would be mistaken to take him at his word. His declarations of his own folly betray a performative aspect, reminiscent of the strange intermingling of deficiency and awareness characteristic of the fool. With his insistence on his own inability to solve the problem, Merry Report consciously sets the stage for Jupiter's epiphany. He does so by illustrating in hyperbolic terms the very irreconcilability of the suits:

‘amonge ten thousand men, no one thyng could stand more wyde from the tother.’ Merry Report’s declarations of despair – exaggerating the impossibility of the task – compel Jupiter’s decision to maintain the status quo. Even the formal qualities of the fool’s speech propel resolution, as song-like rhythm and anaphoric numbering build towards a decisive intervention.

The most bare-bones synopsis of *The Play of the Wether* can locate pleasurable balance in this ending. Jupiter, spurred by naive self-delusion, invites suits in a lengthy opening pronouncement. Chaos ensues, as Merry Report negotiates a diverse cast of suitors with contradictory requests. As this chaos reaches a fever-pitch, Jupiter, having gained a wiser outlook, closes the action in a lengthy pronouncement against change. At the heart of this change is Merry Report, a Marcolfian figure whose dialectical contrast with Jupiter spurs the god’s movement into self-knowledge. This is a process etched onto Merry Report himself, as the progressive demystification of the fool symbolically represents the god’s new insight.

Of course, this synopsis fails to account for a sizable portion of the interlude, and its primary means of generating pleasure: the relentless sexual and scatological humour with which Merry Report engages the suitors. Structurally, as well as thematically, this bawdy material sees Merry Report at his most Vice-like: it disrupts action and postpones resolution, suspending the drive towards orthodox containment with deviant humour. Peter Happé considers this sexual humour the ‘peak’ of the interlude and observes that, with the Gentlewoman’s rivalrous treatment of the Launder, Heywood invokes the hotly topical subtext of mistresses competing for a king.<sup>182</sup> The thematic relevance of this humour to Henry’s concurrent Great Matter is

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<sup>182</sup> Peter Happé, ‘Dramatic Images of Kingship in Heywood and Bale,’ *SEL* 39.2 (1999): 244-5.

extrapolated by Axton and Happé in their edited volume. As Axton summarises: ‘double take feeds prurient imaginations. We are denied spectacle, made to speculate, as Henry’s court did historically, about the king’s sex life.’<sup>183</sup> With the insertion of this innuendo, and the discomfiting optics of the competing women, Axton notes, Jupiter’s throne-room is transformed into a bed-chamber, and the locus of hungry speculation.

Happé and Axton demonstrate the relevance of a vein of humour that otherwise seems circumlocutory to Heywood’s didactic structure: the initiation of a ruler into self-knowledge, and with it, the triumph of mediative conservatism. With these topical jests the interlude’s otherwise allegorical abstraction becomes riveted to a perilously concrete here and now. Rather than being considered as a random disruption of the fourth wall, I view this humour as one among a number of mechanisms designed to enmesh Heywood’s narrative in contemporary life. The most obvious of these vehicles is the character of Merry Report himself who, if acted by Heywood, would have provided the clearest nexus between the courts of Jupiter and Henry. The potential casting of Heywood, a well-known entertainer in Henry’s court, in the role of jesting aid to Jupiter produces an interface between staged and real-life courts. The obvious implication is simply this: Henry, were he to view the play, would find himself uncomfortably aligned with Jupiter. As Jupiter looks down on his loyal subject making merry at his expense, so too does Henry. The presence of Heywood sees an otherwise contained analogue burst from the stage to implicate its audience. As Jupiter becomes initiated into self-knowledge, Merry Report, as the source of this bawdy and topical humour, seems to invite audience members into a self-knowledge of their own.

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<sup>183</sup> Richard Axton, ‘Royal Throne, Royal Bed: John Heywood and Spectacle,’ *Medieval English Theatre* 16 (1994): 73.

Though difficult to verify, the indications that Heywood created Merry Report with the intention of playing him are compelling. Axton and Happé base their argument on accounts of Heywood as ‘a charming, witty, and versatile performer and an expert singer.’<sup>184</sup> Such a casting choice would also have topical resonances: it would invoke Heywood’s comic preoccupation with placing himself in opposition to Will Somer(s) by having him displace the jester from his role, taking it for himself in Jupiter’s analogous court. Viewing Merry Report as a proxy for Heywood can shed light on a function of his sexual and scatological humour that extends beyond narrative dilation, fabliau, or even political commentary.

If Merry Report’s Marcolfian antics induce self-knowledge, then Heywood’s potential casting emerges as an interface between both courts and, with it, an opportunity to provoke similar self-knowledge in his spectators. In a more technical sense, Heywood’s casting represents the most visible facet of what Robert Weimann classes as the play’s dramaturgical *platea*. The *platea* presents drama’s most unruly aspect (and, arguably, a spatialisation of folly): fluid, unanchored, and self-reflective. Like the subplot, the *platea* is best understood in relation to an authoritative center, or locus, often configured on the Tudor stage through objects like dining tables, beds, tombs, and thrones.<sup>185</sup> The epistemological value of this fixed spatial center is clear when contrasted with its anarchic counterpart: the locus is a site of certainty and mimesis around which the *platea* subversively coils. While the assumptions of the locus generally prevail over

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<sup>184</sup> Axton and Happé, *Plays of John Heywood*, 13.

<sup>185</sup> Robert Weimann, *Author’s Pen and Actor’s Voice: Playing and Writing in Shakespeare’s Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 182. Weimann introduced these terms in *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition*.

those of the *platea* – through the teleological closure of narrative, among other things – the energy of the *platea* is understood to powerfully challenge the tenets of representation.

Weimann's *platea* and locus provide a dramatic lexicon by which Heywood's stage space gains meaning: Jupiter's static, authoritative throne, and Merry Report's anarchic circulation of the surrounding space. However, the interventions of subsequent critics have problematised this clear-cut division of mimetic locus and participatory *platea*. The work of scholars like Harry Berger Jr and Richard Preiss has highlighted how, far from undermining the locus, the *platea* and its agents can enact an extension of its authority.<sup>186</sup> As these views attest, the dismissal of the *platea* as a non-representational or self-expressive space may ignore the ease with which, in a text like *The Play of the Wether*, the *platea* can assume a highly didactic function. In fact, a closer examination of Jupiter's throne reveals precisely how Heywood's subversion of the authoritative locus is central to his didactic strategy. With this centralised throne, Heywood ensures that Jupiter, though predominantly withdrawn from the action, is the only character who never fully departs the stage space. This throne appears as a set fixture of the stage, the site from which Jupiter '*is revealed*' to deliver his opening declarations and to which he later withdraws.<sup>187</sup> As the centrepiece of the stage, the throne is simultaneously presented as a site of monarchic surveillance (physically raised and centralised on the stage) and a site of retreat to which Merry Report alone has recourse. Yet even when veiled by a curtain and doing little to progress the narrative, the throne remains both the salient feature of the stage and a

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<sup>186</sup> See Harry Berger Jr., 'The Prince's Dog: Falstaff and the Perils of Speech-Prefixity,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 49.1 (1998): 40–73; and Preiss, *Clowning and Authorship*. The most widely cited criticism of Weimann's model is Erika Lin, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), which points to an overly literal focus on spatial geography that ignores the fluidity of Renaissance dramaturgy.

<sup>187</sup> See, e.g., Axton and Happé, *Plays of John Heywood*, 191, 193, both of which contain stage directions specifying '*Jupiter withdraws in his throne.*'



conversational centerpiece. As such, the Ranger attempts to approach the throne but is stopped by Merry Report, an act that revives the throne in the consciousness of the audience, while conspicuously excluding both the object and the god from the actual narrative. Later, Merry Report draws attention to the throne at an even more illuminating interval: in a dialogue poised to disintegrate into crass scatological humor, he informs the Wind and Water Millers that Jupiter is 'here even in yonder trone' (534). One function of the locus in the interlude is to shape Jupiter's characterisation: it consciously reminds the audience of his presence even as it highlights the god's inactivity.

Heywood's positioning of Jupiter as dangerously inactive is complemented by reminders of the very permeability of the surrounding *platea*. At several key junctures, characters burst into the scene claiming to have overheard the proceedings, subverting divisions between the stage's limits and the onlooking audience. Merry Report interrupts the dialectical squabble of the two Millers as he reenters the stage claiming to 'have hard all the wordes that ye both have hadde' (712). Later, as the Launder arrives on the stage to disrupt Merry Report's rendezvous with the Gentlewoman, she asserts, 'I saw you dally wyth your symper de cokket [simper and coquette]' (876) and 'I herde by her tale she wolde banyshe the sonne' (892). These assertions do less to advance the plot than to construct a complex and highly permeable *platea* in which no conversation is confidential and activity is audible beyond the parameters of the stage itself. Jupiter, confined to his throne – the salient and fixed feature of the stage – seems to represent a site of divine omniscience and surveillance. In practice, however, and as Merry Report's Marcolfian humour reaches its apogee, it emerges as a signifier of passivity nearing on willful blindness, accompanied by reminders of a ruler who is present but either inactive or oblivious.

Specifically, it is the very stasis and inactivity of this locus that exposes the god's key weakness: lack of self-knowledge. This absence emerges as the key message of Heywood's dramaturgy, the message in which his audience, and in particular Henry, is confrontationally implicated. As Weimann and, more recently, McGavin and Walker have shown, the participatory quality of the *platea* is particularly pronounced in the case of the interlude, the intimate domesticity of which left the border between the play world and audiences subversively unclear.<sup>188</sup> With such an intermingling of cast and audience, the mimetic quality of the stage may seem fundamentally untenable. In the case of *The Play of the Wether*, however, this bloated *platea* strengthens the mimetic function of the interlude in powerful ways: it furthers the equivalence of the two rumouring courts and, with them, Jupiter's throne and Henry's dais. Where Heywood's dramaturgical periphery begins to bleed, self-reflexively, into the audience is where his didactic message becomes its most striking.

The spatial impotence inscribed on the throne is accompanied by a diminishing narrative role on the part of Jupiter. As the interlude progresses from his opening pronouncement, more and more of the god's mediatory functions are apportioned to Merry Report. This transition is partly structural: the fool, jealously guarding Jupiter's throne, intercepts the suits of the Ranger, both Millers, the Boy and the Gentlewoman. Yet a significant shift in Merry Report's own persona underlies his colonisation of Jupiter's stage time. As he intercepts and mediates the suits,

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<sup>188</sup> Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition*, 74; and McGavin and Walker, *Imagining Spectatorship*, 51. This alignment of spectators with the destabilisations of the *platea* is not without precedent. It invokes earlier moralities such as *Mankind*, which invites audiences to participate in the scatological humor tormenting Mankind's conscience. An embryonic form of the Elizabethan tension between narratorial mimesis and the meta-theatre of foolery, and their respective claims on the audience, may be at play here.

his own manner draws audaciously near to Jupiter's. Merry Report's imitation of Jupiter is at its most daring when the fool reenters the stage to intercept a quarrel between the Water and Wind Millers, two men who, as the Water Miller aggressively insists, are 'of one crafte but not of one kynde' (550). The setup of this quarrel is reminiscent of Heywood's earlier works, and the two men go on to enter into a dialectical struggle over the comparative merits of water and wind. After a debate extending over three hundred lines, Merry Report interrupts with an adjudicatory motion. He establishes his authority to deliver a final pronouncement, having 'hard all the wordes that ye both have hadde' (712), and demonstrates a middle course:

Nother of them both that hath wyt nor grace  
To perceyve that both myllys may serve in place.  
Betwene water and wynde there is no suche let,  
But eche myll may have tyme to use his fet.  
Whyche thyng I can tell by experyens,  
For I have myne owne, not farre from hens  
In a corner to gether, a couple of myllys  
Standynge in marres betwene two hyllys –  
Not of inherytaunce but by my wife.  
She is feofed in the tayle for term of her lyfe,  
The one for wynde, the other for water,  
And of them both I thanke god there standeth nother,  
For in a good hour be yt spoken  
The water gate is no soner open  
But 'Clap!' sayth the wyndmyll, even strayght behynde.  
There is good spedde, the devyll and all they grynde.  
But whether that the hopper be dusty,  
Or that the mylstonyes be sum what rusty,  
By the mas, the meale is myschevous musty.

And yf ye thynke my tale be not trusty  
I make ye trew promyse – come when ye lyst,  
We shall fynde meane ye shall taste of the gryst.

(714-35)

Merry Report's intervention resolves the dispute with recourse to experiential knowledge. The declaration that 'betwene water and wynde there is no suche let' reveals the grounds of the dispute to be baseless, while the decision that both mills should share resources is one of mediative reconciliation, a gesture via which Marcolf seems suddenly to morph into Solomon. Heywood embellishes Merry Report's play-acting with elevated rhetoric, as the fool, in his final invitation to 'taste of the gryst,' adopts the regal first person plural.

This invitation also represents a climax in the building innuendo of Merry Report's speech. Merry Report exaggerates the bawdy associations of milling with an extended play on the scatological and humoural undercurrents of wind and water. With his allusions to his own experiences of milling, this innuendo becomes entangled with Merry Report's own performance of governance. If Merry Report's account of his milling enterprises is one in which he emerges as a diminished figure – the mills, he notes, are 'not of inherytaunce but by my wyfe' – then this sexual undercurrent adds a dangerous dimension to the fool's characterisation. This general emasculation takes a more specific form with reference to his wife's 'corner' crowded with mills, a clear invocation of cuckoldry. Merry Report's wife, Heywood elaborates, is 'feofed in the tayle for the term of her lyfe,' a reference through which Heywood introduces a richly laden signifier: that of the tail, a term with which traditional associations with the penis and buttocks

were being displaced by the vulva.<sup>189</sup> This description of the wife's genital endowment advances the metaphor of cuckoldry, while invoking a dangerously ambiguous space between male and female sexuality.

As Merry Report's dialogue progresses, what began as an authoritative adjudication becomes increasingly personal.

*Water Myller* The corne at receyt happely is not good.  
*Mery Report* There can be no sweeter, by the sweet rood.  
Another thyng yet whyche shall not be coked.  
My water myll many tymes is choked.  
*Water Myller* So wyll she be though ye should burst your bones  
Except ye be perfynt in settinge your stones.  
Fere not the lydger, be ware your ronner.  
Yet this for the lydger or ye have wonne her –  
Perchance your lydger doth lacke good peckyng.

(736-44)

The implications of cuckoldry advanced in Merry Report's first speech here take a more specific bent: themes of female dissatisfaction and, with them, impotence. The Water Miller's declaration that the 'corne' is not good counters Merry Report's invitation to 'taste the gryst' with an insinuation of sexual dysfunction. As Merry Report laments that his water mill 'many tymes is choked,' he introduces a similarly opaque image: the choked mill, within the extended discussion of his wife's dissatisfaction, suggests a resistant, even humourally imbalanced, female subject.

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<sup>189</sup> Gordon Williams, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature* (New Jersey: The Athlone Press, 1994), 1355.

Yet the choked mill is equally evocative of male procreative impotence, an idea calcified by the water miller's later comment that the wife's resistance will continue 'except ye be perfynt in settinge your stones.' The dialogue in this scene introduces an ambivalent vein of innuendo which wavers between images of the dysfunctional woman and, disguised just beneath them, her dysfunctional husband.

The Water Miller warms to his theme as he advises that Merry Report's ledger may 'lacke good peckyng,' a suggestion which the fool meets with a flurry of verbal leashes indicative of building hysteria:

For wyth peckyng and peckyng I have so wrought  
That I have peckt a good peckyng yron to nought.  
How be yt yf I stycke no better tyll her  
My wyfe sayth she wyll have a new myller.  
But let yt passe – and now to our mater.

(750-54)

As Axton and Happé note, with the wife's threat to 'have a new myller' Merry Report voices the comic inverse of Henry's desire for a more fertile wife. Another dangerous nexus between the men can be found in a curious interrelation of accusation and culpability: with Merry Report's complaint of his wife's insatiable imbalances, he exposes impotencies of his own, mirroring the rumours of Henry's failing virility undercutting his second marriage. At this topical crescendo, Heywood hastily draws focus back to the (ostensible) matter at hand – wording suggestive of Henry's Great Matter. Merry Report does not repeat his attempt to mediate the millers' dispute,

but redirects them to Jupiter's authority. So the fool's performance of Solomonic mediation is quickly terminated.

Merry Report's sexual and scatological excess aligns him with one of a triad of comically impotent types identified by Greg Walker: a Vice whose bawdy foolery is best understood in relation to the sterile authority it subverts. Though Jupiter's sexual exploits are never explicated on stage, the insinuations about him and the youthful Gentlewoman nudge him towards the tradition of another impotent type, that of the aging, cuckolded *senex amans*. As Walker notes, however, the interstice between these figures can become slim as the lasciviousness displayed by the Vice threatens to exhaust into an impotency of its own.<sup>190</sup> For the Vice, this sexual decline may project a similar cuckoldry onto the authority around which he orbits. Yet the daringness of Heywood's theatrical strategy rests in a combination of two modes of address – princely authority on the one hand, innuendo and personal humiliation on the other – by which he literalises a link that may otherwise have been left implied. Merry Report's performance of Jupiter's role rapidly disintegrates into a fabliau of sexual impotency, a theme with which the god's proximity and inaction turn to implicate his own rule.

If the entrance of the Gentlewoman immediately after this dialogue can be read as a topical climax – allowing these snide references to manifest in a live woman, and one for whom youth, beauty and fertility are a point of pride – then this concretisation of the scene's sexual undercurrents also present another aspect: a chance for Heywood to mitigate the dangers of these

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<sup>190</sup> So, he observes, 'the potent-but-overworked male stud and the impotent cuckold are in danger of blurring into a single character.' Walker, 'Laughable Men: Comedy and Masculinity from Chaucer to Shakespeare' in *For Laughs* (?), 11.

references. This opportunity comes as Merry Report, with a lecherous eye, presents the Gentlewoman as a marriage prospect for Jupiter.

*Mery Report* My lorde, how now, loke uppe lustely,  
Here is a derlynge come, by Saynt Antony!  
And yf yt be your pleasure to mary  
Speke quyckly, for she may not tary.  
In fayth I thynke ye may wynne her anone,  
For she wolde speke with your lordshyp alone.

*Jupiter* Sonne, that is not the thyng at this tyme ment.  
If her sewt concern no cause of our hyther resorte,  
Send her out of place; but yf she be bent  
To that purpose, heare her and make us reporte.

(780-89)

Merry Report's suggestion figures as the play's most overt reference to Henry's Great Matter, and, with it, an opportunity for Heywood to formally absolve Jupiter of scandal. Instead, showing puritanical caution, Jupiter insists that marriage is not 'the thyng at this tyme ment' and relegates her suit to Merry Report. The desire for a private audience within the throne room – implied by the Gentlewoman and explicated by the fool – is met with firm disinterest.

This separation of the matter at hand from the Great Matter, or, more broadly, of policy-making from marriage, is only superficially redemptive. Instead, the distinction is established only to be collapsed in Merry Report's response, which undercuts Jupiter's separation of governance and marriage through an extended meteorological metaphor. With this speech, Jupiter's preoccupation with the weather accrues topical significance: Jupiter declines to see her,



Merry Report informs the Gentlewoman, because he is busy ‘makyng a new moone’ (795). This preference for new moons over old invokes Henry’s rejection of Queen Katherine for Anne Boleyn: the former is expired, leaking and incontinent – ‘wasted’ and holding ‘no water’ (797, 799) – the latter brims with the fertile promise of making ‘a thing spryng’ (808). The alignment of the god’s work in ‘making new moons’ and modifying the weather collapses both in an image of the Galenic body. The rejected moon presents as a site of humoural imbalance and, with it, infertility, ‘gushyng out lyke gutters of Noyes flood’ (805). In contrast, the euphonic ‘smale droppes sprynklyng softly’ (806) which Jupiter prefers produce an image of virginal timidity and optimised biorhythms. Heywood’s alignment of these preoccupations figures as a daring commentary: if the governance of the weather is the public face of a private matter, then the interlude’s central concern shifts. Under this new paradigm, Jupiter’s legislative concerns are exposed as a guise, a bold statement on the agendas underlying contemporary interferences in matters of state and Church.

### **Interpretive Redemption and the Instructive *Platea***

It is easy to relegate Merry Report’s carnivalesque jibes to the oft-cited symbolic binaries of high and low culture, hegemony and resistance. Yet the rigid enforcement of these binaries can overlook the ways in which foolery might be harnessed in didactic and authentically satirical ways. By locating carnivalesque elements within a rich matrix of continental performance, folkloric tradition, and dramaturgic theory, it becomes clear that the aesthetics of foolery are not ancillary, but central, to Skelton and Heywood’s deliverance of courtly counsel. Both playwrights represent the interpretive onus of folly, staging courtier-fools who encapsulate counsel in riddling jests, and act as interfaces between diegetic and real-world courts. In

*Magnyfycence*, wisdom literature and foolery exist in a provocative tension; by presenting the interpretive failure and subsequent maddening of a prince, Skelton's interlude sheds light on the malleability of trusted channels of counsel, and suggests a preference for the interpretive dexterity demanded by ludic modes. Likewise, in *The Play of the Wether*, Merry Report inhabits a *platea* that is more educative than subversive, and his Marcolfian folly exposes chasms between public policy and private domesticity, blind aggrandisement and sudden self-knowledge.

Dramatised as interpreters of folly, *Magnyfycence* and Jupiter act as didactic catalysts for humanist self-awareness. *Magnyfycence* and *The Play of the Wether* share an interest in instilling interpretive skill. *Magnyfycence* positions traditional means of counsel – wisdom literature, apothegm, morality plays – as intellectual sedatives. In tandem, both playwrights dramatise the relationship between interpreters and allegorical objects – *Magnyfycence* and Foly, Jupiter and Merry Report – manifesting folly in slippery, polyphonic and equivocating figures who inspire self-knowledge to surprisingly didactic ends. Skelton and Heywood ensconce folly, as an epistemic-allegorical language, in a courtly sphere, constructing a method of counsel that effaces the counsellor, foregrounding audience-interpreters to persuasive effect.

In doing so, these interludes also produce striking depictions of interpretive failure, a state with bodily manifestations (Jupiter's spatial impotence) and debilitating psychological impact (*Magnyfycence*'s maddening). These representations enact an uneasy elision of interpretive failure and the very psychological and cognitive constraints that humanist folly

aestheticises. This tension between Menippean forms and mental disability offers a dynamic entry-point for a consideration of Shakespearean folly.

# 3

## Mental Disability and Shakespearean Folly

### Introduction

Paromita Chakravarti, writing in 2011, argues for a clearer differentiation of the humanist elevation of folly from the lived experience of Early Modern mental disability. For Chakravarti, the ‘lopsided historiography’ of Renaissance folly ‘tends to focus exclusively on the philosophical and literary representation of the *morosoph* rather than on the medical, legal, folkloric, anthropological and teratological account of the natural fool.’<sup>191</sup> Since Chakravarti’s argument centres on current-day scholarship and its limitations, these categories reflect our own disciplinary practices rather than those of the Early Moderns. In the comparatively fluid intellectual field of the Renaissance, humanist writers, with their embrace of ludic textual practice, were often on the frontier of dismantling and reassembling such categories. So, for instance, the folkloric status of the fool, as epitomised by character types like Marcolf and Harlequin and reinvigorated by the writings of Poggio and Rabelais, was not a separate sphere to humanist experiments with folly, but instead frequently animated them. Similarly, as Robert Hornback shows, the sanctioned speech which appealed to humanist writers had highly material origins: the sociological, theological and legal status of the fool which represented him as

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<sup>191</sup> Chakravarti, ‘Natural Fools and the Historiography of Renaissance Folly,’ *Renaissance Studies* 25.2 (2011): 208.

incapable of understanding his actions.<sup>192</sup> The fluid and reciprocal nature of these categories during the Renaissance provides an invigorating state of play for scholars wishing to rectify the imbalance Chakravarti notes.

Whether or not the humanists' embrace of multiple, wide-ranging sources made their use of folly any more egalitarian is another question entirely. As the case study of Maarten van Dorp suggests, the eclecticism of Menippean writing was so contrary to existing rules of literary decorum, with its mingling of 'high' and 'low' culture, that it gave rise to new, highly coded, literary forms. In the aftermath of the Menippean revival, the popularity of folly as an exegetical allegory only further entangles it with the notion of 'high' culture. So, Chakravarti's assertion remains intact, and offers an important reorientation in our grasp of Renaissance fools. The stylistic, thematic and symbolic appeal of folly established by Early Modern Menippeanism was largely abstracted from the real-world experience of those designated fools. This chapter takes the division described by Chakravarti as a provocation for exploring the uneasy interaction between humanist symbolic folly and the lives of the mentally disabled Early Modern people that this literary culture displaced.

In what follows, I attend to the relationships between two madmen and two artificial fools: Lear and his Fool, and Malvolio and Feste. The chapter explores two paradigms for considering mental illness in Early Modern England: theories of demonology, and legal tracts covering the custodianship and inheritance of property. The first point, demonology, is explored in relation to *Twelfth Night*, which vividly invokes the concern in the Malvolio plot. Although

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<sup>192</sup> Hornback, *The English Clown Tradition*, 18-9.

early modern demonology had a waning influence on the diagnosis and cure of mental disability, replaced by methods prescribed by pathology and law, their legacy remained, especially over explanations for the root cause of mental disability.<sup>193</sup> Hence, where supernatural explanations may be offered to describe the onset of an illness, its diagnosis and cure would be approached through comparatively naturalistic means. The second point of reference, legal frameworks, is applied to *King Lear*, and builds on vital research by Alice Equestri on the status of the mentally ill in Early Modern England. Equestri's research has illuminated the fact that the key diagnostic criteria for mental illness in Early Modern England emerged from the administrative frameworks of inheritance law, where the material stakes surrounding property were viewed as considerably higher than those of medicine.<sup>194</sup> The second part of this chapter expands on Equestri's application of the *Prerogativa Regis* to the definitional boundaries of 'folly' and 'lunacy' in *King Lear*, and suggests that legal competency is a nexus for approaching issues of justice and legitimacy in the play.

The mock exorcism of Malvolio by Feste in *Twelfth Night* and the physiological representations of Lear's madness are not contradictory or mutually exclusive paradigms for mental illness; however, each play's respective emphasis offers an avenue for placing two common frameworks in dialogue with disability studies. This dialogue is further complicated by the legacy of folly as allegorical matter, and its complicity with questions and methods of exegesis. Ultimately, this chapter explores this dialogue to suggest that Menippean form at once

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<sup>193</sup> Richard Neugebauer, 'Mental Handicap in Medieval and Early Modern England' in *From Idiocy to Mental Deficiency: Historical Perspectives on People with Learning Disabilities*, ed. David Wright and Anne Digby (London: Taylor and Francis, 2002), 22-43.

<sup>194</sup> Equestri, "'This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen": Feste, Lear's Fool and the border between "idiocy" and mental illness,' *Cahiers Élisabéthains* 99.1 (2019): 23-32.

enables and complicates the stratification of elite interpretive circuits – emerging as a highly malleable literary aesthetic that negotiates and pluralises methods of knowledge, including, vitally, knowledge grounded in embodiment.

The identity of Shakespearean clown Robert Armin – a figure who persistently traversed the boundary between symbolic folly and disability – weaves through this chapter. Armin joined the Lord Chamberlain’s Men at the turn of the sixteenth century, and his recruitment is widely viewed as a catalyst for the evolution of the Shakespearean wise fool.<sup>195</sup> Underlying Armin’s influence was a markedly different skillset from those clowns that preceded him. Unlike Will Kemp, who was celebrated for his strong stature, physical abilities, Morris dancing and penchant for representing lower class subjects, Armin’s style of clowning is generally characterised as subtler and more intellectual. He lacked Kemp’s physical skills, but boasted instead a gift for singing, a talent Catherine Henze has linked to a 204 per cent increase in the volume of songs in Shakespeare’s solo-authored plays after his arrival.<sup>196</sup> In Armin’s wake, Shakespeare’s fool characters were less boisterous and physical, wielding instead the penetrative insight and rustic wisdom celebrated by the humanist school.

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<sup>195</sup> This influence is a matter of near critical consensus, though scholars differ on its exact nature. For some, it is Armin’s own authorial work that suggests a clear dialogue with Shakespeare’s representation of folly. Readings in this vein include Nora Johnson, *The Actor as Playwright in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Preiss, *Clowning and Authorship*. Other scholars take a more conservative position, attributing the evolution in the wise fool to Armin’s different physique and dramatic skillset. See H. F. Lippincott, ‘*King Lear* and the Fools of Robert Armin,’ *Shakespeare Quarterly* 26.3 (1975): 243-53; David Wiles, *Shakespeare’s Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Bente A. Videbæk, *The Stage Clown in Shakespeare’s Theatre* (Westport: Greenwood, 1996); Bart Van Es, *Shakespeare in Company* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Alice Equestri, “*Armine...thou art a foole and a knaue*”. *The Fools of Shakespeare’s Romances* (Rome: Carocci, 2016).

<sup>196</sup> Catherine A. Henze, “‘Wise Enough to Play the Fool’: Robert Armin and Shakespeare’s Sung Songs of Scripted Improvisation,” *Comparative Drama* 47.4 (2013): 420.

Significantly, Armin held a life-long fascination with his subject matter. In his published works, he returned to the subject of natural fools frequently, often repeating stock characters in different works (John o’the hospital, for instance, is introduced in *Fool Upon Fool*, and returns in Armin’s only surviving dramatic work, *Two Maids of More-Clack*). In his most famous exploration of folly, *Fool Upon Fool* (republished in 1608 as *A Nest of Ninnies*), Armin assumes the stance of an anthropologist, cataloguing six ‘sots’ with their ‘liues, humours and behaiours...[and] want of wit in their shew of wisdom.’<sup>197</sup> So, Armin’s vocational practice of folly was paired with a deep theoretical interest in the theme. This interest itself is one that crosses the most clichéd binary of Renaissance folly: the distinction between natural and artificial fools. As a clown Armin himself was, of course, an artificial fool, and the characters he played (Touchstone, Feste, Thersites, Lear’s Fool, and others) are also commonly viewed as artificial fools and jesters. In contrast, Armin’s theoretical gaze perused the world of natural folly, and his works often present disabled and mentally ill characters that are markedly dissimilar to the erudite fool characters he played on stage. While psychoanalysis can only take us so far, perhaps one reason for this abiding interest in natural folly is teratological. As David Wiles notes, Armin was a clown with the appearance of a fool.<sup>198</sup> He combined the ‘artificial’ folly of his dramatic practice with teratological markers commonly associated with natural fools and ‘idiots.’ While Kemp and Dick Tarlton epitomised an association between clowning and physical ability, textual evidence suggests that Armin was shrunken in appearance. As Alice Equestri documents, Armin’s characters are often pointedly unattractive – in *Troilus and Cressida* Armin’s Thersites is called a ‘crusty batch of nature’<sup>199</sup> – and his career with the Lord

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<sup>197</sup> *A Nest of Ninnies Simply of Themselves Without Compound* (London: T.E. for John Deane, 1608), sig. A<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>198</sup> Wiles, *Shakespeare’s Clown*, 162.

<sup>199</sup> William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, ed. David Bevington (London: Arden, 1998), 305 (5.1.5).



Chamberlain's *Men* sees his characters repeatedly associated with animalistic traits, in particular dogs.<sup>200</sup> Perhaps this visual homology – and the way it prompted an experience of social marginalisation generally reserved for the disabled – prompted Armin's lasting fascination with natural folly and its various manifestations. The life and roles of Robert Armin present themselves as a point of departure for interrogating the division of symbolic folly and disability; a study of Armin's fool roles, I believe, illuminates a consistent impulse to scrutinise this division, whether through representation, parody, or inversion.

In taking 'diagnosis' as a theme, this chapter treads some fraught theoretical ground. Research in disability studies has rightly problematised the notion of diagnosis, and the medical approaches undergirding it, because of its assertion of neurotypicality as a reified standard.<sup>201</sup> The pathologisation of difference enacted by the medical establishment – with its often-harmful emphasis on diagnosis and cure – led Marxist and materialist scholars to advocate for new frameworks for understanding disability. The model resulting from this work, dubbed the 'social' model by Mike Oliver, conceives of disability as a condition arising from disabling social environments.<sup>202</sup> It insists that disability does not inhere in the body, but is rather imposed on it by social structures that assume, and ultimately police, the predominance of a certain bodily norm. The politics of the social model have been complemented by work done in the wake of poststructuralist critics like Foucault, Butler and Deleuze and Guattari, which enabled disability studies theorists to show how cultural representations enable the construction of disability as a

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<sup>200</sup> Equestri, "*Armine...thou art a foole and a knaue*", 17.

<sup>201</sup> For an overview of this history, see Carol Thomas, 'Disability and Impairment' in *Disabling Barriers, Enabling Environments*, ed. John Swain, Sally French, Colin Barnes, Carol Thomas (London: Sage, 1988): 21-7.

<sup>202</sup> Oliver, *The Politics of Disablement* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990).

discursive category.<sup>203</sup> By revealing how social and cultural categories are, in fact, the ultimate arbitrators of disability, this work has enabled the more positive, ‘affirmative’, conception of disability as a collective social identity described by John Swain and Sally French.<sup>204</sup>

In recent years, the social model has come under increasing criticism for its erasure of the realities of embodiment. According to the damning assessment of Tom Shakespeare, social and poststructuralist scholars risk appearing ‘more concerned with deconstructing the category of disability or intellectual disability than in changing the social conditions of disabled people and people with learning disabilities.’<sup>205</sup> In place of this, recent scholarship tends to synthesise the social displacement of disabled bodies with the reality of embodiment itself. In the field of Early Modern studies, scholars such as Robert McRuer and Tobin Siebers have been pivotal in presenting this intersection of built environments and embodiment as the new focus of enquiry.<sup>206</sup> As Rosemary Garland-Thomson summarises: ‘the various interactions between bodies and world make disability from the raw material of human variation and precariousness.’<sup>207</sup> Disability has both biological and social sources, and it manifests through their friction.

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<sup>203</sup> Dan Goodley, ‘Who is Disabled? Exploring the Scope of the Social Model of Disability’ in *Disabling Barriers, Enabling Environments*, 118-124.

<sup>204</sup> Swain and French, ‘Towards an Affirmation Model of Disability,’ *Disability and Society* 15.4 (2000): 569-82.

<sup>205</sup> Tom Shakespeare, *Disability Rights and Wrongs Revisited* (London: Routledge, 2013), 2.

<sup>206</sup> See, for instance, McRuer, ‘Richard III: Fuck the Disabled: The Prequel’ in *Shakespeareer: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. Madhavi Menon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011): 294-301; Siebers, *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008); Siebers, ‘Shakespeare Differently Disabled’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment*, ed. Valerie Traub (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 435-53.

<sup>207</sup> Rosemary Garland-Thomson, ‘The Politics of Staring: Visual Rhetorics of Disability in Popular Photography’ in *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities*, ed. Sharon L. Snyder, Brenda Jo Brueggemann, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (New York: MLA, 2002), 75.

If the term ‘diagnosis’ is still haunted by the spectre of discredited medical approaches, this recent emphasis on embodiment paves the way for its re-consideration. In particular, this chapter examines how diagnosis might be redeemed when considered as a vehicle for the prized humanist state of self-knowledge. When diagnosis is viewed as a means for expanding self-knowledge – rather than simply enforcing the gaze of the medical establishment – we might begin to see it as a vehicle for empowering the disabled subject. For both Malvolio and Lear, the onset of madness is entangled with instances of epistemic and interpretive failure. This failure encompasses their inability to perceive and interpret their surroundings, as well as maintain self-knowledge. While *Twelfth Night* indicates just how harmful the process of diagnosis might be – and in fact seems to present a vision of mental illness that is *created by* the act of diagnosis and cure – *King Lear* enables us to piece together a more positive conception of diagnosis as a vehicle for community and self-knowledge.

In what follows, I argue that *Twelfth Night* narrates a familiar predominance of elite literary culture over marginalised groups, here manifested in the tyranny of the humanist artificial fool over the Puritan madman, Malvolio. In a continuance of a developing theme, Malvolio’s onset of madness is vitally entwined with an act of exegetical failure – his parsing of Maria’s letter – and this failure suggestively figures as an intensification of embodiment. In *King Lear*, however, we can begin to view embodiment not as a punitive form of epistemic exclusion, but as the basis for new forms of knowledge. The pathos of *King Lear* has often been traced to the dismantled hierarchies that enable king and fool to share a common destiny. However, a consideration of a very different hierarchy is also fruitful: that of the symbolic fool *over* the displaced madman, a hierarchy that is asserted and then nullified through the progression of the

play. The shared, and highly-embodied, community of Lear, the Fool and Poor Tom is thus one way of richly reconfiguring the forms of knowledge embedded in allegorical folly.

## **Reading Disability in *Twelfth Night***

### **1. Clown vs Puritan Revised**

Since G.B. Harrison's attempts to link Feste's mock exorcism of Malvolio to the case of Puritan exorcist John Darrell in the 1950s, many critics have contributed to an increasingly sophisticated understanding of this link.<sup>208</sup> John Darrell was the celebrity figurehead of a group of Puritans who advocated for the dispossession of spirits through Protestant principles of fasting and prayer, rather than the elaborate rites promoted by the Catholic Church. Perhaps surprisingly, the Church of England took a critical view of Darrell and his followers. These critiques were spearheaded by Samuel Harsnett, the chaplain to the London Bishop Richard Bancroft, and echoed the attitude of the Church of England to the Puritan sect more broadly. Harsnett criticised the Darrell group's over-zealous application of the Protestant principle of individual interpretation and was particularly scathing of the inclusion of lower clergy, and even laity, in dispossessions that should otherwise have been the domain of those of higher office. For Harsnett, a little reformation went a long way. The general sense of threat that Darrell and his followers

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<sup>208</sup> William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, ed. G.B. Harrison (London: Penguin, 1958). More recent scholarship on this connection includes Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Winfried Schleiner, 'The Feste-Malvolio Scene in *Twelfth Night* against the Background of Renaissance Ideas about Madness and Possession,' in *Jahrbuch Deutsche Shakespeare Gesellschaft West* (1990): 48-57; Donna B. Hamilton, *Shakespeare and the Politics of Protestant England* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992); Hilaire Kallendorf, *Exorcism and its Texts: Subjectivity in Early Modern Literature of England and Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Marion Gibson, *Possession, Puritanism and Print: Darrell, Harsnett, Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Exorcism Controversy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

represented towards ecclesiastical hierarchy was channelled into a more specific accusation in 1597, one that led to his arrest and a lengthy trial. This was the accusation that Darrell counterfeited his exorcisms, focused largely on the specific case of demoniac William Sommers, who, according to sceptics, was taught to feign symptoms to perform his possession and cure. After an eighteen-month imprisonment, Darrell was freed. However, the debate over dispossession, and its broader links to the Puritan project, continued, culminating in an edict (1604) banning all exorcisms except those licensed by a bishop.<sup>209</sup>

The Darrell trial illuminates the resonances of Malvolio's mock exorcism for the Early Moderns. Despite this, aspects of Shakespeare's rendition are surprising, primary among them the fact that Malvolio, despite being the only character explicitly aligned with Puritanism, is the character who most vehemently opposes the dispossession. Having been labelled a 'kind of puritan' by Maria (2.3.136),<sup>210</sup> Malvolio's Puritan sympathies have been widely discussed by scholarship. J. L. Simmons, in an influential essay on the theme, identifies Malvolio's forced interpretation of the letter as a mockery of Puritan exegesis, the stockings and cross-garters he is tricked into wearing as deliberate infractions of the Puritan style of dress, and his desire to marry Olivia as reflective of Puritan disdain for hierarchy, both ecclesiastical and social.<sup>211</sup> Feste's mock exorcism of Malvolio – an exorcism which, from Malvolio's perspective, is premised on a genuine belief of his madness – may be read as ironic but also, more darkly, as an attempt at payback via the exact means the Puritans were accused of: fraudulent exorcism. For Marion Gibson, this scene betrays Shakespeare's sympathy with Darrell by producing the wronged

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<sup>209</sup> Gibson provides an overview of these events in *Possession, Puritanism and Print*, 1-18.

<sup>210</sup> All references are taken from Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, ed. Keir Elam (London: Arden, 2008).

<sup>211</sup> J. L. Simmons, 'A Source for Shakespeare's Malvolio: The Elizabethan Controversy with the Puritans,' *Huntington Library Quarterly* 36.3 (1973): 181-201.

Malvolio as his proxy. In this way, Gibson asserts, *Twelfth Night* offers ‘a model of a noble lady’s household as the state itself, which at first encourages and then betrays the godly.’<sup>212</sup> For other critics, the exorcism channels debates about theatricality. Stephen Greenblatt, writing on demonic references in *The Comedy of Errors*, *King Lear* and *Twelfth Night* traces an increasingly sceptical view of exorcism, viewing the treatment of Malvolio as a revenge plot in which ‘the tables are turned on the self-righteous fanatic.’<sup>213</sup> For Winfried Schleiner, the theatricality of exorcism relates to the anti-theatrical critiques of the Anabaptist movement. With his exposure of the fraudulence of Darrell’s practice, Schleiner suggests, Shakespeare affirms the criticisms of Harsnett and ‘unmasks the professed foes of the theater as actors themselves and actors in bad faith.’<sup>214</sup>

Yet, this long-standing cliché of Puritans as staunchly anti-theatrical has undergone revision in recent decades. Kristen Poole, in her examination of the legacy of Puritan pamphleteer Martin Marprelate on Early Modern popular culture, has uncovered an entirely different stereotype at play, one she labels the ‘carnival grotesque.’ Her identification of Falstaff with Marprelate has helped enable a more sophisticated understanding of Early Modern Puritans: Falstaff is an object of mockery, but he is also, in his own right, subversive and carnivalesque.<sup>215</sup> On the topic of theatricality itself, Huston Diehl has shown that, despite being caricatured as anti-theatrical, many Puritan tracts actually encouraged performance and theatrical playing as a

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<sup>212</sup> Gibson, *Possession, Puritanism and Print*, 163. Gibson draws on the argument of Hamilton, who sees *Twelfth Night* as driven by a moralistic urge to preserve church unity, one resolved by the collective church-going in the final scene. Hamilton, *Shakespeare and the Politics of Protestant England*. A similar argument comes from John D. Cox, who reads the scene as a ‘strategic satire’ against either religious extreme. *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama, 1350-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 115.

<sup>213</sup> Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 212.

<sup>214</sup> Schleiner, ‘The Feste-Malvolio Scene,’ 57.

<sup>215</sup> Kristen Poole, *Radical Religion from Shakespeare to Milton: Figures of Nonconformity in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

means of ‘arousing emotions understood to be conducive to spiritual conversion.’<sup>216</sup> This research enables a broader understanding of the form and structure of the sub-plot. While the sub-plot has often been viewed as a transgressive, liminal interval in dramatic narrative (a microcosm of theatre more broadly) these Puritan caricatures frequently inhabit and *drive* its action. Malvolio is a particularly interesting study in this regard. Although he frowns upon the antics of Sir Toby, Andrew Aguecheek and Feste – whom he views as breaching decorum and propriety – he nonetheless remains an enormously subversive force in Olivia’s household. As Simmons, Schleiner, Ivo Kamps and Alan W. Powers have all emphasised, Early Modern audiences would associate Malvolio with Puritan opposition to hierarchy and a dangerous fantasy of social mobility.<sup>217</sup>

It is easy to read the violent antagonism between Malvolio and Feste as a confrontation of two opposing energies: the dour conservatism of the Puritan interlocked with the carnivalesque frivolity of the clown. Yet, a clearer understanding of Malvolio reveals him to be one of the most persistently destabilising threats to the social cohesion of Olivia’s household. The incensed reactions of Fabian, Sir Toby and Andrew Aguecheek to Malvolio’s fantasy of marriage to Olivia reveal how outrageously subversive his aspirations are. ‘Bolts and shackles!’, exclaims Sir Toby in outrage as he overhears Malvolio imagine the two as equals (2.5.53), a suggestive image that foreshadows Malvolio’s imprisonment, while also disclosing the true provocation driving his jailers. Malvolio’s fantasies involve disciplining Sir Toby:

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<sup>216</sup> Huston Diehl, ‘Disciplining Puritans and Players: Early Modern English Comedy and the Culture of Reform,’ *Religion and Literature* 32.2 (2000): 84.

<sup>217</sup> Simmons, ‘A Source for Shakespeare’s Malvolio’; Schleiner, ‘The Feste-Malvolio Scene’; Ivo Kamps, ‘Madness and Social Mobility in *Twelfth Night*,’ in *Twelfth Night: Critical Essays*, ed. James Schiffer (New York: Routledge, 2009), 229-43; Alan W. Powers, “‘What he wills’”: early modern rings and vows in *Twelfth Night*’ in *Twelfth Night: New Critical Essays*, 217-27.

Malvolio      I extend my hand to him thus, quenching my familiar smile with an  
austere regard of control –

Sir Toby      And does not Toby take you a blow o'the lips then?

Malvolio      Saying 'Cousin Toby, my fortunes, having cast me on your niece, give me  
this prerogative of speech' –

(2.5.63-9)

Malvolio's dream of condescending to his superior prompts an inevitable outburst of rage from Sir Toby. Malvolio's subversions appear superficially very tame – 'a familiar smile' paired with 'austere regard of control' hardly suggests licentiousness. Yet the suggestive theme of the 'prerogative of speech' signals how subversive Malvolio's fantasies truly are, co-opting the language of license extended to fools as symbolic agents of carnival. Malvolio's 'prerogative of speech' sees him encroach on the sacrosanct territory of the fool, and, when Olivia later labels Malvolio's attempt at seduction as a 'very midsummer madness' (3.4.53), Shakespeare presents the social-climbing Puritan as avatar of the carnivalesque.

By viewing Malvolio as the most authentically-carnavalesque force in *Twelfth Night*, we can link Feste to the humanist legacy of folly: the intertwining of folly with the demands of philological interpretation in order to configure elite cultural mores. If popular criticism teaches us that Feste should represent the subversive spirit of the sub-plot, he instead frequently enforces the powers that suppress it. In his, somewhat humourless, first exchange with Maria, Feste's answers invoke the usual verbal sparring of folly, yet he uses this form to deliver conservative biblical apothegm.



Maria            My lady will hang thee for thy absence.  
 Feste            Let her hang me. He that is well hanged in this world needs to fear no  
                      colours.  
 Maria            Make that good.  
 Feste            He shall see none to fear.  
 Maria            A good Lenten answer. I can tell thee where that saying was born of ‘I fear  
                      no colours.’  
 Feste            Where, good Mistress Mary?  
 Maria            In the wars, and that may you be bold to say in your foolery.  
 Feste            Well, God give them wisdom that have it; and those that are fools, let  
                      them use their talents.

(1.5.3-14)

Congratulating Feste on his ‘Lenten’ answer, Maria’s response mobilises a common antithesis associated with Shakespearean comedy: the binary of carnival and lent, associated, respectively, with the hedonistic subversions of the sub-plot and the cultural ‘containment’ of the main plot.<sup>218</sup> Feste’s toying with a Lenten sensibility associates him with hegemony even as Malvolio’s social climbing demotes the upright steward to the revelries of the sub-plot. Maria cites the etymology of Feste’s response – ‘this world needs to fear no colours’ – as a reminder of the ‘boldness’ of his folly. Yet even this allusion to his clowning is one Feste meets with proverbial wisdom, appealing to divine ordinance and legitimising his response through reference to Christ’s parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27). Later Viola, arguably the keenest observer of Feste’s folly, repeats a similar formula.

This fellow is wise enough to play the fool,

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<sup>218</sup> C.L. Barber famously discusses this antithesis in *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy*. Since then, it has been central to understanding a number of fool figures in Shakespeare’s works, particularly Falstaff in the Henriad.

And to do that well craves a kind of wit.  
He must observe their mood on whom he jests,  
And the quality of persons and the time,  
And, like the haggard, check every feather  
That comes before his eye. This is a practice  
As full of labour as a wise man's art;  
For folly that he wisely shows is fit,  
But wise men, folly-fallen, quite taint their wit.

(3.1.58-68)

Viola's paradoxical entangling of wisdom and folly is a platitude familiar to any student of humanist thought. It is one in which Feste refuses to be contained by the subversive energies of the sub-plot, preferring a praxis of folly that is calculated and highly theorised. Instead, in an allusion to *The Praise of Folly*, Feste emerges as a practitioner of folly who exposes its universality, telling Viola that 'Foolery, sir, does walk about the orb like the sun, / it shines everywhere' (3.1.37-8). The wise fool exposing folly in the wise mobilises a dynamic interplay between Feste and Malvolio: as destabilised character types they emerge as agents of containment one moment, and subversion the next.

## **2. Building Epistemic Circuits**

When we broaden our field of vision further, we encounter an aspect of *Twelfth Night* that sheds light on its invocations of allegorised folly. The stage on which Malvolio and Feste's dialectical rivalry plays out is one deeply preoccupied with initiation, positioning characters within and without epistemic circuits. Lines of codified humour running through the play – frequently instigated by Feste – are the clearest indicator of the boundaries of these circuits. This plays out

from Feste's first greeting of Andrew Aguecheek and Sir Toby: 'How now, my hearts? Did you never see the picture of "we three?"' (2.3.15). Feste alludes to a popular visual motif in tavern culture which represented two asses with the caption 'we three'; the gag involves the oblivious spectator asking where the third ass is and, in doing so, implicating himself as precisely that. When Sir Toby responds with 'Welcome, ass' (16), he broadcasts his own familiarity with the joke, signalling a sociability entangling himself and Feste, and produced by their shared participation in 'low' tavern culture.

The exact contours of these networks are established by those on the *outside*, generally Malvolio or Sir Andrew, who, in repeatedly failing to get the joke, strengthen the coterie of those who do. Even as he chastises folly, Malvolio repeatedly demonstrates an inability to comprehend it. He criticises Feste's antics to Olivia, saying:

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's gagged. I protest I take these wide men that crow so at these set of fools no better than the fools' zanies.

(1.5.79-85)

The 'zanies' Malvolio refers to are *Giovanni*: the servant characters from the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, a term that denoted 'assistant' but came to mean imitator. So Malvolio identifies a phenomenon whereby those who humour the fool are in danger of becoming cheap imitations. However, Malvolio's speech unknowingly broadcasts his own ignorance of folly. He narrates Feste's subordination to an 'ordinary fool' (that is, a 'natural' fool rather than a paid jester) in

terms that undercut his own conclusions. In dismissing the natural as having ‘no more brain than a stone’ he invokes popular Elizabethan jester, John Stone and, with this context awakened in the consciousness of the audience the word ‘ordinary’ assumes the Early Modern meaning of tavern, the venues at which Stone performed.<sup>219</sup> Malvolio proves himself unable to make the most fundamental differentiation between natural and artificial fools, a distinction of which the Early Moderns were highly conscious. A similar miscomprehension of folly is shown by Andrew Aguecheek later in the piece:

Sir Toby        My lady’s a cathayan, we are politicians, Malvolio’s a Peg-o’-Ramsey and  
                         [singing] ‘Three merry men be we.’ Am not I consanguineous? Am I not  
                         of her blood? Tilly-bally, lady! [Sings.] ‘There dwelt a man in Babylon,  
                         lady, lady.’

Feste            Beshrew me, the knight’s in admirable fooling.

Sir Andrew     Ay, he does well enough if he be disposed, and so do I too. He does it with  
                         a better grade, but I do it more natural.

(2.3.74-82)

The obvious humour of this moment lies in the pretentious Sir Andrew unknowingly confirming his own idiocy, boasting about his ‘natural’ talents in fooling. In fact, in the very act of seeking to align his jests with Sir Toby – an attempt at imitation that runs through the play – Aguecheek pointedly differentiates himself as he signals the artificiality of Toby’s folly, and the naturalism of his own. Aguecheek echoes Maria’s assessment of his character early on – ‘he’s a very fool and a prodigal’ (1.3.22), and, in his unknowing verification of this assessment, he marks the comparative comic sophistication of Feste, Sir Toby and Maria.

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<sup>219</sup> So Elam notes in the Arden edition. Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, 189.

The obliviousness of Aguecheek and Malvolio to the referential networks forming around them produces the pair as objects of mockery. An ongoing motif of infectious disease shared between Feste and Sir Toby, for instance, is one that Aguecheek repeatedly fails to comprehend. ‘I did impeticos thy gratility,’ Feste assures Aguecheek of his receipt of payment (2.3.25), playfully bastardising the ‘pocketing of gratuity’ in a parody of Aguecheek’s fustian language. Feste invokes impetigo, the infectious skin disease, yet both this reference and the clown’s mockery go over the head of Aguecheek, who instead urges Feste to sing. It does transmit, however, to Sir Toby, who signals his receipt of the clown’s jests through playfully extending on the motif in the aftermath of Feste’s song:

Sir Andrew     A mellifluous voice, as I am a true knight.

Sir Toby        A contagious breath.

Sir Andrew     Very sweet and contagious, i’faith.

Sir Toby        To hear by the nose it is dulcet in contagion.

(2.3.52-55)

Sir Toby’s references to contagion are particularly humorous in light of the characteristic style of response from Aguecheek: that of imitation. Where Aguecheek’s repetition of Sir Toby is an ongoing marker of his impressionability as a character, here it cements his miscomprehension of the joke. Feste and Sir Toby comment on his habit of repetition through a metaphor of infection, and Aguecheek unknowingly provides the punchline through doing just this.

Aguecheek’s incognisance runs so deeply that he fails to register the joke, even in moments of meta-spectatorship as he, Sir Toby and Fabian watch Malvolio succumb to their

trap. As they observe Malvolio's discovery and parsing of the staged letter, Aguecheek alone remains stumped as to the dramatic irony of Malvolio's plight. In one instance, both Aguecheek and Malvolio are perplexed by a bawdy reference to Olivia in the letter.

Malvolio      [*takes up letter.*] By my life, this is my lady's hand. These be her very c's,  
her u's and her t's, and thus makes she her great P's. It is in contempt of  
question her hand.

Sir Andrew    Her c's, her u's and her t's. Why's that?

(2.5.85-9)

Even as he spells out an early English form of 'cunt',<sup>220</sup> Malvolio is so captured by his grand fantasies that he fails to recognise the sexual humour. More damningly, Aguecheek, despite being party to the prank, misses the jest and emerges as a meta-spectator unable to read dramatic irony. In this scene, the spectatorship of Toby and Fabian guides and assimilates with audience response, while Malvolio and Aguecheek are positioned outside their discursive network, oblivious to the existence of the joke.

Although these characters exist on the outskirts of this epistemic circuit, this does not necessarily mean they are unaware of its existence. For Malvolio in particular, the prospect of codified and secretly transmitted knowledge seems to hold great appeal. John Kerrigan notes that 'Malvolio's cultivated discretion (his chosen mode of being) is a form of self-advertisement. For the ornate secrecy of the letter is calculated to command attention: it engages in a covert exhibitionism which the steward finds congenial.'<sup>221</sup> One of the purest expressions of Malvolio's

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<sup>220</sup> Elam, *Twelfth Night*, 242.

<sup>221</sup> John Kerrigan, 'Secrecy and Gossip in *Twelfth Night*,' *Shakespeare Survey* 50 (1997): 76.

social-climbing instincts is his desire to broadcast to his inferiors a new cultural status through participating in codified knowledge beyond their access. In fact, his fantasy of social mobility distills into an ostentatious display of codified knowledge: ‘I will be proud, I will read politic authors, I will baffle Sir Toby’ (3.2.156-8). Malvolio’s desire to communicate codified knowledge is clear in his attempts to seduce Olivia, attempts in which he never overtly acknowledges the letter, instead preferring the transmission of covert signals. When Olivia is baffled by his cross-garters, he responds cryptically: ‘If it pleases the eye of one it is with me as the very true sonnet is: “Please one, and please all.”’ (3.4.20-2). Then when Olivia fails to identify herself as the ‘one’ in question, she receives a second veiled allusion: ‘I think we do know the sweet Roman hand’ (27). Malvolio’s communications attempt to broadcast his knowledge, while ratifying its appearance of secrecy; yet while he hopes his dialogue will codify their shared secret, it is met with disbelief and mockery. Malvolio’s attempts to participate in the type of epistemic circuits from which *Twelfth Night* pointedly excludes him is a vehicle of irony, but perhaps also the clearest indicator of his carnivalesque attempts at radical mobility. This attempt to replicate participation in enclosed knowledge is one way of approaching the severity of Feste’s revenge; the clown, riddling avatar of epistemic circuitry, emerges too as vigilante defender of its violation.

### **3. Maddening the Exegete**

Since J. L. Simmons’ essay, Malvolio’s hoodwinking by the letter has been viewed as a parody of the Puritan elevation of biblical texts over ecclesiastical history, ceremony, and hierarchy.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> J. L. Simmons, ‘A Source for Shakespeare’s Malvolio,’ 181-201.

Malvolio's exegetical tendencies are operative in the success of Maria's fraudulent letter; as Maria herself notes when she reports back on its success, Malvolio responds 'like a pedant that keeps a school i'th' church...obey[ing] every point of the letter that I dropped to betray him' (3.2.71-4). Viewed this way, the prank becomes a means of exploiting and, at the same time, satirising aspects of the Puritan zeal for literalist exegesis.

Malvolio's exegetical approach quickly becomes suspect as he opens the letter intent on being satisfied with its contents.

Malvolio      *[Reads.] I may command where I adore. Why, she may command me. I serve her, she is my lady. Why, this is evident to any formal capacity. There is no obstruction in this. And the end – what should the alphabetical position portend? If I could make that resemble something in me! Softly – [reading] M.O.A.I.*

(2.5.113-19)

The humour of Malvolio's reading of the first line of the letter is the interpretive energy he dedicates to a task transparently designed to provoke his ultimate conclusion. Likewise, Malvolio dedicates laboured reasoning to deciphering an anagram that invites him to interpolate himself into the letter. "M." Malvolio. "M" – why, that begins my name!', Malvolio exclaims in apparent surprise, and after enough time has lapsed between his initial reading and his conclusion for Fabian and Sir Toby to insert several amused comments from the side-lines (123-4). In his longing to make the anagram 'resemble something in me', the steward discloses a heavy interpretive bias, and this biased framework, combined with a letter designed to cater to his fantasies and a highly literalist methodology, should easily elicit his ultimate reading. Instead,



he engages in a delayed and highly laboured analysis. Fabian comments on how Malvolio's overwrought exegetical framework underlies his humiliation when he observes that 'contemplation makes a rare turkey-cock of him. How he jets under his advanced plumes' (2.5.28-9).

Though the letter is designed to hoodwink Malvolio, it is riddled with signifiers of its own falsity, the correct interpretation of which would expose the farce and redeem Malvolio. The shared bemusement of Malvolio and Aguecheek at Olivia's C's, U's and T's is just one example of a failure to penetrate the literal surface of the letter to the layers of ludic irreverence signalling its inauthenticity. A more suggestive example of this interface between the literal and the ironic occurs within the transcript of the letter itself: '*In my stars I am above thee, but be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them*' (2.5.141-3). The tricolon seems tailored to appeal to Malvolio's belief in his own social mobility, and the extent to which it has impressed upon him is clear when he recites the quotation back to Olivia.

Malvolio	'Be not afraid of greatness' – 'twas well writ.
Olivia	What mean'st thou by that, Malvolio?
Malvolio	'Some are born great' –
Olivia	Ha?
Malvolio	'Some achieve greatness' –
Olivia	What sayst thou?
Malvolio	'And some have greatness thrust upon them.'
Olivia	Heaven restore thee!

(3.4.37-44)

Yet Malvolio unknowingly invokes a passage that sabotages his ends. Maria's letter misappropriates a speech by Christ in favour of celibacy: 'For there are some chaste, which were so born of *their* mothers bellie: and there be some chaste, which be made chaste by men: & there by some chaste, which haue made them selues chaste for the kingdome of heauen' (Matthew 19:12). For critics of the Puritan school, the irony of Malvolio's incomprehension of this biblical allusion – an incomprehension aided by the blind literalism of his interpretive approach – is rich. Where Malvolio brandishes his own desires for greatness through marriage, he unknowingly cites a guarantor of his continued celibacy. In fact, even the stylistics of the letter broadcast its vacuity: when Fabian delightedly identifies the anagram as a 'Fustian riddle' (2.5.107) he latches onto formal features – bombastic rhetoric and artifice, both frequently derided – that undermine the letter and its contents. As the elevated tone of the riddle discloses its own emptiness, Malvolio's eagerness to take it seriously reveals his fundamental interpretive error.

These referential ironies – each elided by Malvolio's literalist reading – provide comedy for the audience even as they undermine the efficacy of Puritan exegesis. In Malvolio's appetite for literalism, and inability to perceive signifiers of ludic play, we may spy a second Maarten van Dorp. This context of interpretive testing via folly allows us to approach the key confrontation between Feste and Malvolio, the mock exorcism, anew. One of the most realistic features of this scene – and its psychiatric crux – is the attempt of Feste, masquerading as Sir Topas, to ascertain Malvolio's state of mind through intelligence testing.<sup>223</sup> Feste focuses his testing of Malvolio on an eschatological question: the fate of the soul according to Pythagoras.

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<sup>223</sup> Schleiner, 'The Feste-Malvolio Scene,' 53.

Malvolio      I am no more mad than you are. Make the trial of it in any constant question.

Feste          What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wildfowl?

Malvolio      That the soul of our grandam might haply inhabit a bird.

Feste          What think'st thou of his opinion?

Malvolio      I think nobly of the soul, and no way approve of his opinion.

Feste          Fare thee well. Remain thou still in darkness. Thou shalt hold th'opinion of Pythagoras ere I will allow thy wits, and fear to kill a woodcock lest thou dispossess the soul of thy grandam. Fare thee well.

(4.2.47-59)

Feste's questioning follows a familiar formula, clarifying abstract classical knowledge first and spiritual fortitude second. Malvolio's responses on both fronts meet Early Modern standards for sanity, yet, as Schleiner points out, this is an unfair test.<sup>224</sup> It invokes a central claim of John Darrell while on trial: his insistence that, if a supposedly possessed subject gave lucid responses to intelligence tests, it was actually the devil speaking. In a parody of this insistence, Feste responds with an enforcement of pagan metempsychosis that would make even the most gullible observer question his clerical credentials.

However, if audiences view this Pythagorean question as the only test in this scene, they fall prey to the same literalism that landed Malvolio in the dark room in the first place. Another aspect of this scene issues a more significant test to Malvolio's reasoning: Feste's impersonation of Sir Topas, a fraud by which Malvolio is duped. In fact, considered in light of Feste's performance of curacy, there may be more to the Pythagorean test than initially meets the eye.

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<sup>224</sup> Schleiner, 'The Feste-Malvolio Scene,' 53.

Through invoking metamorphosis in doctrinal form, Feste playfully invokes the logic of the sequence: the transmogrification of fool into curate. Malvolio's failure to read the scene, despite the aid of the Pythagorean allusion, means that he quite genuinely *does* fail a test of intellect. Even with references to the carnivalesque transformations of the scene, Malvolio's focus on the immediate blinds him to Feste's identity and indicates his broader inability to read the meta-narratives of *Twelfth Night*.

Thus the Pythagorean question might be read as a microcosm for a much broader test of intellect which Malvolio fails to perceive. The nature of this test inheres in Feste's performance of curacy – a satirical performance with no pretensions to realism or authenticity. This is clear from when Feste first dons his clerical garb.

Feste            Well, I'll put it on, and I will dissemble myself in't, and I would I were the first that ever dissembled in such a gown. I am not tall enough to become the function well, nor lean enough to be thought a good student, but to be said an honest man and a good housekeeper goes as fairly as to say a careful man and a great scholar.

(4.2.4-9)

Feste opens with a familiar vein of anti-clerical satire, concentrated on the Darrell trial and the allegedly false dispossessions of the Puritans. Throughout this speech Feste's stance shifts from one of outward satire to parody, as he slowly assumes the persona of Sir Topas from the implied stage direction in line four ('Well, I'll put it on'). Around the point when Feste alludes to his own physical stature – likely drawing on the reputed bodily disfigurements of Armin – he begins spouting primary aspects of Puritan ecclesiology: the falsity of church hierarchy and the

sufficiency of any member of the laity to be ‘a careful man and a great scholar.’ When Feste addresses Sir Toby several lines later this impersonation has become a clear caricature:

Feste            *[As Sir Topas]* Bonos dies, Sir Toby. For as the old hermit of Prague, that never saw pen and ink, very wittily said to a niece of King Gorboduc, ‘That that is is’; so I being Master Parson am Master Parson, for what is ‘that’ but ‘that’ and ‘is’ but ‘is’?

(4.2.12-16)

From his bastardised greeting – a hybrid address implying both Spanish and Latin – to his invention of theological authorities, Feste’s curacy grows increasingly parodic. With the inclusion of a simplified form of what John Kerrigan has called ‘ontological riddling’, Feste marks the nature of his performance through the verbal play of folly.<sup>225</sup> This use of ontological riddling – the fool’s provocation for interpretive dialogue – indicates the nature of the performance as a test. Yet Malvolio’s incognisance only grows as Feste’s parody becomes more daring. Urged by Sir Toby to go ‘To him in thine own voice’ (65), Feste adopts a strategy of ventriloquism, a strategy he introduces by singing to Malvolio a song with alternating parts (71-79) focused on the topical theme of spurned advances. Even with this quickfire alternation between roles Malvolio remains duped, his responses revealing his (literally) blind acceptance of the situation.

Critical perspectives on Malvolio’s madness have yet to link his deteriorating mental state with the question of interpretive ability and failure. Although the central conceit of the

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<sup>225</sup> Kerrigan, ‘Secrecy and Gossip,’ 78.

mock exorcism is that Malvolio is not truly mad, scholars frequently view the question of Malvolio's mental state as more complicated. As Schleiner observes, the 'theme of treating someone as a madman or even turning him into one by such treatment runs through the Malvolio subplot.'<sup>226</sup> For some scholars, Malvolio's 'madness' is connected to his Puritanism, highlighting Malvolio's growing mental disturbances as his Puritan ambition mounts.<sup>227</sup> Another common view is that Maria's prank is designed to manifest an existing, but well-concealed, mental illness in Malvolio. Allison P. Hobgood suggests that, even early in the play, Malvolio displays an 'inconstant nature, one defined more by humoral excess and impassioned intemperance than moderation and propriety,' while Kerrigan reminds us that Malvolio is deeply 'mired in fantasies' even before discovering the letter.<sup>228</sup>

The question of whether or not Malvolio is truly mad, however, enacts a distinction that *Twelfth Night* itself seems to pointedly obscure. That Malvolio has delusions prior to his exorcism is clear, as is the fact that both letter and exorcism intensify his agitated state. Yet the exorcism is interesting for other reasons: it is the clearest site of Malvolio's interpretive failure, which, like his delusions, runs through the play until culminating in the dark room scene. Instead of trying to discern the exact contours of Malvolio's madness, we might attend to the

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<sup>226</sup> Schleiner, 'The Feste-Malvolio Scene,' 51.

<sup>227</sup> Schleiner writes that 'by their opponents Anabaptists were often called madmen' and L.J. Simmons, before him, notes that madness was considered by the Established church as 'an inevitable stage in the Puritan's progress.' Schleiner, 'The Feste-Malvolio Scene,' 48 and Simmons, 'A Source for Shakespeare's Malvolio,' 184. For Ivo Kamps, *Twelfth Night* provides a vision of madness as failing to perform one's social identity intelligibly; by this understanding, both the letter and the exorcism were used to expose an existing madness within Malvolio, manifesting in his social climbing delusions. Kamps, 'Madness and Social Mobility.'

<sup>228</sup> Allison P. Hobgood, 'Twelfth Night's "Notorious Abuse" of Malvolio: Shame, Humorality, and Early Modern Spectatorship,' *Shakespeare Bulletin* 24.3 (2006): 4. Kerrigan, 'Secrecy and Gossip,' 75. Hobgood's view of existing humoral imbalances is disputed by Joost Dalder, who finds in the mock exorcism scepticism of Renaissance explanations for madness, including those grounded in humoral pathology and demonology. He refrains, however, from commenting on the specific state of mind of Malvolio. Joost Daalder, 'Perspectives of Madness in *Twelfth Night*,' *English Studies* 78.2 (1997): 105-110.

interchangeability of apparent madness and interpretive failure. Feste himself comments on the epistemic crux of Malvolio's alleged madness when he responds to the steward's insistence that he is in darkness: 'Madman, thou errest. I say there is no darkness but ignorance, in which thou art more puzzled than the Egyptians in their fog' (4.2.42-44). Literal madness and exegetical failure become indistinguishable as Malvolio and Feste play out a scene of exorcism that is simply an elaborate interpretive test. They play out, too, dual identities that form a kind of chiasmus: Malvolio sways between madman and failing exegete and Feste playfully alternates between religious doctor and tyrannising fool. Malvolio is a madman whose madness at once precedes, enables, and is intensified by interpretive failure. At the end of the play we view a madman vowing revenge on an artificial fool, a plot device that speaks to epistemic hierarchies privileging the interpretive object over the exegete he disables. This hierarchy is subject to playful revision and reconfiguration in *King Lear*.

### **Reading Disability in *King Lear***

As he anticipates Malvolio's maddening in the dark room, Sir Toby gives a description of their gruesome recreation that ends with a suggestive legal reference.

Come, we'll have him in a dark room and bound. My niece is already in the belief that he's mad. We may carry it thus for our pleasure and his penance till our very pastime, tired out of breath, prompt us to have mercy on him; at which time we will bring the device to the bar and crown thee a finder of madmen.

(3.4.131-6)

Sir Toby's allusion points us to a vital fact of Early Modern psychiatry: that categories of mental illness were more clearly defined and diagnosed in the field of law than in those of medicine and theology.<sup>229</sup> The role of 'finder of madmen' was thus a legal role, arbitrated and administrated in court. In Early Modern England, sanity was considered an essential metric for the legitimacy of a person's management of their assets, including their bequests. Within the parameters of feudal law, escheators emerged as 'finders of madmen', fulfilling the administrative function of diagnosing mental illness, determining custodianship for the mentally ill person, and overlooking the distribution and maintenance of their property. Sir Toby implies that Malvolio, having 'taken the infection of the device' (3.4.127) may find his mental state tested before the bar. With this brief reference, *Twelfth Night* offers a glimpse into the complex legal status of the mentally ill and anticipates the material consequences of the trauma the audience is about to witness. In *King Lear*, the legal status of the mentally ill is expanded to form an undercurrent of Lear's dramatic pathos. The play repeatedly invokes feudal inheritance law and, like *Twelfth Night*, presents a humanist artificial fool as a catalyst for exploring the material circumstances of the mentally ill.

In this section I focus on how questions around assets, sovereignty and inheritance in *King Lear* invoke the terms and tenets established by the law and its provisions for mental illness. I ask how these terms allow a revision of the legal complexity of Lear's mental state and shed light on the treatment he receives (or, perhaps, endures) from the characters around him. Finally, I argue that *King Lear* draws on the specific vocabulary of the diagnostic tests administered by escheators to establish mental illness, and ask how the representation of this test reorders the terms of Lear's relationship with his Fool. If *Twelfth Night* depicts an interpretive

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<sup>229</sup> See Equestri, "'This cold night'," 23-32.



test that creates a madman – and bars him from knowledge – *King Lear*, I argue, stages a diagnostic test that liberates him, and induces him into new forms of knowledge. In both of these processes, artificial fools stand at the intersection of elite philological culture and real-world disability.

### 1. The Royal Prerogative in Albion

A contemporary legal tussle that has frequently been linked to *King Lear*, that of Brian Annesley and his three daughters – Grace, Christian and Cordell – provides a point of departure for considering mental illness in the play.<sup>230</sup> In 1600, Annesley drafted a will leaving the bulk of his estate to Cordell and, in 1603, Grace sought to overturn the will and gain vicarious control of the estate by having her father declared incompetent. Cordell contested Grace's actions in a letter to Robert Cecil, First Earl of Salisbury and master of the Court of Wards and Liveries; Cecil intervened on Cordell's behalf, upheld the will and committed Annesley to the guardianship of a close family friend. The widely-publicised dispute between the daughters of a decrepit patriarch is strikingly evocative of *Lear*.

When considering law and justice in *King Lear*, it is tempting to foreground themes of moral restoration and retribution over the less grandiose question of legal autonomy. A re-orientation that centres on legal autonomy, however, allows us to conceptualise Lear's divestment of sovereignty as loss. Of course, Lear's disempowerment is rarely articulated as

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<sup>230</sup> A. R. Buck, 'Cordelia's Estate: Women and the Law of Property from Shakespeare to Nahum Tate,' in *Women, Property and Letters of the Law in Early Modern England*, ed. Andrew Buck, Margaret W. Ferguson and Nancy E. Wright (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004): 183-99. Donna Woodford, *Understanding King Lear* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004).

loss; instead, it is Lear's *agency* in his own de-throning that exposes his initial folly and sets off a chain of events culminating in stark downfall. However, for students of English feudal law, this chronology may seem suspect. According to criteria set out in the 1322 *Prerogativa Regis* – a document which held statutory power in Tudor England, and which Equestri has persuasively brought to bear on the study of early modern folly<sup>231</sup> – evidence of a person's mental disability necessitated crown custodianship of their estate (over time the *Prerogativa Regis* became an important source of royal revenue) and day-to-day management by a guardian, usually a close family member.<sup>232</sup>

Administration of the *Prerogativa Regis* was conducted in the Court of Wards and Liveries and overseen by Robert Cecil (to whom Annesley's daughter wrote to appeal for her father's custodianship). A key function of the court was retroactive, asking of the person under evaluation: 'what land and other property did he possess and which of these had he given away during the time of his illness?'.<sup>233</sup> Ascertaining proof of mental disability was thus one way of forcing a legal revaluation of the bequests made earlier in the person's life. Despite this, protections existed to prevent the *Prerogativa Regis* becoming a mechanism for exploitation. In addition to declaring incompetency and managing wards, the Court also had a key litigious function. It heard suits about the unlawful retention of profits by guardians, the unlawful retention of royal wards, embezzlement and, significantly, complaints brought by wards alleging

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<sup>231</sup> "'This cold night",' 23-32.

<sup>232</sup> H. E. Bell, *Introduction to the History and Records of the Court of Wards and Liveries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953); Nigel Walker, *Crime and Insanity in England, Vol. I. The Historical Perspective* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968) and Richard Neugebauer, 'Mental Handicap in Medieval and Early Modern England,' in *From Idiocy to Mental Deficiency: Historical perspectives on people with learning difficulties*, ed. David Wright and Anne Digby (Abingdon: Routledge, 1996): 22-42.

<sup>233</sup> Neugebauer, 'Mental Handicap,' 28.

wrongdoing by their guardians.<sup>234</sup> Though Lear's language in the mock trial demands penal (even divine) judgement rather than financial recompense, such powers were also within the remit of the Court of Wards and Liveries, which records instances of fines, imprisonment, and even flagellation of negligent guardians.<sup>235</sup> This tension between the administrative and litigious functions of the court emerges as a catalyst destabilising justice in Shakespeare's Albion. There can be no doubt that Lear's descent into insanity is at its most dramatic and pathetic after his ejection into the storm in Act 3. For the few, intermittent voices questioning the state of his sanity from the outset of the play, however, the stakes seem to be very high, powerfully threatening the legitimacy of his divestment.

The possibility of Lear suffering some kind of mental illness from the beginning of the play has generally been explored with reference to medical theory. These hypotheses range from the sweeping assertion of 'childish imbecility' made by German critic August Schlegel in the 1800s, to the more technical conclusions drawn by more recent scholarship, including the diagnosis of 'acute hypochondrical melancholy' delivered by F. David Hoeniger.<sup>236</sup> Yet, as Equestri shows, the most comprehensive diagnostic criteria for mental illness emerged from the administrative frameworks of inheritance law.<sup>237</sup> Equestri's research has shown how *King Lear* adheres to definitions of mental illness derived from the *Prerogativa Regis*, revealing the pertinence of Early Modern law in delineating folly. This reading builds on Equestri's work to

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<sup>234</sup> Bell, *Court of Wards and Liveries*, 4-5.

<sup>235</sup> Bell, *Court of Wards and Liveries*, 102.

<sup>236</sup> See A. W. Schlegel, *Dramatic Art and Literature*, trans. John Black (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1846), 411 and Hoeniger, *Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), 330. For a survey of productions which have emphasised Lear's disability from the *opening* of the play, see Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of King Lear* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992) and Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. J. S. Bratton (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1987).

<sup>237</sup> Equestri, "'This cold night",' 23-32.

suggest that the Quarto *King Lear* might be read as a drama of legal competency – a drama that exposes the mechanisms in inheritance law that construct mental illness for exploitative ends. It then makes some suggestions about the configuration of Lear’s Fool within this legal framework, suggesting he pushes Lear to recognise his restraints in a diagnostic process that inducts Lear, as a disabled subject, into new forms of knowledge: both self-knowledge, and communal embodied knowledge.

The first character to question Lear’s reason is his counsellor Kent, who accuses him first of madness (1.1.147) and then of folly (150).<sup>238</sup> The enraged pitch of Lear’s response discloses how an accusation of mental disability might threaten the validity of Lear’s division and bequest. Lear disavows Kent’s audacity, with ‘strained pride / to come betwixt our sentences and our power’ (170-71), a response that illuminates his anxiety in the face of looming impotence. For Lear, Kent’s intervention seems to present a blockade between his sovereign intent and his authority to execute it. So, when Kent continues to exhort Lear to ‘reserve thy state’ (150), he delivers a double entendre encompassing both Lear’s sovereignty and his state of being, implying a correlation between an uninhibited mental state and Lear’s divestment of power. Kent’s charge ventures into medical territory with his bitter insinuation that the king ‘kill thy physician, / And thy fee bestow upon the foul disease’ (164-65). Our temptation to read these lines as metaphorical has obvious sources, including a number of Christ’s parables that frequently present sin in pathological terms.<sup>239</sup> However, as Gail Kern Paster has shown, in the

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<sup>238</sup> References are taken from *King Lear*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Arden, 1997). This facing-page edition juxtaposes the 1608 Quarto and 1623 Folio texts and, except where stated otherwise, lines quoted are common to both versions. I believe some significant omissions in the Folio text may, in part, be due to the declining topicality of the *Prerogativa Regis* in the lead up to 1623. The next section of this chapter explores this prospect in more detail, and explicitly contrasts Quarto and Folio versions.

<sup>239</sup> See, for instance, the healing of the paralytic man (Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26), and the healing of the paralytic at Bethesda (John 5:1-18; Matthew 12:9-13). This trend continued to hold sway in Early Modernity

language of Galenic physiology, this division between somatic imbalance and identity was less strict, with questions of pathology deeply entwined with those of selfhood and character.<sup>240</sup> If the foul disease Kent chastises is rage, it still demanded a medical cure through the depletion of cholera; hence we might read Kent's intervention as one with very real diagnostic connotations.

Kent's intervention does not prevent the fateful division of the kingdom but instead awakens questions of its legitimacy that haunt the remainder of the play. For Regan and Goneril, as the beneficiaries of Lear's bequest, these questions loom with particular persistence. When they discuss the extent of Lear's madness at the end of the opening scene, the sisters betray anxieties that run deeper than those of filial concern; where the illegitimacy flagged by Kent has done little to dissuade Lear, it has caused some alarm for his heirs.

Goneril        You see how full of changes his age is. The observation we have made of it hath been little. He loved our sister most, and with what poor judgement he hath now cast her off appears too grossly.

Regan         'Tis the infirmity of his age, yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself.

Goneril        The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash; then must we look from his age to receive not alone the imperfections of a long-engrafted condition, but wherewithal the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them.

(1.1.294-302)

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and, as Helen Smith argues, may suggest a tighter relation between physiology and religious experience than previously supposed. 'Metaphor, Cure, and Conversion in Early Modern England,' *Renaissance Quarterly* 67.2 (2014): 473-502.

<sup>240</sup> Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 12.

The sisters' concern centres on Lear's fits of rage, and the likelihood of their escalation. However, their determination to act seems disproportionate to the problem at hand; they meet a matter of speculation – the uncertainty of which rings out in their wavering diagnoses in the earlier lines, alternating between hypotheses about 'the infirmity of his age' and a 'long-grafted condition' – with a firm resolve to action. A legal perspective suggests an underlying cause for this shift from speculative to imperative; within the framework established by the *Prerogativa Regis*, the very presence of doubt threatens to undo legal action. For Regan and Goneril, the ambiguity of their father's state translates into a pressing need for action to ratify a bequest threatened by the growing spectre of illegitimacy, illegitimacy highlighted as Lear's 'unconstant starts' (1.1.303) become all the more severe. Regan voices this concern as a paradox: 'If our father carry authority with such disposition as he bears, this last surrender of his will but offend us' (1.1.307). This linkage of authority and surrender anticipates Lear's later reluctance to cede full sovereignty. However, by centring the question of his disposition, a new locus of concern emerges. It is not Lear's reluctance to give up his sovereignty that compromises his surrender; rather, it is a disposition that compromises the authority on which the surrender hinges. Lear, carrying authority with clear signs of mental incapacity, renders his own edict illegitimate.

The lack of a clear follow-through to Regan and Goneril's resolve to 'do something, and i'the heat' (1.1.309) has led critics to dismiss this dialogue as an attempt to manufacture dramatic impact rather than contribute to a cohesive narrative.<sup>241</sup> However, earlier in this exchange we catch a suggestion of the strategy that this demand for action might centre upon. When Regan and Goneril attempt to determine the nature of Lear's disability, they explore an interstice

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<sup>241</sup> R.A. Foakes comments that they exit 'as if they will at once devise a plan, which is good theatre, though nothing comes of it.' *King Lear*, 179.

between madness and idiocy which the *Prerogativa Regis* had been instrumental in establishing and which had profound implications for the confiscation and custodianship of property. The distinction between ‘idiocy’ and ‘madness’ had a range of ramifications, affecting the length of the custodianship as well as the crown’s entitlement to keep the profits generated by the land. In the case of idiocy, the condition was deemed to be life-long and congenital, granting the crown permanent custodianship and entitling it to claim interest and profits. Madness, on the other hand, was deemed temporary, requiring only a short-term custodianship in which the person’s income was placed on reserve until his ‘return to reason.’<sup>242</sup> One key method of differentiating the two revolved around the question of *onset*; a technicality at the forefront of the sisters’ minds as they acknowledge the increasing disability that has come with Lear’s ‘infirm and choleric years,’ while insisting, too, on the presence of a long-term, underlying condition. With their discussion of the nature of Lear’s condition, the sisters introduce a vocabulary of legal distinctions linked to the provisions for custodianship laid out in the *Prerogativa Regis*.

Regan and Goneril are confronted with a bequest both morally unfair in its exclusion of Cordelia and technically illegitimate due to the incapacity of their father. The prospect of Lear’s recovery, though remote, presents complications of its own: it would, in theory, entitle him to demand a restoration of assets based on the initial illegitimacy of the bequest. However, the *Prerogativa Regis* also offers an avenue for the sisters to revise the terms of the bequest entirely, by emphasising custodial legitimacy rather than rightful inheritance. We begin to observe two narratives about the nature and origin of Regan and Goneril’s political power: Lear views it as an autonomous bequest, while his daughters promote a narrative of custodianship necessitated by

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<sup>242</sup> Equestri, “‘This cold night’,” 23-5. Anne Digby, ‘Contexts and Perspectives’ in *From Idiocy to Mental Deficiency*, 2.

incapacity. As the play progresses, these narratives rub up against each other in increasingly jarring ways, until they literally disrupt each other in the close of Act 2:

Lear            I gave you all –  
Regan          And in good time you gave it.  
Lear            – Made you my guardians, my depositories,  
                    But kept a reservation to be followed with such a number.

(2.2.439-442)

For Lear, the generosity of his gesture demands respect and patronage. For Regan, cutting off his hyperbolic pathos, the gesture was an unavoidable, even overdue, necessity of his incompetence. With her intervention, Lear's bitter attempts at irony transform into a statement of unknowing truth, one that solidifies her guardianship.

When Regan and Goneril re-position themselves into custodial roles, the very illness that invalidates Lear's initial bequest ultimately *legitimises* their continued possession of it. As such, the sisters begin to emphasise the incapacity of Lear in increasingly stark terms. In the Quarto version Goneril, confronted with Lear's disruptions in her court, insists that 'old fools are babes again and must be used / With checks as flatteries, when they are seen abused' (1.3.17-21). Goneril justifies an unnatural imbalance of power through a new maternal relation as Lear's madness becomes so engrafted he disintegrates into child-like incapacity. When Lear appeals against Goneril's injustices to Regan, she too foregrounds Lear's mental incapacity as grounds for their custodianship:



O, sir, you are old:  
Nature in you stands on the very verge  
Of her confine. You should be ruled and led  
By some discretion that discerns your state  
Better than yourself. Therefore I pray you  
That to our sister you do make return

(2.2.335-40)

Regan paints a state of disability not just permanent but terminal, one that necessitates custodianship of his state, a term again loaded with dual signification. This view of Lear’s incapacity underlies Goneril and Regan’s increasing custodial controls, as they chip away at his armed contingent until a single knight remains. Goneril and Regan promote an argument in which authority is substituted with provision:

Goneril                                Hear me, my lord:  
  What need you five and twenty? Ten? Or five?  
  To follow in a house where twice so many  
  Have a command to tend you?

Regan    What need one?

(2.2.449-52)

As Regan turns her eye to the one remaining knight – already a beacon of Lear’s diminishment – the sisters reduce Lear to the very state of dependency that, according to their rhetoric, demands custodianship in the first instance. Where the audience might be expected to sympathise with Lear, however, his maddened response only affirms the assessment of his daughters. In fact, the tragic culmination of this argument for custodianship is delivered by Lear himself in the Quarto version. Caught in the storm, he attempts to instigate a mock trial against his daughters. The

pathos of this scene is stark: Lear's ramblings about justice shift between that wielded by the worldly courts and the fires of divine judgement, and he appoints arbitrators – the Fool, Kent, and Edgar as Poor Tom – whose mental incapacity to yield judgement mimics his own, in a display of madness that ultimately legitimises Regan and Goneril's custodial rule for the audience.

## 2. Evolving legislature between Quarto and Folio *Lear*

Since this mock trial scene is one of several judicial references expunged from the Folio version, scholars of editorial change have often focused on the rapid-fire governmental developments of James I's reign.<sup>243</sup> Yet, in parallel with the tumultuous Jacobean years was a period of legislative pressure that first exposed, and then ultimately diminished, the power of the *Prerogativa Regis*. The prompt for this legislative change was a series of debates in the first decade of the seventeenth-century, which saw the actions of the Court of Wards and Liveries come under increasing parliamentary scrutiny. The death of William Cecil, Lord Burleigh in 1598 – whose long administrative reign over the court ensured nearly forty years of financial efficiency and stability – provoked discussion about the abolition of the court, and its replacement with a fixed rate annual payment to the Crown.<sup>244</sup> By 1603-4, discomfort with the court began to take clearer

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<sup>243</sup> Giuseppina Restivo, for instance, argues that the mock trial 'may have assumed a different meaning in the changing landscape of Jacobean rule' as the king consolidated royal power. 'Inheritance in the Legal and Ideological Debate of Shakespeare's *King Lear*' in *Shakespeare and the Law*, ed. Paul Raffield and Gary Watt (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 161. Leah Marcus, likewise, links the Quarto references to the topicality of James' monarchic heavy-handedness, reading the mock trial scene as a reference to the Court of Chancery (which James used to circumvent challenges posed by the courts of common law). *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and its Discontents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). Nina Taunton and Valerie Hart argue that the Gunpowder Plot scandal (1605) led the Quarto *Lear* to tread a 'narrow line between paying homage to Stuart idealism and exposing the tensions and injustices brought dramatically to the foreground' by the incident, references that were later erased in the 1623 version. "'King Lear", King James and the Gunpowder Treason of 1605,' *Renaissance Studies* 17.4 (2003): 695-715.

<sup>244</sup> Bell, *Court of Wards and Liveries*, 137-8.

shape when a petition of grievances by Sir Robert Wroth led to the formation of a parliamentary committee to inspect the legitimacy of practices around wardship. These grievances focused on the exploitative administration of the *Prerogativa Regis*, citing instances of minors being seized by their kin, with their wardship sold for financial gain, as well as accusations of the neglect of the land and assets by guardians.<sup>245</sup> The committee was ultimately abandoned, but not before prompting public discussion about the fallibilities of wardship practice. This period of agitation may go some way to explaining the intensity of the legal references in the Quarto version, references expunged, perhaps in light of their waning topicality, from the 1623 Folio. The period between the Quarto and the Folio also coincided with significant changes relating to the diagnosis and administration of the mentally ill and handicapped through the Court. Until 1540, around 80% of wardships relating to mental disability offered a diagnosis of ‘idiocy.’<sup>246</sup> These improbable rates of diagnosis, as Richard Neugebauer notes, are more likely to reflect fiscal strategy than genuine psychiatric statistics: since idiots were not entitled to the profits generated from their lands, the diagnosis of idiots was more lucrative than that of lunatics.<sup>247</sup> Over the succeeding century, however, this imbalance was rectified, likely due to increasing pressure on the Crown and the poor publicity for the practices of wardship.<sup>248</sup> By the Elizabethan period, diagnoses of idiots (as opposed to lunatics) fell to 50%, reflecting more natural epidemiological rates; by 1625 it had fallen to 40%.<sup>249</sup> This gradual change was advantageous to mentally ill subjects and their families, allowing for a greater preservation of personal assets and, for the mentally ill person, autonomy.

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<sup>245</sup> Bell, *Court of Wards and Liveries*, 138-9.

<sup>246</sup> Neugebauer, ‘Mental Handicap,’ 32.

<sup>247</sup> Neugebauer, ‘Mental Handicap,’ 32.

<sup>248</sup> Neugebauer, ‘Mental Handicap,’ 35.

<sup>249</sup> Neugebauer, ‘Mental Handicap,’ 35.

If a significant portion of *Lear* can be read with reference to the *Prerogativa Regis*, then I believe the growing insignificance of this statute, and the Court of Wards and Liveries, explains the erasure and neutralisation of many legal references in the Folio version. In the Quarto version, a prediction read by Edmund of the fate of Albion speaks specifically to the violation of contracts between kin and acquaintance:

I promise you, the effects he writes of succeed unhappily, as of unnaturalness between the child and the parent, death, dearth, dissolutions of ancient amities, divisions of state, menaces and maledictions against King and nobles, needless diffidences, banishment of friends, dissipation of cohorts, nuptial breaches and I know not what.

(1.2.143-9)

In the Folio version, a comparable prophecy is transposed to Gloucester, its legal impact erased and replaced with generalised platitudes describing disarray: ‘machinations, hollowness, treachery and all ruinous / disorders follow us quietly to our graves’ (1.2.113-4). Also erased in the Folio is the Quarto text’s only explicit reference to the *Prerogativa Regis*, in lines Equestri claims as a satire on English law:<sup>250</sup>

Kent            This is not altogether fool, my lord.  
Fool            No, faith, lords and great men will not let me; if I  
                  had a monopoly out, they would have part on’t; and  
                  ladies too, they will not let me have all the fool to  
                  myself, they’ll be snatching.

(1.4.144-8)

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<sup>250</sup> Equestri, “‘This cold night’,’ 27.

The Fool, as the only clearly-defined ‘idiot’ in the play, acknowledges the state’s claim over his body and possessions. Here, in concert with the nihilistic mood of this moment, it is not fool’s possessions, but folly itself they seek to claim. This reference to the *Prerogatia Regis* and its potential for exploiting the mentally disabled throws into sharp relief the Fool’s earlier reference to the ‘lord that counselled thee to give away thy land’ (1.4.137). Viewed through the prism of the *Prerogativa Regis* and its capacity for estranging the mentally ill from their assets, this act of counsel is tainted by the prospect of profit.

Another significant contrast between the Quarto and Folio texts – the softening of Regan and Goneril as characters – may speak to this changing legal context. A frequent observation made of the Folio text is that it humanises the sisters, both by omitting some particularly scathing depictions of them from the Quarto text (for instance, the onslaught of moral accusations made by Albany against Goneril in Act 4), and fleshing out their motivation for curtailing Lear’s privileges. In the Folio text, Goneril’s behaviour is rationalised as she details the impact of Lear’s contingent of knights in her court.

Goneril	This man hath had good counsel – a hundred knights! 'Tis politic, and safe, to let him keep At point a hundred knights! Yes, then on every dream, Each buzz, each fancy, each complaint, dislike, He may enguard his dotage with their powers And hold our lives in mercy. Oswald, I say!
Albany	Well, you may fear too far.
Goneril	Safer than trust too far.

(1.4.315-22)

Goneril's fear of intimidation contrasts with omitted Quarto lines, in which she claims an unapologetically dominant position.

Idle old man

That would still manage those authorities  
That he hath given away. Now by my life  
Old fools are babes again and must be used  
With checks and flatteries, when they are seen abused.

(1.3.17-21)

In the Quarto texts, these lines both describe and defend custodianship, emphasising Lear's incapacity and his necessary curtailment. Within the broader frame of the *Prerogativa Regis*, Regan and Goneril's actions in the Quarto expose the ways the statute enabled the exploitation of wards by their nearest kin. In the Folio, the omission of some of the clearest legal references create the need for new, *non*-custodial motivations for the sisters. Our tendency to view Regan and Goneril's primary concern as Lear's volatility may be coloured by these Folio additions. Lines 1.4.315-22 above, for instance, enable us to view Regan and Goneril's anxieties and deliberation to act in the opening scene through the prism of familial concern. Without these additions, both their actions and scheming would remain more cryptic and, combined with the pointed legal emphases of the Quarto version, more insidious.

Finally, given that the court scene is the legal epicentre of the Quarto text, the context of the *Prerogativa Regis* may allow us to consider it anew. As Bell explains, while the Court of

Wards and Liveries was primarily administrative, it retained a litigious function. Violations of the *Prerogativa Regis* – specifically, those relating to the rights of minors and the mentally ill – often demanded litigation, in cases that were initially heard by the Court of Learned Law and later moved to the jurisdiction of the Court of Wards. This court scene thus invokes an interface of two aspects of the Court of Wards: its diagnosis (and administration) of idiots and lunatics, and its ability to hear lawsuits concerning abuses against them, or negligence and exploitation of their lands. The interplay of these two functions generates poignant dramatic irony: where Lear envisions himself demanding litigation, he unknowingly constructs a diagnostic hearing in which witnesses receive bleak confirmation of his unfitness to rule. A single figure, in his participation in this mock court, playfully fractures the illusion of Lear. ‘Is your name Goneril?’ asks the Fool in his adjudicatory role, as Lear presents his daughters for judgement, ‘Cry you mercy, I took you for a joint-stool’ (3.6.49, 51).

### 3. Lear’s Fool as Escheator

The questions of legitimacy and custodianship that drive the early scenes of the Quarto text disclose anxieties about the potential for crown exploitation of the diagnostic and adjudicatory role of the Court of Wards and Liveries. Amid the apocalyptic atmosphere of the play, a more mundane failure emerges: the stretching of social and legal tenets to self-defeating illegitimacy.<sup>251</sup> For Lear, the tenets of the *Prerogativa Regis* do not protect him from the

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<sup>251</sup> Critics are divided on the failures of justice in the play. Some greet this failure as a welcome condition for the ultimate triumph of forgiveness over justice at the close of the play, realised as Cordelia refuses to hold Lear to account. See, for instance, Dorothy C. Hockey, ‘The Trial Pattern in *King Lear*,’ *Shakespeare Quarterly* 10.3 (1959): 389-95. For others, however, this triumph of forgiveness is not sufficient to compensate for the failures of justice. See, for instance, Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), and Danielle A. St. Hilaire, who argues that Lear’s madness stems from ‘the collapse of the illusion that the rationality of that system is self-evident and

injustices caused by his legal incapacity; instead, in a striking irony, these tenets allow for the continuation and legitimisation of these very injustices, with his beneficiaries and the state – their interests here intertwined – using sanctioned control to seal off any path to recourse.

These legal conundrums allow us to consider anew the relation between Lear and his Fool, a relationship that has been a topic of interest in recent work on disability. This criticism sheds light on the empathetic groups formed around a shared experience of disability in the play; Lear, the Fool and Edgar as Poor Tom figure as a community stratified by a shared bodily knowledge.<sup>252</sup> With these communities in mind, we can conceive of the diagnostic process as one that strengthens communal knowledge and, for Lear, induces the vital humanist state of self-knowledge. I believe the framework of the *Prerogativa Regis* adds texture to the precise nature of these disabled communities; specifically, it allows us to envision Lear's Fool in the role of diagnostic agent, escheator, a move which expands and reconfigures the epistemic nature of allegorised folly.

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sufficient in and of itself to guarantee the enforcement of the justice based upon it.' 'Pity and the Failures of Justice in Shakespeare's *King Lear*,' *Modern Philology* 113.4 (2016): 489. According to Richard Strier, Shakespeare's works demonstrate a consistent suspicion of the moral efficacy of the law, and we might locate this trend in *Lear*'s depiction of the subordination of the just spirit of the law to its technical application. Strier, 'Shakespeare and Legal Systems: The Better the Worse (but Not Vice Versa),' in *Shakespeare and the Law: A Conversation Among Disciplines and Professions*, ed. Bradin Cormack, Martha C. Nussbaum, and Richard Strier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 174–200.

<sup>252</sup> See Lindsey Row-Heyveld, "'Known and Feeling Sorrows': Disabled Knowledge and *King Lear*," *Early Theatre* 22.2 (2019): 160. For Equestri, 'madness and folly border one another, to signal the three men's equal condition as dispossessed outcasts... [and] also create a positive sense of community in the trio.' "'This cold night'," 29. On the question of whether or not Poor Tom is entitled to membership of these communities given the fraudulence of his madness, Row-Heyveld offers a compelling justification based on the centring of embodied knowledge in disability studies: 'the play repeatedly insists that disability – even fraudulent disability – confers new and irreproducible somatic knowledge about the human condition.' *Dissembling Disability in Early Modern English Drama* (London: Palgrave, 2018), 16.



From the Fool's late entrance at the end of Act 1, he emerges as the character whose accusations of folly against Lear are most bitter and sustained. Offering his coxcomb, first to Kent and then to Lear, the Fool initiates a symbolic exchange of folly reminiscent of the *sottie*. Through making grandiose claims about the extent of folly's influence, this symbolic revelation of folly also has echoes of *The Praise of Folly*. However, though the Fool's initial claim about Lear's state of mind is established through the symbolics of allegorical folly – manifest in the coxcomb exchange – he executes his argument in increasingly technical ways. As Equestri observes, the Fool's 'main focus in the play is to define folly as alienation from one's property and economic power, thus stressing the legal notion of idiocy.'<sup>253</sup> However, we may take the point further: an analysis of the precise features of the Fool's dialogue illuminates, not just a general concern with Lear's legal status, but aspects of the important legal role of escheator. The Fool's verbal sparring with Lear invokes the language of the main method for clarifying a person's legal competence under the *Prerogativa Regis*: a rudimentary intelligence test that became institutionalised during the Tudor era. In *La Nouvelle Natura Brevium*, Fitzherbert outlines the main criteria raised by the test:

He who shall be said to be a Sot or Idiot from birth is such a person who cannot account or number twenty-pence, nor can tell who is his Father or Mother, nor how old he is &c, so as it may appear that he hath no understanding or Reason what shall be for his Profit or what for his Loss. But if he hath such understanding that he know and understand his letters, and do read by Teaching or information of another Man, then it seemeth that he is not a Sot, nor a natural idiot.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Equestri, "'This cold night",' 27.

<sup>254</sup> Anthony Fitzherbert, *La Nouvelle Natura Brevium* (London: 1524), 233, quoted in Walker, *Crime and Insanity*, 36.

The test focused on verifying intellect and memory, and included basic questions which addressed the ability to recognise one's location, age and family members. The question of judgement, and especially financial judgement, was vital in considering the person's ability to manage their assets. Because of this, tests focusing on pecuniary skill were essential for establishing mental and legal aptitude.

Questions of philosophical value are foundational to *Lear*, and the king's failure to accurately ascertain value (at least, filial value) underlies the dramatic action of the play. As the play animates and negotiates systems of value, Lear's Fool emerges as a nexus unifying ideas of philosophical value with the more material questions of monetary value. In Act 1, the Fool offers a measure for value in apothegmatic rhyme.

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.
Kent	This is nothing, fool.
Fool	Then tis like the breath of an unfee'd lawyer, you can have me nothing for't. [ <i>to Lear</i> ] Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?

Lear           Why no, boy, nothing can be made out of nothing.  
Fool           [*to Kent*] Prithee tell him, so much the rent of his land comes  
                  to; he will not believe a fool.

(1.4.115-32)

The general secular wisdom of this utterance is complemented by a suggestion of biblical systems of value: in particular, the inversion of worldly hierarchies established in Christ's Sermon on the Mount. By preferring a humble exterior concealing hidden knowledge, the Fool's speech also shares its logic with the Silenus Box allegory. This logic shows a deference for the biblical tradition of wise folly, extended by the humanists into a rationale for Menippean textual hybridity.

When the Fool questions 'can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?' he invokes the pivotal exchange of the play's opening, in which Lear, stunned by Cordelia's defiance, asserts that 'nothing will come of nothing' (1.1.90). Hence the Christian-humanist system of value the Fool articulates draws on a precedent set earlier in the play: the sincerity of Cordelia's 'nothing', which surpassed the hollow flatteries of her sisters. Lear's misunderstanding of Cordelia's value is a moral miscalculation that prompts a very real monetary miscalculation, and the Fool clearly extends this link by transporting the moral dimension of Cordelia's 'nothing' into the material world: 'so much the rent of his land comes to.' This discussion of monetary value later becomes more explicit as the Fool introduces a form of testing through a riddle.

Fool           Nuncle, give me an egg and I'll give thee two crowns.  
Lear           Which two crowns shall they be?  
Fool           Why, after I have cut the egg i'the middle and eat up the meat,

the two crowns of the egg. When thou clovest thy crown i'the  
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.

(1.4.148-57)

The Fool offers a threefold pun: the crown as a scalp (visually parodied in the tip of an egg), the regal crown and, suggestively intertwining both meanings, the crown as legal tender. The Fool's alternation between the mundane and the regal, eggs and scalps on the one hand, kingdoms and crowns on the other, is an obvious source of dark humour. Rhetorically, the proximity of these two extremes also issues a challenge: that of demarcating the one from the other. The riddle is framed as a request for bartered exchange, and Lear's ability to ascertain value (here confused by wordplay) rests at its heart. The Fool opens with a challenge to Lear to calculate value, and, at the close of the exchange, seems to conclude that he cannot, declaring that Lear 'hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou gav'st thy golden one away.'

A cornerstone of intelligence testing, in line with the high philosophical value placed on it by the humanist tradition, was self-knowledge, a theme that encompassed awareness of one's identity, age, and genealogy. When the Fool first raises the topic of Lear's self-knowledge – accusing him of folly in the early coxcomb exchanges – his concern seems symbolic and rhetorical. In the Quarto text, the Fool asks if Lear knows the 'difference between a bitter fool and a sweet one,' and offers a riddle in the place of proofs.

Fool            That lord that counselled 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.

Lear           Dost thou call me fool, boy?

Fool            All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with.

(1.4.137-43)

As the Fool interpolates Lear into the riddle, taking an apparently abstract premise and materialising it with sudden, accusatory force, he implies Lear's own inability to self-identify. Within the legal framework of the Quarto text, the reference to the lord 'that counselled thee to give away thy land' contains implications of guardian exploitation. In the context of the Fool's riddle, however, it asserts a second failure of Lear's: his refusal to uphold the humanist ideals of leadership as collaborative and consultative.<sup>255</sup> The Fool's mocking query about 'the lord that counselled thee to give away thy land' condemns Lear's absolutism and failure to consult, as an imagined circle of counsellors evaporates to reveal Lear as solitary demagogue. Likewise, the Fool's taunting touches on the theme of genealogy (a vital criterion of the intelligence test), here with hierarchies symbolically inverted as Lear 'mad'st thy daughters thy mothers' and 'gav'st them the rod and putt'st down thine own breeches' (1.4.164-5). Yet ultimately this scathing rhetorical image is literalised as Lear, confronted with his daughters' defiance, seems to loosen his grasp on the real:

Lear           Does any here know me? This is not Lear  
                   Does Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes?

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<sup>255</sup> Walker explains the importance of these ideals, citing Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*. *Plays of Persuasion*, 64-5.

Either his notion weakens, his discernings are lethargied – Ha, waking?  
 'Tis not so. Who is it that can tell me who I am?  
 Fool           Lear's shadow.  
 Lear           I would learn that, for by the marks of sovereignty, knowledge and reason,  
                   I should be false persuaded I had daughters.  
 Fool           Which they will make an obedient father.  
 Lear           Your name, fair gentlewoman? [*to Goneril*]

(1.4.217-27)

In this scene, symbolic and rhetorical confusion seems to meld with actual madness. Lear's mistaking of his kin, whether for rhetorical effect or as the result of actual madness, demarcates a loss of reason in the exact terms – failure to recognise family and recite genealogy – that demanded legal intervention according to the *Prerogativa Regis*. Later, another key criterion of the test – the question of age, and the implication that Lear fails to recognise his – prompts the king's first acknowledgement of his own madness. 'Thou shou'dst not have been old till thou hadst been wise,' the Fool charges Lear, eliciting a frenzied response: 'O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!' (1.5.43-5).

Lear's increasing acknowledgement of mental illness is triggered by dialogue with the Fool, dialogue that invokes the terms laid out in diagnostic tests used to administer the *Prerogativa Regis*. The humanist concern with symbolic self-knowledge here mixes with real-world metrics, a union crystalised in the question of value, both moral and economic. Although the Fool's jibes never entirely depart from a symbolic realm, they nonetheless focus on surprisingly material questions: those of asset management, monetary calculations, and recognition of kin and age. With this invocation of the terms and stipulations of Court testing,

Lear's Fool emerges as an escheator in motley. The identification of the Fool as an escheator presents a process of diagnosis that subverts standard medical and legal procedure. Lear's Fool alters the intended audience of the intelligence test, defying the clinical gaze and instead edging Lear towards the prized state of self-knowledge.

## **Towards a Republic of Fetters**

The Fool, when viewed as a figure of congenital disability – or, in Early Modern terms, as a ‘natural’ – opens new avenues for considering disability in *King Lear*. Yet, the Fool's function as a riddling vehicle of self-knowledge links him much more explicitly with the tradition of artificial folly, and the epistemological circuits of the Silenus Box allegory. The argument that *King Lear* depicts a community centred around a shared experience of disability offered by Row-Heyveld, Equestri and others is, I believe, largely correct. However, in overstating the shared marginalisation of Lear and the Fool – and in assuming them both to participate in an experience of social disability as a result – we overlook the ways the humanist discourse of folly existed in complex proximity to real-world mental disability. An emphasis on the humanist tradition of folly is useful, not because it challenges our attempts to model collective knowledge and community in *King Lear*, but because it enriches our understanding of exactly how dynamic such models might be.

As Lindsey Row-Heyveld has shown, the new emphasis on embodied knowledge in disability studies allows us to conceptualise Lear, the Fool and Poor Tom as participating in an epistemic community of their own. Embodied knowledge is that formed at the intersection of physical impairment and a material world constructed to sideline, rather than accommodate,

variance. Recognising in each other modes of behaviour developed in response to these twofold difficulties, the trio of Lear, the Fool and Poor Tom develop a communal bond formed around their shared knowledge of disability, a body of knowledge that, as Row-Heyveld reminds us, is ‘collective but not coherent.’<sup>256</sup> It is worth reflecting on the exact terms with which Tobin Siebers encouraged this turn to embodied knowledge in disability studies. Siebers advocates for embodied knowledge as a framework to break the stalemate between the medical and social models, the former inadequate in its pathologisation of disability, the latter in its exclusive focus on built environments as the source of disability. Inspired by the question of how the field might evolve if Richard III was replaced as the ‘standard-bearer’, Siebers offers a compelling new candidate:

With Falstaff as standard-bearer, there is no need for diagnosis. Those of us who notice that Falstaff is disabled know it, and know it instantly, not because he shows biological signs of disability or withdraws from a disabling environment. We know it because he embodies the knowledge of what it means to be a disabled person.<sup>257</sup>

Embodied knowledge is an important intervention in disability studies because, unlike both the medical and social models, it presents disability in terms that are not immediately legible to the able-bodied world and, vitally, are not trying to appeal to it. Disability in this framework is not broadcast by physical markers, whether bodily or environmental, but instead by mutual recognition and participation in a body of knowledge shared between those with disabilities. We may begin to think of embodied knowledge in surprisingly familiar terms: it is a shared and

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<sup>256</sup> Lindsey Row-Heyveld, “‘Known and Feeling Sorrows’,’ 160.

<sup>257</sup> ‘Shakespeare Differently Disabled,’ 441-2.



codified epistemological system – a discursive community – that resists the gaze of those who do not participate in it.

The role played by the Fool in the formation and adjudication of this network of knowledge in *King Lear*, provides a glimpse into the ways this representation of material, embodied knowledge interacts with the legacy of Menippean culture. The Fool, a riddling avatar of allegorical folly, captures the philological elitism of humanist culture: its preference for abstraction over material reality, the global over the local. Such a preference for the immaterial over the physical is contingent on a community for whom embodiment represents no social, physical, or intellectual constraints and for whom, as a result, *disembodiment* is a ready luxury. With *King Lear*, we see the inklings of a new kind of community formed around the Fool, also partaking in collective knowledge. Here, knowledge of the body, of shared circumstances and of shared barriers – not a republic of letters but one of fetters.

By presenting a network of disabled knowledge, *King Lear* dynamically reworks a humanist aesthetic legacy. Yet the Fool's straddling of two worlds – Menippean humanism and material disability – produces him as a complex and evasive figure. Even as some critics claim him as a figure of disability, others highlight his participation in a more traditional legacy of folly as a mode of satiric social commentary.<sup>258</sup> The lack of dialogue between these perspectives

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<sup>258</sup> The role of Lear's Fool as social commentator has been widely observed. See, for instance, Goldsmith, *Wise Fools in Shakespeare* and William Willeford, *The Fool and His Sceptre*. Textual critics have engaged in some debate over whether or not the Fool's role as social commentator is heightened or decreased in the changes made to the Folio text. For John Kerrigan and R. A. Foakes, the Folio additions reinforce the Fool as 'a sharp mature professional, deliberately needling Lear.' Foakes, 'Textual Revision and the Fool in *King Lear*,' *Trivium* 20 (1985): 37; Kerrigan, 'Revision, Adaptation, and the Fool in *King Lear*,' in *The Division of Kingdoms: Shakespeare's Two Versions of King Lear*, ed. Gary Taylor and Michael Warren (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983): 195-239. Robert Hornback disputes this perspective, suggesting that Folio changes actually emphasise 'the pathos of a sweet, natural Fool.' Hornback, 'The Fool in Quarto and Folio *King Lear*,' *ELR* 34.3 (2004): 311.

has an obvious source: it is difficult to think of the Fool as both inside and outside, offering sardonic commentary from a stance of Menippean detachment, while also limited and restrained by the same impairments he seems to criticise. It is at the intersection of these two roles, however, that *Lear* presents us with a dynamic vision of folly. In many of the Fool's most memorable lines of social commentary, he does not self-differentiate from on high, but instead elides distinctions between him and his companions. 'Here's a night that pities neither wise men nor fools' (3.4.77) he remarks at the outset of the storm, a point he reiterates later at its centre: 'this cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen' (3.4.77). While Lear and Poor Tom lean towards solipsism, the Fool, in his commentative capacity, tends to emphasise mutual impairment. An exchange toward the end of Act 3 shows precisely how the Fool acts to intertwine the trio:

Fool	Prithee, nuncle, tell me whether a madman be a gentleman or a yeoman?
Lear	A king, a king.
Fool	No, he's a yeoman that has a gentleman to his son; for he's a mad yeoman that sees his son a gentleman before him.
Lear	To have a thousand with red burning spits Come hizzing in upon 'em!
Edgar	This foul fiend bites my back.

(3.6.9-17)

Taking the play's motif of children unnaturally elevated above their parents, and inserting Poor Tom as the 'yeoman', the Fool establishes a surrogate link between Lear and Edgar, replacing those of blood. In the next lines, this link becomes literalised in an apparent provocation of somatic knowledge: Lear, wishing judgement on his daughters, seems to summon 'red burning

spits' onto the back of his new surrogate son instead, eliciting a pained exclamation from Edgar. As a commentator, the Fool enacts a filial bond between the two, creating family through shared disability.

Much has been made of the Fool's last line in the Folio text, delivered at the heart of the action and prefacing his disappearance. In response to Lear's rambling suggestion that 'we'll go to supper i'the morning' (3.6.81), the Fool returns 'and I'll go to bed at noon' (82). What at first glance seems an utterance of near nihilistic nonsense, is, as John Kerrigan notes, also an invocation of the popular name of the salsify flower, which closed in the midday sun. For Kerrigan, this is a line of bitter resignation as the Fool, despairing of Lear's condition, states his resolve to 'absent himself from half the story'; for Hornback, in contrast, the pathos of this line would have cemented the Fool as a 'pitiable natural.'<sup>259</sup> What is lost in the artificial-natural divide is the fact that, again, the act of offering commentary here is not a process of satiric distancing but instead one of effacement. In the Fool's imitation of Lear's line, he leaves on a note of pathetic camaraderie and elides himself into Lear. In his final moments on stage, the Fool does not torment the madman but sinks into him, offering one means of recuperating allegorical folly for disability studies, and illustrating the dynamic malleability of Menippean form.

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<sup>259</sup> Kerrigan, 'Revision, Adaptation, and the Fool,' 229; Hornback, 'The Fool in Quarto and Folio': 315.

# 4

## Nonsense, Travel and Global Folly

### Introduction

This chapter studies a second sphere that illustrates the malleability of the Menippean tradition: English attempts to co-opt and ventriloquise the global periphery. The texts I examine here powerfully mobilise a dialectic of domestic and international, refining an aesthetic language of fragmentation, foolery and the grotesque. I suggest that Cavalier nonsense writings circulated during the Civil War use an aesthetic of the global periphery to powerfully depict an England at odds with itself: an anglophone world turned inside out. However, this chapter opens at an earlier juncture, in the world of Jacobean tavern culture, where what evolved into an aesthetic of polemic and nihilism was first popularised as an aesthetic of play. In this tavern culture, Menippean writing branches into a new stylistic vogue: the creative innovation of nonsense verse. Interweaving an aesthetics of folly with a context formed around closed sociable networks, these nonsense texts advance the humanist view of folly as an interpretive, epistemic object. Yet they suggestively merge this function with a new stream of global motifs, partly sourced from the genre of travel writing. Using Thomas Coryat's sensational travel output as a case study, this chapter shows that Coryat's writings (and the nonsense panegyrics of their paratexts) craft an aesthetic of folly that dynamically integrates the themes of travel and the

‘foreign.’ In the second half of this chapter, I describe how this aesthetic of play developed into one of polemic, as Cavalier writers co-opted nonsense tropes to depict a newly ‘alien’ England.

The global motifs of nonsense verse are a rich study because they merge the interpretive symbolism of folly with material concerns: in particular, the nature and influence of foreign variance on a precarious English identity. The first half of this chapter sets a scene in which humanist culture might be said to co-opt the global – generating an aesthetic of the periphery to stratify the social and epistemic circuits of the Jacobean tavern world. Yet, this aesthetic comes to define a country divided and a culture fragmented, capturing a condition in which the exegetical singularities of allegory seem untenable. Because of this, this chapter borrows chiasmus as a guiding rhetorical form, to capture the logic of interplay and exchange in nonsense verse: a swivelling, destabilising aesthetic language through which the local and the global mutually refract.

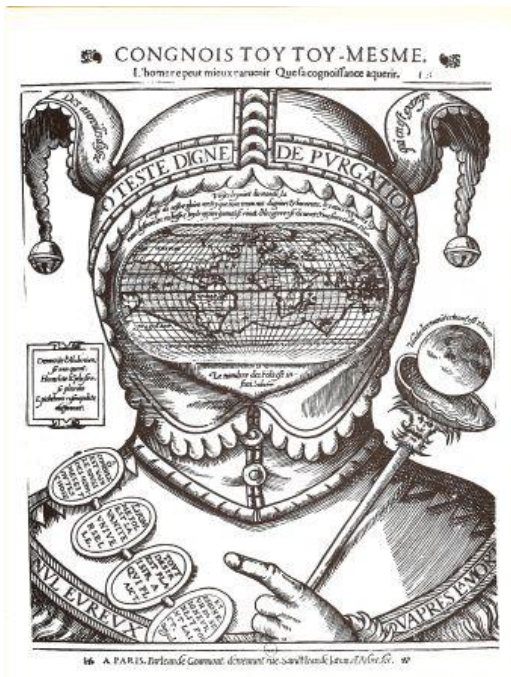


Figure 6. Jean de Gourmont, *Foolscape World Map*, c. 1570.

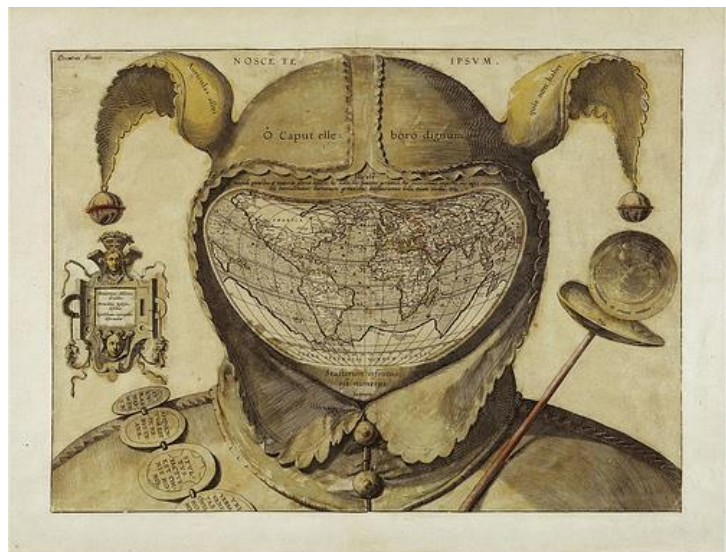


Figure 7. Anonymous foolscape world map, c. 1590.

The expansion of humanist folly from the universal to the global is captured in a new trend in cartographic representation.<sup>260</sup> Around 1575 Jean de Gourmont produced a world map framed by a jester's cap and motley and captioned with the Medieval French maxim *congnois toy toy-mesme* ['know thyself'] (Figure 6). The framing of this map represents progress and fallibility as tightly entwined: an age of discovery is soured and curtailed by the limits of humanity's own self-knowledge, and innovation only highlights what remains unknown. Another rendition of this cartographic theme, likely originating in Antwerp ca 1590, is even more interesting (Figure 7). This map, though anonymous, is commonly attributed to an 'Erichthonius Cosmopolites' ('citizen of the world/cosmos'). However, Anne S. Chapple points out that the inscription is likely a bastardisation of Erichthonius Cosmopolites, a mythical Athenian king associated with wisdom and madness. The accidental offspring of Hephaestus and Gaia – conceived as semen fell to the earth while Hephaestus raped Athena – Erichthonius was a snake-human hybrid, and his monstrous form maddened the daughters of Cecrops to death.<sup>261</sup> The double aspect of Erichthonius is captured in a gift from Athena: two drops of blood from Medusa, one of which poisoned, while the other healed. Erichthonius, then, captures a chiasmatic interface of wisdom and folly, poison and healing. A world map invoking Erichthonius projects the form of paradox onto global exploration, a form that limits and defines the colonial endeavour.

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<sup>260</sup> This chapter will argue for a vision of 'global folly' as a distinct category from the 'universal folly' asserted by earlier humanist writings. On the one hand, the theme of universal folly, notably captured in *Das Narrenschiff* and *The Praise of Folly*, is one in which folly emerges to capture an abstracted, postlapsarian state. It deploys synecdoche (the allegorical Everyman), and implicates human culture in a holistic sense. In contrast, when English writers turn their attention to global folly, they focalise fantastic anomalies and variants: the precarity of the global 'edge' as a stimulating departure from English norms. If the philosophy of universal folly emerges from abstraction and allegory, global folly fetishises particulars.

<sup>261</sup> Chapple, 'Robert Burton's Geography of Melancholy,' *SEL* 33.1 (1993): 114. For more on these maps see Yael Susan Wender, 'Montaigne in Motley, Montaigne in Tears: The Stable Madness of the *Essais* read through Early-Modern Melancholy' (PhD thesis: Cornell University, 2017), 26-30.

If we peel back one layer of this cartographic trend we see the particulars these maps are universalising: Medieval tropes placing monsters and grotesques at the borders of maps to represent the frontiers of civilised culture. In earlier cartography, grotesque antique-work – hybrid and metamorphosing figures styled in symmetrical patterns – occupied the peripheries of maps. L. E. Semler writes that these edges, though primarily decorative, conveyed an important ontological aspect by expressing ‘the incoherency and strangeness of the world outside European influence.’<sup>262</sup> At one remove from the aesthetic pleasure of the fantastic is a theological dimension inherited from Medieval topography. ‘Monstrous men are symbolically farthest from Christ of anything in the creation,’ writes John Block Friedman, ‘and are represented in the narrow band at the edge of the world, as far as possible from Jerusalem, the center of Christianity.’<sup>263</sup> If the globalisation of folly represented by Gourmont and ‘Epichthonius Cosmopolites’ builds on these cartographic precedents, then their grotesque antique-work transforms into a mirror for the European world, as the fantastic anomalies and variants of the ‘edge’ come to inflect, and reflect, the core. In the symbolic topography of Gourmont and Epichthonius – as in the written accounts of Lery and Montaigne – the periphery of the map comes to define its entirety.

The terms ‘core’ and ‘periphery’ are now encumbered by a scholarly apparatus of their own: the world-systems paradigm popularised by Immanuel Wallerstein and first applied to the

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<sup>262</sup> Semler, ‘Mapping the Grotesque: Inventing and Possessing the World in Early-Modern England,’ in *Travel and Travellers from Bede to Dampier*, ed. Geraldine Barnes et al (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005), 202. See also Lynn Tarte Ramey, ‘Monstrous Alterity in Early Modern Travel Accounts: Lessons from the Ambiguous Medieval Discourse on Humanness,’ *L’Esprit Créateur* 48.1 (2008): 81-95.

<sup>263</sup> Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981), 37.

sphere of literary production by Franco Moretti.<sup>264</sup> The core and periphery of world-systems analysis describe a global hierarchy produced by modern networks of capital flow. Wallerstein dates the roots of the modern capitalist system to the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), which ratified state sovereignty following a bruising thirty years of sectarian conflict in Europe. Despite the nominal independence of European states, however, Dutch economic hegemony in the aftermath of Westphalia exemplifies the workings of the world-systems model: ‘in theory, all the states within the system were sovereign, independent, and equal. In practice, there was a hierarchy of state power, one that tended to correlate with the position of the state in the world economy.’<sup>265</sup> Moretti’s application of the world-systems approach interrogates the ongoing colonial structure in *textual* circulation. The literary output of the periphery, he suggests, is circumscribed by the way that the canonical texts produced by the core are imposed as models for imitation.<sup>266</sup> If this paradigm suggests that global literature tends towards homogeneity, however, data selected by Moretti’s ‘distant reading’ suggests otherwise. Instead, Moretti describes the output of the periphery as reflecting a compromise between imported foreign models (generally Anglo-French) and local elements, combining to create a destabilised aesthetic tone. This clash of disparate elements leads to disjointedness: ‘when foreign “formal patterns” (or actual foreign presence, for that matter) make characters behave in strange ways (like Bunzo, or Ibarra, or Bràs Cubas), then of course comment becomes uneasy – garrulous, erratic, rudderless.’<sup>267</sup> So, concludes Moretti, the inequalities of the world-system model are not simply external to the peripheral text, but ‘embedded well into its form.’<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System, Volumes I-IV* (1974-2011; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011) and Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London: Verso, 2013).

<sup>265</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System, Volume II*, xx-xxi.

<sup>266</sup> Franco Moretti, ‘World-Systems Analysis, Evolutionary Theory, “Weltliteratur”,’ *Review* 28.3 (2005): 217-228.

<sup>267</sup> Moretti, ‘Conjectures on World Literature,’ in *Distant Reading* (London: Verso, 2013), 65.

<sup>268</sup> Moretti, ‘Conjectures on World Literature,’ 66.



The terminology of world-systems analysis taps into an imaginary that pre-dates global capitalism in its current form. The idea of a Eurocentric core and colonial periphery can be traced through the Medieval cartography described by Semler and Friedman, with symbolic topographies which present the European world giving way to a fantastically-stylised edge. In Early Modern Europe we view a society that envisions itself as the core, if not of capitalist production than at least of divinely-ordained civilisation. Building on world-systems analysis, this chapter attempts to trace an *aesthetic of the periphery* that characterised Menippean engagements with travel and the ‘fantastic’. Such an aesthetic, though produced in the core, replicates the compromise described by Moretti: it infuses traditional forms like the sonnet with a miscellany of elements viewed by the English as bizarre and exotic.

This chapter has three broad parts. In the first part, it situates Coryat’s *Crudities* in the broader travel genre, and explores how an aesthetic of the periphery was styled and captured in text. This section argues that the distinguishing rhetorical form of this aesthetic is chiasmus, staging a dialectic interplay between anglophone core and various peripheral sites. The second part of this chapter describes how this aesthetic of the periphery – particularly that of nonsense verse – rapidly became complicit in the ongoing games of humanist folly. Increasingly, these games entrenched the social strata of Jacobean tavern culture by problematising the act of interpretation itself: the interpretive prompt of folly is met by a textual form that defies it. The final section synthesises the first two, analysing how an aesthetic of the periphery was applied, chiasmatically, by Cavalier pamphleteers to the English core during the Civil War.

This final section describes two ‘turnings-out’ that expand and reconfigure the parameters of Menippean textual play. The first is how the foolery of tavern sociability transformed into an aesthetic of dismay in Cavalier writings: here, I contend that the ‘world turned upside down’ motif of Civil War nonsense verse might be better conceptualised as the world *turned inside out*, as the aesthetics of the periphery are transported into the core. In addition to this aesthetic change, a second Civil War phenomenon also challenges allegorised folly: the demands of ciphered communication. The use of nonsense poetry as a vehicle for illicit communication both builds on and transforms the epistemic circuits of folly: here, the demand for interpretation is that of simple substitution, and is material rather than philosophical. One trend this chapter traces is how Jacobean nonsense creates sociable networks based around the problematisation and pluralisation of interpretation; yet, transformed into a cipher, these Civil War verses circumscribe philological play. With this evolution in nonsense, the spectre of political utility – which lingers over folly all the way from the sanctioned speech granted to the Medieval fool – returns to unsettle the epistemological edifice developed by the humanists.

### **Thomas Coryat and the Menippean Counter-voyage**

One body of work that captures aspects of Moretti’s aesthetic compromise is Early Modern travel writing. Depictions of strange and marvellous worlds, at the furthest reaches of British endeavour, construct an aesthetic of the periphery through radically fragmentary form. This destabilised structure speaks to a confrontation with alterity, but it also invokes the contested status that the very act of travel had in Early Modern thought.<sup>269</sup> In Medieval Europe, the

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<sup>269</sup> For an overview of the debates around travel, see Edward Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour: Anglo-Italian Cultural Relations since the Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1998); J. W. Stoye, *English Travellers*

primary rationale for long-distance, international travel was pilgrimage.<sup>270</sup> Yet, as Chaney documents, by the early 1500s the Reformation had subverted the status of Papal Rome and the religious significance of the relics and mythology incentivising pilgrimage.<sup>271</sup> The retaliation of Rome to the English Reformation included the publication of Pius V's *In coena domini* (1567), which banned 'heretics' from entering Italian states, and pre-empted the formal excommunication of Elizabeth I in 1570. The addition of a final complication – the beginning of the war with Spain, coinciding with these sectarian divides – rendered travel to Catholic Europe a complex affair.<sup>272</sup> These tensions fostered a general suspicion towards English travellers both at home and abroad, cumulating in England with the penalisation of suspected Catholics for visits to Italy through the late sixteenth century.<sup>273</sup>

This period of intra-European tension began slowly to abate in the aftermath of the Spanish Armada and the election of the peaceable Clement VIII to the papacy. With the 1604 Spanish Peace treaty, travel to Europe became a more feasible proposition to Jacobean Englishmen.<sup>274</sup> Where political obstacles faded, however, ideological objections remained. Roger Ascham's *The Schoolmaster* (1564) is one of the more notable polemics against travel, and is particularly striking as an exercise in anti-Italianism. In condemning the 'Italianate Englishman' fashioned by excessive travel, Ascham popularised the Italian proverb *Inglese Italianato, e vn diavolo incarnate* in England, a proverb he translates as: 'You remain men in

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*Abroad 1604-1667* (London: Alden, 1952); Jonathan P. A. Sell, *Rhetoric and Wonder in English Travel Writing, 1560-1613* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006). A specific discussion of Coryat's negotiation of the status of travel can be found in Anthony Parr's 'Thomas Coryat and the Discovery of Europe,' *Huntington Library Quarterly* 55.4 (1992): 578-602.

<sup>270</sup> Parr, 'Thomas Coryat,' 578-80; Chaney, *Evolution of the Grand Tour*, 58-60.

<sup>271</sup> Chaney, *Evolution of the Grand Tour*, 60-1.

<sup>272</sup> Chaney, *Evolution of the Grand Tour*, 76-8.

<sup>273</sup> Chaney, *Evolution of the Grand Tour*, 78.

<sup>274</sup> Chaney, *Evolution of the Grand Tour*, 83; Stoye, *English Travellers Abroad*, 23.

shape and fashion but become devils in life and condition.’<sup>275</sup> Yet Ascham’s fluent use of this proverb may have been a rhetorical misstep, and one offering obvious ammunition to his opponents. ‘*Un Inglese Italianato, e un Diavolo incarnate*. Now, who the Divell taught thee so much Italian?’ challenges John Florio in his manual of the Italian language, *Second Frutes to be gathered of twelve trees, of diverse but delightful tastes to the tongues of Italian and English* (1591).<sup>276</sup> In the English imaginary, beyond the sphere of pamphlet debates, Italy remained a hive of lust and Machiavellian scheming. The scale of the Venetian sex industry (including records of 30-40,000 registered prostitutes) so captured the English imagination that a sixteenth-century London brothel capitalised on the legend with the simple name of ‘Venice’.<sup>277</sup>

These hazards had been reiterated throughout the Middle Ages to pilgrims, who were warned about the dangers of indulging ‘aimless curiosity’ in their journeys.<sup>278</sup> By the Jacobean years, however, religious rationales for travel had been overtaken by secularised ones: defendants of travel positioned it as an essential pedagogic process for the young humanist, a method of heuristic learning that engaged the principle of the *vita activa*.<sup>279</sup> The view that an education abroad was essential, not just for diplomats but for all courtiers, became commonplace, and the obvious financial burden of extensive travel became a means of stratifying the well-to-do courtier.<sup>280</sup> One key proponent of travel, Robert Dallington, argued that

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<sup>275</sup> Roger Ascham, *The Schoolmaster*, ed. Lawrence V. Ryan (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967). George B. Parks gives some history of this proverb pre-dating Ascham’s usage in ‘The First Italianate Englishmen,’ *Studies in the Renaissance* 8 (1961): 199. A thorough resource for exploring English anti-Italianism is Michael J. Redmond’s *Shakespeare, Politics, and Italy: Intertextuality on the Jacobean Stage* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009).

<sup>276</sup> John Florio, *Florios Second Frutes* (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1969), sigs. A5<sup>r</sup>-A5<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>277</sup> See Ann Rosalind Jones, ‘Italians and Others: Venice and the Irish in *Coryat’s Crudities* and *The White Devil*,’ *Renaissance Drama* 18 (1987): 102 and Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour*, 66-7.

<sup>278</sup> Anthony Parr, ‘Thomas Coryat,’ 578-602. Parr suggests that the innovation of Coryat is the transformation of this aimless curiosity – the ‘surplus value’ of travel – into serious, pleasurable matter.

<sup>279</sup> Parr, ‘Thomas Coryat,’ 581.

<sup>280</sup> Stoye, *English Travellers Abroad*, 28.

travel was justified when it equipped the commonwealth subject with civic knowledge: ‘He must determine that the end of his *Travell* is his ripening in knowledge, and the end of his knowledge is the service of his countrie.’<sup>281</sup> The humanist fetishisation of antiquity, too, found an object in the historic artefacts of Europe, and its layered affinity with the past could be revealed through chorographic writing.<sup>282</sup> But the xenophobia of the Elizabethan years did not disappear. In 1617, Joseph Hall rehashed the objections of Ascham in *Quo Vadis? A Just Censure of Travell As it is commonly undertaken by the Gentlemen of our Nation*, one of the most adamant Jacobean polemics against travel. In it, Hall emphasises the dangerous impressionability of the young humanist, and his susceptibility to foreign vice.<sup>283</sup>

### 1. Reading the Panegyrics: Sociability in Nonsense

A walking testament to these variegated concerns, who became a stock character on the English stage in the style of Jonson’s aggressively-Italianate Sir Politic Would-be, is traveller Thomas Coryat.<sup>284</sup> Coryat is a walking testament in the most literal sense: he gained fame for his far-flung perambulations and the unwieldy accounts of his journeys he published in their aftermath. Coryat’s first major expedition took place in 1608, covering France, Italy, Switzerland, and Germany, and leading to the publication of *Coryat’s Crudities* (1611).<sup>285</sup> In 1612, he embarked on a new adventure, this time heading east. He travelled through Greece, Turkey, modern-day

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<sup>281</sup> Robert Dallington, *A method of trauell shewed by taking the view of France. As it stooode in the yeare of our lord 1598* (London: Thomas Creede, 1605), sig. B1<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>282</sup> Vassiliki Markidou shows how the ruins at Troy became an ‘highly popular, secularized pilgrimage’ site for humanists, and explores accounts by Coryat, as well as William Lithgow and George Sandys. See ‘Performing Identity: Early Seventeenth-Century Travelers to the Ruins of Troy,’ *Journeys* 19.2 (2018): 68.

<sup>283</sup> See Redmond, *Shakespeare, Politics and Italy*, 38.

<sup>284</sup> Redmond makes this claim, tracing the influence of Coryat and his *Crudities* to plays like *The Roaring Girl*, *The Ball* and *The Novella*. *Shakespeare, Politics, and Italy*, 60.

<sup>285</sup> Michael Strachan, ‘Coryate, Thomas,’ in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Clarendon, Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed 23 February 2021, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6364>.

Iran and finally reached Moghul India in 1615. Coryat travelled around India for the following year until, in 1617, he died of dysentery in Surat.<sup>286</sup> Letters, verses, and descriptions of his experiences were published posthumously in a volume titled *Greetings from the Court of the Great Mogul* (1618).

Coryat's *Crudities* remains his most famous work. This travelogue is a compelling example of the idiosyncrasies attributed to Early Modern travel and the jesting sociable networks that coalesced around it. Arguably a more notable feature of *Crudities* than its core body – and a feature that illuminates its sociable function – is a bizarre and bloated paratext. The paratext consists of panegyric verses Coryat solicited from friends in England, many of whom belonged to the literary clubs that met in London's Mitre and Mermaid taverns,<sup>287</sup> in advance of the publication of *Crudities*. The discursive and self-referential networks these verses construct when read collectively suggest that they were widely circulated, and that their composition became a popular social pursuit. The verses make a game of mocking Coryat and his travels and present us with a number of tropes, including the juxtaposition of Coryat's humble birth in Odcombe, England with his far-flung travels and the lampooning of his infamous walking. One verse by Robert Phillips exemplifies the tone of the panegyrics.

Since euery pen is prefs'd to praise  
Thee traueelling *VVonder* of our daies,  
My muse would chide should she not sing

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<sup>286</sup> Strachan, 'Coryate, Thomas.'

<sup>287</sup> Overviews of these clubs and their social functions include Timothy Raylor, *Cavaliers, Clubs and Literary Culture: Sir John Mennes, James Smith and the Order of the Fancy* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994), 72-3 and Michelle O'Callaghan, *The English Wits: Literature and Sociability in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). This chapter draws extensively on both texts.

The praise of thee most wandering thing,  
Who with thy restlesse feete and painefull wit  
A book of wonders now hast writ;  
In which thy worke we plaine do see  
How well thy feete and wit agree.<sup>288</sup>

Phillips' mock praise entangles Coryate's intellect with the laughable mode of his travels – here via the alignment of feet and wit. Phillips also engages in meta-textual musings on the nature of the panegyric form, and the multitude of pens invoked in his opening line demonstrates the homosocial breadth of panegyric-writing as a pastime. Ultimately, fifty-five of the panegyrics were published with *Crudities*, and such a surplus remained that a collection of leftover verses was later published as a separate volume, titled *Coryat's Crambe* (1611).

The dynamic produced by this interplay of text and paratext is nebulous in terms of both intent and effect. Coryate's insistence that Prince Henry encouraged the writing of the panegyrics and pressed for them to appear in print suggests that Coryate ceded only reluctantly. He writes of the panegyrics:

At last when I saw the multitude of them to increase to so great a number, I resolved to put above a thousand of them into an *Index expurgatorius*, and to detain them from the presse. Whereupon the Princes Highnesse (who hath most graciously deigned to be the *Hyperaspist* and *Moecenas* of my booke) understanding that I meant to suppress so many, gave me a strict and expresse commandement to print all those verses which I had

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<sup>288</sup> Thomas Coryate, *Coryats crudities hastily gobled vp in five moneths traueells in France, Sauoy, Italy, Rhetia co[m]monly called the Grisons country, Heluetia aliàs Switzerland, some parts of high Germany, and the Netherlands; newly digested in the hungry aire of Odcombe in the county of Somerset, & now dispersed to the nourishment of the traueelling members of this kingdome* (London: William Stansby, 1611), sig. c7<sup>r</sup>.

read to his Highnesse. Since then that inevitable necessity hath been imposed upon me, I have here communicated that copious rhapsodie of poems to the world that my learned friends have bountifully bestowed upon me; wherein many of them are disposed to glance at me with their free and mery jests, for which I desire thee (courteous Reader) to suspend censure of me till thou hath read over my whole booke.

(*Crudities*, sigs. c1<sup>v</sup>-c2<sup>r</sup>)

Coryat's introduction to the panegyrics pursues several strategies to mitigate poor press. He opens with an insistence that the panegyrics were published under duress, continues by seeking to re-frame the critiques as 'free and mery jests', and finishes with an exhortation that his reader suspend judgement, an exhortation that veils the entire paratext with an extended caveat. Based on this account, the dialectic of mockery created by the verses suggests a tense, even antagonistic relationship between body and paratext. For Michelle O'Callaghan, this rivalry figures as a 'convivial language of social discrimination' by which the members of the Mitre Tavern club endeavoured to distinguish themselves from Coryat and, by association, popular print culture.<sup>289</sup> Yet, O'Callaghan notes, this appearance of rivalry is not entirely sincere: she and Katharine A. Craik both conceptualise the relationship between Coryat and his panegyrists as a collusion.<sup>290</sup> Philip S. Palmer goes a step further to argue that Coryat actively assimilated the panegyrics (which he here refers to as 'notes') into the core structure of the *Crudities*: 'similarities among

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<sup>289</sup> *The English Wits*, 6-7. On the topic of print culture, O'Callaghan elaborates that the form of the mock encomium enabled these scribal communities 'to collude in and to resist the unfolding print event, and to put in place a language of social discrimination that sought to regulate this print community and the nature of its readership.' 109-10.

<sup>290</sup> O'Callaghan suggests that that a collusion is apparent in the panegyrists' preference for paradoxical forms (like the mock encomium), which create a reader experience where ridicule combines with wonder – a fitting extension of travel writing as a genre. *The English Wits*, 121. Craik traces the collusive relationship through the corporeal metaphor produced by *Crudities*, and extended playfully in the paratext. The mutual participation in this metaphor discloses a shared interest in the aesthetics and effects of consumption and disgust. Katharine A. Craik, 'Reading "Coryats Crudities" (1611),' *SEL* 44.1 (2004): 78.



these notes open up the possibility that Coryate strategically ventriloquised their voices, evidently to play with the meaning of their verses and participate in the book's ongoing "game of mock praise."<sup>291</sup> The scholarship of Craik and Palmer emphasises that Coryat, far from being a hapless buffoon, was in on the joke, and that he actively cultivated his own comic persona.

This view of the travel text as polyphonic and self-ironising recalls the tradition of mock epic, and, more specifically, the 'countervoyage' trope described by Elizabeth Chesney.<sup>292</sup> Anthony Parr makes the connection between contemporary travel exploits and Chesney's theory in his *Renaissance Mad Voyages*. For Parr, the proliferation of highly-publicised and unabashedly self-promotional trips undertaken by English travellers around the turn of the sixteenth century participated in a 'spirit of play and burlesque' derived from the example of Lucian.<sup>293</sup> As Parr explains, Lucian showed a preoccupation with imaginary, epic voyages, and his *Vera Historia* in particular is a 'prototype for a narrative of travel or exploration that mocks its own claim to truth.'<sup>294</sup> This builds on Chesney's description of the trope as 'epistemologically oriented', with voyage narratives that betray both a 'subjective yearning for essentiality and the empiric contradictions that, in this dawn of the modern era, thwart such a goal.'<sup>295</sup> Chesney points to Rabelais and Ariosto as examples of how the mock epic and 'countervoyages' emerged as a popular expression of Menippean epistemic instability.

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<sup>291</sup> Philip S. Palmer, 'The Process of thy glorious book': Material Reading and the Play of Paratext in *Coryat's Crudities* (1611), *Renaissance Studies* 28.3 (2013): 340.

<sup>292</sup> Elizabeth A. Chesney, *The Countervoyage of Rabelais and Ariosto: A Comparative Reading of Two Renaissance Mock Epics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1982).

<sup>293</sup> Anthony Parr, *Renaissance Mad Voyages* (London: Routledge, 2015), 6.

<sup>294</sup> Parr, *Renaissance Mad Voyages*, 27-8.

<sup>295</sup> Chesney, *Countervoyage*, 10, 11-12.

This association between the polyphonic instability of *Crudities* and a Menippean heritage is supported by a reading by Andrew Hadfield. Hadfield describes a legacy of Erasmian codified folly in *Crudities*:

Coryat's ludicrous persona, expressed throughout the prefatory material, may well be a disguise. He is probably more akin to the figure of folly in Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, as is suggested by the explicit direction that the work needs to be carefully read and decoded. Coryat and his chosen poets come to appear more like co-conspirators, laughing at the ignorant reader and exposing folly rather than simply providing the reader with an object of ridicule. The classical references, including, significantly, Apuleius's golden ass, refer back to a Lucianic tradition of satire and social criticism beloved by Thomas More and Erasmus.<sup>296</sup>

Hadfield prosecutes his case with references to imagery in the paratext presenting *Crudities* as codified. In a panegyric by Ben Jonson, we find that 'Each leafe of his iournall, and line doth vnlocke / The truth of his heart there.'<sup>297</sup> Hadfield also points to another panegyric, attributed to Lewes Lewkenor, with clearly Lucianic undertones:

Old wormy age that in thy musty writs  
Of former rules records the present wits,  
Tell us no more the tale of Apuleius Asse,  
Nor Midas ears, nor Io eating grasse.  
This work of Tom's so far them all exceeds,  
As Phoebus' fiddle did Pan's squeaking reeds.  
He writes not of gnat, nor frog, nor woodcocks bill,

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<sup>296</sup> Andrew Hadfield, *Literature, Travel, and Colonial Writing in the English Renaissance 1545-1625* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 61.

<sup>297</sup> Thomas Coryat, *Coryates crambe, or his colwort tvvise sodden and now serued in with other macaronicke dishes, as the second course to his Crudities* (London: William Stansby, 1611), sig. A2<sup>v</sup>.

Of steeples, towns, and towers, entreats his goose's quill.

(*Crudities*, sig. C5<sup>v</sup>)

Lewkenor's panegyric positions Coryat's work as the product of a Menippean tradition that it has surpassed and, in so doing, rendered obsolete. While Lewkenor's references to gnats, frogs and woodcocks invoke classical mock encomia, in Coryat's hands the form takes on an enlarged target: the steeples, towns and towers of Europe. To appreciate the satire of *Crudities* requires the penetration of an allegorical Silenus Box-style exterior, Lewkenor suggests, concluding that 'The care and toil was his, thine are the gains, / Crack then the nut, and take the kernel for thy pains' (*Crudities*, sig. c6<sup>r</sup>).

## 2. Reading Corayt as Postcolonial: The Chiasmatic Traveller

Evidence suggests that Coryat's self-promotional strategy merged Menippean tropes with anglophone caricatures of the periphery.<sup>298</sup> After returning from Europe, Coryat nailed his shoes to the porch of his home church in an echo of clown Will Kemp, who, at the close of his highly-publicised Morris-dancing tour, nailed his buskins to a guild-hall in Norwich. Coryat's texts consistently position him within a vein of paradoxical folly popularised by Erasmus: in his posthumous *Greetings from the court of the Great Mogul* an epigram explicitly aligns him with the giant of humanist folly.

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<sup>298</sup> Parr argues that Coryat capitalised on the vogue for eccentric travel exploits by selling his journey as 'an idiosyncratic ordeal.' *Renaissance Mad Voyages*, 99. Melanie Ord has written that Coryat harnessed a fractured literary style that presented *Crudities* as 'a work comprising different agenda, discourses, and personas, including that of moralist, wit, antiquarian, and good-natured fool.' 'Provincial Identification and the Struggle over Representation in Thomas Coryat's *Crudities* (1611),' in *Archipelagic Identities*, ed. Philip Schwyzer and Simon Meador (London: Routledge, 2004), 134. Markidou, writing of Coryat's accounts of ruins (along with those of Lithgow and George Sandys), suggests that they enable their writers to 'fashion identity vis-à-vis otherness – whether social, religious, or cultural.' 'Performing Identity,' 68.

His Parallel with Erasmus

*Erasmus* did in praise of folly write;  
And *Coryate* doth, in his self-praise endite.<sup>299</sup>

These invocations allow Coryat to engineer his persona as *self*-ironising, and the traveller pointedly takes as much pleasure as his detractors in contrasting his humble beginnings in Odcomb and the pretensions of his travels. In a notable instance in his preface to *Great Mogul*, he relishes the burlesque scale of these disparities.

Three years (poore Countrime that haue not trauaild)  
And some odde daies; in *Odde-combs* grace and yours,  
I haue enricht my feete (through something gravaild)  
With measuring millicents of Townes and Towres.  
And yet I sweare, my head is nothing full,  
But rather empty of such things as fit  
One that makes nothing of the *Great Mogul*,  
But farre beyond, or wise, as farre as it  
Is from my *Od-combe*. Mean to trauaile stille,  
Till I haue equald in some seuen years more  
The Wise *Vlysses*; for of him, my will  
Wants nought in wit, but seuen years and some score  
Of foolish days: of which, I hope to spend  
Ten million more

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<sup>299</sup> Thomas Coryat, *Thomas Coriate trauller for the English vvits: greeting From the court of the Great Mogul, resident at the towne of Asmere, in easterne India* (London: printed by W. Iaggard and Henry Fetherston, 1616), sig. A3<sup>v</sup>.

Coryat's preface opens a dialogue with the mockery of the panegyric writers. He echoes a number of their tropes: the category mistakes of his 'enricht feet', his antiquarian fascination with minutia – even 'millicents' (an apparent hybrid of millimetres and centimetres) – in the face of foreign grandeur. While ensconced in the exotic court of the Mogul, he longs only for Odcomb, the comic, if affectionate, standard by which all other destinations fall short. If Coryat's alignment of himself with Odysseus betrays mythographic pretension, he proves aware of this indecorous move. In fact, the comparison seems more ironising than grandiose: where Ulysses grows in wit and wisdom, Coryat presents himself as the anti-Ulysses, growing only in folly over his own seven-year voyage. With this comparison, Coryat positions himself as the protagonist of his own mock epic, a real-world counter-voyage melded with the form of the travelogue.

Despite Coryat's English roots, his self-promotional strategy embraces the novelty and folly of the periphery. With this confrontation of core and periphery, we can begin to piece together some formal features of an Early Modern rendition of Moretti's aesthetic compromise. Coryat's writings figure as an instance of mutual compromise – the *Crudities* and its large, intra-referential paratext realise in a formal sense contemporary fears of the corruption of travel. Philips' verse praising 'thee most wandering thing,' indicates how Coryat's travels present the English traveller himself as exotic object, and as a source of novel appeal as compelling as the destinations he describes.

A striking rendition of this interchange between English subject and foreign object is in the metaphor of gustation running through the *Crudities*. This theme is boldly foregrounded in Coryat's title: the term 'crudities' was used in Early Modern dietetics to refer to raw foodstuffs that interfered with digestion.<sup>300</sup> The metaphor of digestion represents the task of writing as one with a radically transformative effect: the object of alterity takes on new forms through the process of consumption, digestion and excretion. Craik notes that Coryat's gustative metaphor draws on popular pedagogic writings, such as Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, which set the precedent of using digestion to refer to the division and processing of subject matter.<sup>301</sup> This rhetorical manipulation uneasily aligns *Crudities* with colonialism, and suggests that the writing of travelogues enacts a form of mastery through text. With this reading, *Crudities* emerges as an interface between the raw materials of foreign difference, and an account of these objects at least partially-digested for the English palate, via literary composition.

With a text as self-ironising and reflexive as *Crudities*, however, forms of assertion can never be entirely uncomplicated. Craik and David J. Baker both emphasise the experiential aspect of *Crudities*, one which destabilises foreign objects and domestic readers alike. Craik argues that Coryat, by nourishing sensual pleasure and appetite, invokes criticisms of contemporary prose romance in order to playfully re-construct his gendered readership.<sup>302</sup> For

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<sup>300</sup> Craik's 'Reading "Coryat's Crudities",' gives an overview of the term.

<sup>301</sup> Craik, 'Reading "Coryate's Crudities",' 78. Craik notes that contemporary travel writing frequently used the metaphor of digestion 'to admonish travelers to assimilate nothing pernicious from abroad.' 'Reading "Coryate's Crudities",' 80.

<sup>302</sup> Craik, 'Reading "Coryate's Crudities",' 84-5.

Baker, Coryat draws on anxieties about the way travel threatens the stability of the humoral



body, anxieties harnessed in the cause of sensationalised self-promotion: ‘Coryate offered his ludicrously permeable body to mock and his tales of digestive misadventure to titillate.’<sup>303</sup> Baker bases his conclusions in part on a reading of the frontispiece of *Crudities*, a woodcut by the engraver William Hole (Figure 8). In this frontispiece, Coryat’s adventures are depicted in a series of absurdist tableaux. At the centre of the frontispiece is a portrait of Coryat held by three supporters on a plinth. The supporters personify the

Figure 8. William Hole, frontispiece of *Coryat’s Crudities*, 1611. European kingdoms he has visited: Gallia,

Germania, Italia. As Baker observes, however, a closer inspection of this grandiose self-mythologising yields a curious detail: Germany is vomiting up Coryat, producing a line of fluid that runs into his plinth. Baker continues:

The ‘passages’ of the trip that is depicted seem to follow something like the ‘passages’ within bodies that are also depicted. Eating, digesting, and excreting are what the eye follows, and this movement pulls the engraving together into a corporeal diagram, though a roughly sutured one. The assorted sites on which Coryate ‘expose[d]’ his ‘body,’ as he

<sup>303</sup> David J. Baker, “‘My Liquid Journey’: The Frontispiece to *Coryat’s Crudities* (1611)’ in *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England*, ed. Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan Jr (London: Palgrave, 2007), 127.

would later put it, to a ‘world of imminent dangers both by Sea and Land’ are themselves portrayed as a ‘body,’ a ‘body’ through which Coryate moves. Here, for our titillated curiosity, his travels are set out as a sequence of fluid geo-somatic exchanges. Our eyes track the path of a travelling body (inside another body) as it is pursued, besmirched, transported, and assaulted. We take a quick tour of its routes within what seems like nothing so much as a trans-national alimentary canal.<sup>304</sup>

The frontispiece, as described by Baker, mobilises a fruitful tension. If Coryat’s central conceit, following Quintilian, is to organise crude matter through metaphorical digestion, the frontispiece suggests that this matter performs a similar digestive act on him, channelling the fears of assimilation by foreign culture noted by Craik.<sup>305</sup> This threat, or promise, of mutual transformation is a tension that runs through Coryat’s works, and is often commented on overtly through paratext. It takes a more literal colonial bent in a prefatory verse to *Great Mogul*:

Loe here the wooden Image of our wits;  
Borne, in first trauaile, on the backs of Nits;  
But now on Elephants, &c:  
O, what will he ride, when his years expire?  
The world must ride him; or he all will tire.

(*Great Mogul*, sig. A4<sup>v</sup>)

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<sup>304</sup> Baker, “‘My liquid journey”,’ 121.

<sup>305</sup> ‘Reading “Coryate’s Crudities”,’ 80.



Coryat is introduced in an image of colonial conquest – albeit an absurdist one – poised on the back of elephants riding through the court at Agra. This verse echoes Coryat’s desire, expressed while describing the 30,000 elephants kept by the mogul, ‘one day (by Gods leau) to haue my picture expressed in my next Booke, sitting vpon an Elephant’ (*Great Mogul*, sig. E1<sup>v</sup>). Coryat’s publisher fulfilled this request

posthumously, furnishing *Great Mogul* with a woodcut of Coryat mounted awkwardly on an elephant, with accentuated English attire (Figure 9).

There is potential to read satiric intent in this image; Richmond Barbour claims it as an extension of Coryat’s ironising self-mythography, showing him to advance through Asia ‘in a low-budget

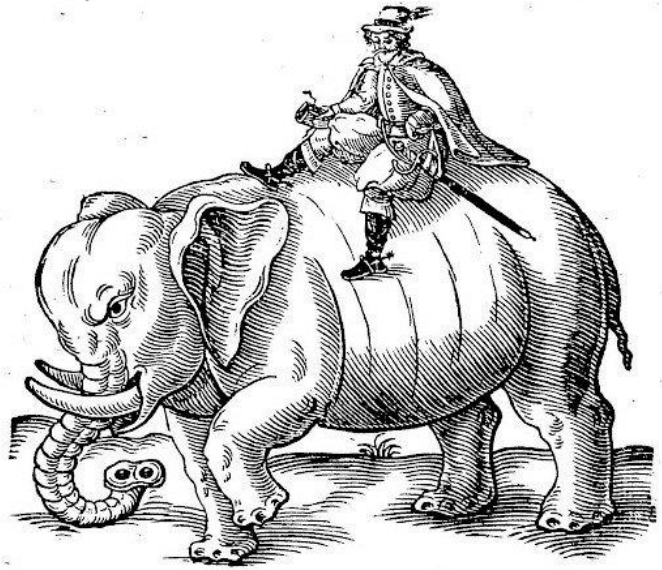


Figure 9. Woodcut in *Great Mogul*, 1616.

parody of Tamburlaine in triumph.’<sup>306</sup> If the tone of the woodcut is ambiguous, however, the accompanying epigram is pointedly subversive. With the looming threat of old age, Coryat’s imperialising grandeur (parodic though it may be) begins to falter and, in its place, ‘the world must ride him.’ Far from resisting this influence, Coryat appears eager and willing to embrace the transformation of cross-cultural contact. In a letter to Sir Edward Philips published in the volume, Coryat modestly declares:

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<sup>306</sup> Richmond Barbour, *Before Orientalism: London’s Theatre of the East, 1576-1626* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 136.

I am perswaded, that if euer any accident worthy of admiration euer happened vnto your honor in al your life time, it will be the receiuing of this present Letter, from me out of the Easterne *India*: yet perhaps it will seeme vnto you so wondrous, that I beleue you will doubt whether this bee the true hand-writing of your once *Odcombian* Neighbour, *Thomas Coryate*.

(*Great Mogul*, sig. B1<sup>v</sup>)

Coryat is the first to contrast his humble roots in Odcombe with his remarkable travels. ‘Once Odcombian,’ he relishes his own digestion by alterity.

In some ways, Coryat’s body of work – with its competing voices of text and paratext – stages a cyclical exchange: it narrates moments of cross-cultural contact, in which colonial assertion is embedded with the possibility of postcolonial pushback.<sup>307</sup> Scholars of the Renaissance have found in the early moral relativism of Montaigne, Lery and others glimmers of postcolonial attitudes, even in the midst of a colonialising status quo; recently, Shankar Raman has reinforced this model with his claim that the colonial and postcolonial have always been ‘interwoven formations.’<sup>308</sup> Perhaps most significantly, several Renaissance writers indicate that confrontations with the periphery can powerfully fracture European identity. Jean de Léry’s *Histoire d’un voyage fait en la terre de Brésil* (1578), for instance, presents encounters with

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<sup>307</sup> In making this claim, it is important to differentiate Coryat from the active, literal colonial project England was beginning to undertake at the time. Coryat never represented England abroad in any formal capacity and, in fact, was generally viewed as a liability when his own travels intersected with diplomatic missions, which happened several times during his travels in India. What he *does* embody is colonialism’s more insidious aspect: a thirst for the ‘exotic’ and ‘oriental’, and a preoccupation with capturing and relaying it for the amusement and vicarious possession of English audiences. In fact, for scholars like Richmond Barbour, Coryat’s writings are innovative because they are among the first to promote travel as a commodity. This commodification, Barbour writes, is ‘a logical extension of London’s markets for exotica and of social institutions that theatricalise the world.’ *Before Orientalism*, 124.

<sup>308</sup> Raman, *Renaissance Literatures and Postcolonial Studies*, 3. For a sampling of this historic scholarship see, for instance, Greenblatt’s *Marvellous Possessions* (Chicago, Chicago UP, 1991) and Ania Loomba’s *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998) and *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002).

cannibals as a means of perceiving the more covert ‘barbarism’ of the Christian world.<sup>309</sup> In his famous essay ‘Of the Cannibales’ (often considered the inspiration of Shakespeare’s Caliban) Montaigne makes a similar argument. Here, he suggests that Amerindian unity with the ‘lawes of nature’ (an argument first made by Spanish friar Bartolomé de las Casas) exposes the corruption of European artifice: ‘We have so much by our inventions, surcharged the beauties and riches of her works, that we have altogether over-choaked her: yet where ever her puritie shineth, she makes our vaine, and frivolous enterprises woonderfully ashamed.’<sup>310</sup> In a similar way, though with a dramatically transformed tone, representations of Coryat suggest that encounters with the periphery might render English identity powerfully elastic. The lampooning of an Englishman abroad makes a mockery of the geographic and cultural periphery; yet this mockery is always conscious of the ways the periphery can transform anglophone subjectivities.

If a thirst to observe and capture ‘otherness’ for English consumption drives Coryat’s writing, ultimately this orientalist outlook is met with a somewhat postcolonial result: the transformation of the English subject. In this process, Coryat himself assumes a highly textual form. The opening pages of *Crudities* contain an ‘explication of the emblems of the frontispiece’ with the following title.

Certaine opening and drawing distiches to be applied as mollifying Cataplasmes to the Tumours, Carnosities, or difficult Pimples full of matter appearing in the Authors Front, conflated of Stiptike and Glutinous Vapours arising out of the Crudities: The heads whereof are particularly pricked and pointed out by letters for the Readers better understanding.

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<sup>309</sup> Raman, 34-5.

<sup>310</sup> Montaigne, 102.

The explication refers to the vignettes on the book's cover, numbered for the reader's convenience, and transforms them through corporeal metaphor. It is a face full of unsavoury skin conditions – 'the author's front' – an image crystalised in the actual portrait of Coryat at the centre of the frontispiece. By positioning textual defects in bodily terms, Hole's frontispiece leaves readers with food for thought: the process of travel is one that has rendered Coryat fundamentally unfamiliar and, at the same time, produced him as text, displacing the account of his observations with one of himself.

Given the highly constructed nature of Coryat's persona, an argument for his textualisation is not new.<sup>311</sup> What it yields in this context, however, is a distinguishing formal feature of this confrontation with the periphery, the beginnings of a 'turning out' taking place at the fissures of the core. In the case of Coryat and his *Crudities*, this formal property is one of interchange or, in a rhetorical sense, chiasmus. Core and periphery engage in a dialectical negotiation in which each becomes coloured and shaped by the other. Though power relations and imperialism feed into this negotiation, they do not entirely conscribe it. Instead, this chiasmatic pattern echoes the assertion of Raman, in which interwoven alterities sustain each other.

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<sup>311</sup> Barbour describes Coryat's self-promotion in explicitly textual terms: 'inscribing himself into the remote scenes he travelled to describe.' *Before Orientalism*, 116. Jyotsna G. Singh describes the 'aestheticizing dimension of the colonizing imagination' recurrent in Coryat's works, and particularly pronounced in *Great Mogul*. Coryat's fashioning of his own identity is integral to the function of the marvellous aesthetic as an apologetic for colonial endeavour, and Coryat transforms 'into a "character: wandering the landscape of a real and imagined "East."' *Colonial Narratives / Cultural Dialogues: "Discoveries" of India in the Language of Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1996). For an account of the way 'marvellous topographies' were invoked to both 'other' and contain India, see Pramod K. Nayar, 'Marvelous Excesses: English Travel Writing and India, 1608-1727,' *Journal of British Studies* 44.2 (2005): 213-238.

## The Periphery Codified: Literary Sociability in the London Tavern

A closer look at the nonsense verses prefacing *Crudities* yields some further specifics of Moretti's aesthetic compromise. The panegyric 'Cabalistical Verses, which by transposition of words, syllables, and letters make excellent sense, otherwise none' was composed by John Hoskyns, a lawyer Noel Malcolm credits with inventing literary nonsense (at least, in its seventeenth-century form),<sup>312</sup> and provides a case study in nonsense as aesthetic compromise.

### *In laudem Authoris*

Even as the waves of brainlesse butter'd fish,  
With bugle horne writ in the Hebrew tongue,  
Fuming up flounders like a chafing-dish,  
That looks asquint upon a Three-mans song:  
Or as your equinoctiall pasticrust  
Projecting out a purple chariot wheele,  
Doth squeeze the spheares, and intimate the dust,  
The dust which force of argument doth feele:  
Even so this Author, this Gymnosophist,  
Whom no delight of travels toyle dismaies,  
Shall sympathize (thinke the reader what thou list)  
Crownd with a quinsill tipt with marble praise.

(*Crudities*, sig. e6<sup>r</sup>)

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<sup>312</sup> Noel Malcolm, *The Origins of English Nonsense* (London: Fontana, 1998), 4.

Semler analyses this verse as an exercise in the Early Modern grotesque, noting the disjunction between form and content that is typical of the aesthetic: Hoskyns' verse adheres to rules of poetic form, including regular AB rhyme structures, iambic rhythm and a logic of similitude (evinced in the stanza openings of 'even as', 'or as' and 'even so'). In contrast to this formal regularity is the content of the poem, with imagery swelling into an excess of incongruous novelties that defy semantic meaning or logical relation.<sup>313</sup> Semler's reading of nonsense as grotesque sheds light on precisely what an aesthetic of the periphery entails: the grotesque is defined by compromise, pictorial compromise in the form of metamorphosing shapes, ontological compromise in the conflation of once-distinct categories.<sup>314</sup> At the same time, by viewing Hoskyns' style as an aesthetic of the periphery, we can view its puzzling heterogeneity in more complex terms than those of a nihilistic assault on meaning. In concert with the emphasis of *Cruditie*s, Hoskyns' panegyric summons images of the globe: it opens with the oceanic frontier (lapped with 'waves of brainlesse butter'd fish'), progresses to reference an 'equinoctiall pasticrust' and closes with a 'squeezing' of the spheres. If we treat this self-conscious global aesthetic as a serious organising principle, the disarray of exotica ('bugle horne'; 'Hebrew tongue'; 'purple chariot wheele'); category mistakes (for instance, the looking 'asquint upon a Three-mans song') and other incongruities begins to take shape around a logic of the periphery.<sup>315</sup> The global as an overarching theme lends logic to the incongruities of the poem

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<sup>313</sup> L.E. Semler, 'The Caroline Grotesque in Verse: Robert Herrick, Richard Flecknoe and John Taylor,' *Yearbook of English Studies* 44 (2014): 149-50.

<sup>314</sup> Seminal works on the grotesque which emphasise this compromise include Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963); Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Ralf Remshardt, *Staging the Savage God: The Grotesque in Performance* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016); Neil Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grotesque*. Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* positions the 'carnavalesque' – a mode of the grotesque symbolised in the 'lower stratum' of the body – in similar terms.

<sup>315</sup> Elsewhere, I have argued that the *effect* of nonsense is peripheral, estranging the reader from an essentialist textual core. See Spadaro, 'On Classification and the Grotesque: Theorising Para-Genre in Early Modern Nonsense Verse and Montaigne's *Essais*,' *JLLC* 66.1 (2019): 16-30.

because a view of the periphery as fantastically disjunctive by nature permits, and even demands, a representational field suffused with nonsense.

Where the usual scaffold governing meaning is syntax, nonsense forces its reader to seek new organising principles. As Semler notes in his reading of John Taylor's *Odcombs Complaint* (1613), thematic motifs are one way the reader is encouraged to order and comprehend nonsense verse.<sup>316</sup> This point might be applied more holistically to the panegyrics as a coherent and intra-referential body of work. The global imagery running through the entire paratext of *Crudities* is an important vector of mock praise, and include a language invented by Henry Peacham, 'The Utopian Tongue' (*Crudities*, sig. 11<sup>r</sup>). Examples of this intra-referential networking abound. In a panegyric published in *Coryat's Crambe* (2011), Anthony Washborne alludes to 'Tom Odcombes braine pan' (sig. b4<sup>r</sup>), a term signifying the skull in medical discourse but, in the sociable context on nonsense, suggesting a convergence of Hoskyns' 'pasticrust' with his 'brainless butter'd fish'. Later, Coryat himself seems to pick up on this shifting motif in dedications published in *Coryat's Crambe*, where repeated references to the hemisphere are intermingled with invocations of the brain: the 'bottle of my braine' (sig. A2<sup>v</sup>); the 'nimble industrie of my legges, braine and fingers' (sig. B3<sup>r</sup>); and, in the clearest echo of Hoskyns' brainless fish, a reference to *Crudities* being 'brought home / swimming in the liquid ocean of my braine' (sig. B1<sup>v</sup>). These repeated attempts to couch consciousness in a brain rather than a 'mind' draw on the materialist preference for the viscosity of organ over abstract signification. In nonsense, this preference is deployed with a precarious and gruesome effect: the brain as a vessel for thought threatens constantly to reduce into bodily entrails.

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<sup>316</sup> Semler, 'Caroline Grotesque,' 152.

Perhaps the most illuminating comment on these intra-referential networks can be found in texts external to *Crudities*: in *Laugh and Be Fat* (1612) and *Odcombs Complaint* (1613) John Taylor engages with the panegyric verses and draws the network of images outwards. He responds to a panegyric by John Sanford, ‘Punctures and Junctures of Coryate,’ which represents Coryat first as ‘couch’d between the poles’ (sig. l2<sup>r</sup>) and, later, as a bee circling round a world ‘hing’d on the Articke and Antarticke starre’ (sig. l2<sup>r</sup>). In his response in *Odcombs Complaint*, Taylor revives Sanford’s imagery with references to an ‘Articke Pole.’<sup>317</sup> In *Laugh and Be Fat*, meanwhile, Taylor opens a dialogue with Hoskyns’ ‘Cabalistical Verses’ in a poem titled ‘Cabalistical, or Horse Verse’. In it, Taylor compares the nonsense form of Hoskyns’ poem to the eccentricity of *Crudities*. He then positions himself on the rim of this discursive network, claiming that ‘I in imitation am his [Hoskyns’] Ape.’<sup>318</sup> In the verse, Taylor draws on a recognisable pool of nonsense motifs, paying homage to Hoskyns’ ‘equinoctiall pasticrust’ and Washborne’s ‘braine pan’ with an image of the ‘Hemispheares huge warming pan’ (sig. C3<sup>v</sup>).

This compilation of motifs is, at times, overwhelmingly rapid as it expands and multiplies. Images compile into an amorphous and self-referential corpus – referencing travel through invoking the globe (particularly its spherical quality, manifest in ‘equinoctiall’ lines and geographic poles), the exotic, and the bizarre – strung together in discursive, but semantically aimless, networks. The intra-textual repetition of motifs creates layers of meaning that transcend individual panegyrics and bind them into a discursive whole. Such a method of constructing

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<sup>317</sup> John Taylor, *Odcombs complaint: or Coriats funerall epicedium or death-song, vpon his late reported drowning. With his epitaph in the Barmuda, and Utopian tongues. And translated into English by Iohn Taylor* (London: G. Eld, 1613), sig. B5<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>318</sup> John Taylor, *Laugh, and be fat (or a commentary on the Odcombian blanket)* (London: W. Hall, 1612), sig. C3<sup>v</sup>.



meaning is highly collaborative and presents the verses as vehicles of homosocial bonding. As Malcolm notes, the ‘self-parodic routines of nonsense poetry are characteristic products of enclosed, self-conscious institutions such as clubs.’<sup>319</sup> The effect of this semantic interdependency nears codification; the verses construct meaning through playful, but arbitrary, repetition of motifs and in doing so, they render the significance of these motifs illegible, except within the context of a broader whole. An isolated reference rebuffs meaning – not necessarily literal meaning, but rather the significance constructed through ludic overlay and repetition – because it is severed from a vitally-important semantic field. Meaning is contingent on sociable networks, rather than on the inherent rules of language or cultural signification.

The writers of nonsense verse frequently allude to the function of codification through both form and content. In his ‘Cabalistical verses’, Hoskyns issues a challenge of exegesis that centres on translation: the ‘transposition of words, syllables, and letters’ through which the poem makes ‘excellent sense, otherwise none’ (*Crudities*, sig. e6<sup>r</sup>). The title itself projects esoteric interiority by invoking the mystical Jewish tradition of Kabbalah, a framework strengthened by Hoskyns’ reference to a ‘horn writ in Hebrew tongue’ (sig. e6<sup>r</sup>). In his response in *Laugh and Be Fat*, Taylor describes Hoskyns’ nonsense as ‘speeches mysticall’ and ‘strange verses Cabalisticall’ (sig. C3<sup>v</sup>). Yet in aligning cabalistical verses with ‘Horse verse’ in his title, Taylor betrays a note of venom toward the idea of codified folly. Taylor again alludes to an esoteric function in his later *Sir Gregory Nonsense and his newes from no place* (1622), referring to his

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<sup>319</sup> Malcolm, *Origins of English Nonsense*, 22.

work as ‘a hotch potch messe of *Nonsense*, / In darke Enigmaes, and strange sence vpon sence.’<sup>320</sup>

In a formal sense, annotation presents the verses as objects requiring interpretation. Sanford’s ‘Punctures and Junctures’, with its imagined commentator Mr. Primrose Silkworme, epitomises this with extensive endnotes shedding light on the poem’s erudite jibes against Coryat. This footnoting continues through the oeuvre of seventeenth-century nonsense and is intensified through the Civil War period. Discerning the tone of these scholarly additions proves something of a challenge. In the case of Sanford’s poem, his footnotes enrich the discursive complexity of the mock panegyric; so, for instance, in a shorter note he glosses a stanza beginning ‘*Tom* is a twinne’ with the fact that ‘*Tom* in Hebrew signifieth a twinne’ (*Crudities*, sig. 12<sup>v</sup>). Conversely, however, since the footnotes only further the collective mockery of Coryat, they assimilate scholarly pretensions into the joke in the same spirit as Feste’s play. Put another way, while the overt codification may commentate on the existence of an epistemic network, any attempt to actually *decipher* the marks of codification is to fall into the exegetical trap of literalism.

## 1. Reading Literary Clubs

The epistemic circuits constructed by nonsense verse reflect the form and function of the literary clubs that produced it. The membership of the Mermaid group – termed the ‘Sireniacal

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<sup>320</sup> Taylor, *Sir Gregory Nonsense his newes from no place Written on purpose, with much study to no end, plentifully stored with want of wit, learning, iudgement, rime and reason, and may seeme very fitly for the vnderstanding of nobody*. (London: Nicholas Okes, 1622), sig. B6<sup>v</sup>.

Gentlemen' by Coryat (*Great Mogul*, sigs. E4<sup>v</sup>, F3<sup>r</sup>) – can be partially constructed through the authorship of the panegyrics. In the Latinate poem 'Convivium philosophicum' (generally attributed to Hoskyns) a number of wits are named that were common to both Mermaid and Mitre clubs. These include Hoskyns, Ben Jonson, John Donne, Richard Martin, Christopher Brooke, George Garrad, Inigo Jones and Hugh Holland.<sup>321</sup> A similar club emerged in the 1620s and 30s, the 'Order of the Fancy,' with a comparable emphasis on sociable witticism and tavern culture. Raylor uses panegyrics dedicated to the *Innovation of Penelope and Ulysses* (ca. 1635-9) – a poem by known member of the order, cleric John Smith – to reconstruct the membership of this later group. By Raylor's estimation, we can include such names as James Atkins, John Mennes, Thomas Pollard, Robert Herrick and Philip Massinger in the roll call of the Order of the Fancy. While there is minimal overlap in the membership of the Mitre/Mermaid clubs and the Order of the Fancy, their continuities in form and purpose are writ large. Contests of wit and drollery animate both groups, which meet regularly in London taverns to deepen homosocial bonds for leisure and, secondarily, careerist ends. Like the Mermaid group, the Order of the Fancy positioned Jonson as patron, before later shifting their allegiance to the up-and-coming wit Philip Massinger.<sup>322</sup> One prominent fixture of popular culture looms over clubs of both periods: the ferociously productive poet John Taylor who shows an obsessive interest in the clubs and their membership, despite being socially positioned on their outskirts.

Crucial to the operation of these clubs was the production of an internal hierarchy to negotiate the broader social positioning of members. The dominant demographic of the Order of

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<sup>321</sup> Raylor, *Cavaliers*, 72-3; O'Callaghan, *The English Wits*, 70-3. O'Callaghan attributes this overlap of membership to the 'well-confirmed habits of formal socializing among a wide section of friends and associates in the West End of early seventeenth-century London.' *The English Wits*, 71.

<sup>322</sup> Raylor, *Cavaliers*, 99.

the Fancy was the younger sons of gentry who, blocked from significant inheritance because of their juniority, had to reconcile their aristocratic roots with the necessity of a vocation.<sup>323</sup> One function of the clubs seems to be the working-out of status anxieties inherent in this ambivalent social positioning, which were, in some way, compensated for by demonstrations of wit. Raylor points to the adoption of the role of fool by Coryat in order to gain royal preferment as one reflection of this alignment of burlesque and courtly poetics.<sup>324</sup> The patronage sought by the Order of the Fancy – first from Ben Jonson, later Philip Massinger – suggests that ludic output was at the heart of the social function of the club. In fact, the internal structures Raylor uncovers present the club as a meritocracy governed by wit: ‘the singling out of the best speaker of nonsense provides further evidence that the order was influenced by the earlier clubs since it seems possible this practice derives from the focal position accorded to the self-styled fool Coryate and meetings of the Mitre group.’<sup>325</sup>

Raylor interprets in the Order of the Fancy a dual function of carnivalesque release on the one hand, and careerist fraternising on the other. This model has similarities to the ‘safety-valve’ theory of carnival: the use of therapeutic, contained anarchy in the place of authentic subversion. As a microcosm of society, the clubs use nonsense to provide individual relief, while stratifying core relationships. Raylor elaborates:

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<sup>323</sup> Raylor, *Cavaliers*, 81.

<sup>324</sup> Raylor, *Cavaliers*, 122.

<sup>325</sup> Raylor draws these conclusions based on data contained in the curious Lewis-Warner brief (1633), a document compiled to protest the validity of John Busby’s will, through bringing into disrepute its signatories. One of these signatories was a member of the Order of the Fancy, John Smith, and thus the document contains interesting assertions as to the conduct of Smith himself (debauched, if the brief is to be believed) and the form of the club. According to one allegation of the brief, the disreputable nature of the Order of the Fancy was evident in its social hierarchy, in which ‘Chiefest place’ at meetings was awarded to the best speaker of nonsense. Raylor, *Cavaliers*, 99. O’Callaghan suggests that ‘the prominence given to the buffoon at the table’ (both explicitly in the ‘Convivium Philosophicum’ and, arguably, the structure of the clubs more generally) indicates the influence of a symposiastic tradition epitomised by Xenophon’s *Symposium*. *The English Wits*, 73-4.

While the group thrived on internal competition, the fraternal bonds it established would have served, as they did in the classical sodalities, to *contain* excessive competition between members, who were, after all, seeking much the same channels of preferment... The use of nonsense as a medium of competition helped to prevent such competition from endangering group solidarity by providing a harmless, nonsemantic field in which such group urges could be released and nullified.<sup>326</sup>

This view of folly is familiar, but somewhat limiting. By relegating foolery to a release from ‘the constraints of reality’, only relevant to career insofar as it augments fraternal bonds, we ignore the complicity of ludic style and elite philological culture. Social ambitions are etched into the act of literary play. How can we understand the function of clubs as alternate social spheres? Following Raylor, we might imagine them firstly as a sphere of fantasy: ‘a surrogate family in which privileges of birth and the unjust system of primogeniture were exchanged for a system of intellectual meritocracy.’<sup>327</sup> However, the audacity of this sphere is inherent in ludic pursuits that emulate the stratifying function of the Silenus Box, an avatar of closed interpretive circuits.

## 2. John Taylor’s Linguistic Games

The resentment of primogeniture evident in the clubs never quite resulted in an embrace of fluid meritocracy. This contradiction is never clearer than in the case of John Taylor, self-styled ‘Water Poet,’ whose long and productive career coincided with both the Mitre/Mermaid Clubs and the Order of the Fancy. Like Maarten van Dorp and Malvolio, Taylor is constructed as a

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<sup>326</sup> Raylor, *Cavaliers*, 104.

<sup>327</sup> Raylor, *Cavaliers*, 103.

figure on the margins of literary circuits; however, this marginalised status is dynamically engaged and reshaped in his works. Taylor was a boatman on the Thames, and had an active literary life which spanned from nonsense verse and travel writing at the beginning of his career, to heated polemical pamphlets during the Civil War era. Parallels between Coryat and Taylor are numerous (a fact partly due to Taylor's persistent imitation of the traveller): both produced avid accounts of treacherous and sometimes comic journeys for self-promotional ends. Taylor undertook twelve journeys through Britain, as well as two trips abroad: to Hamburg in 1616 and Prague in 1620. One of his resulting travelogues, *Three Weekes, Three Daies, and Three Houres Observations and Travel from London to Hamburg* (1617) is explicit in its engagement with *Crudities*, bearing a dedication to Coryat.<sup>328</sup> Like Coryat, Taylor also co-opts the stunts of Will Kemp: his highly-publicised attempt to row to Queenborough in a paper boat gestures back to the clown's *Nine Daies Wonder* (1600).<sup>329</sup> This invocation of folly – and, specifically, the folly inscribed in the geographic peripheries of the travel genre – is a tactic of self-advancement shared between Kemp, Coryat and Taylor.

Taylor's literary debt to Coryat is a recurrent feature of his works. In his first pamphlet, *The Sculler* (1612), Taylor includes an epigram comparing his output to Coryat's with the claim 'I am no Duncelcomb, Coxelcomb, Odcomb *Tom*.'<sup>330</sup> That same year, Taylor composed a pamphlet that owed its entire form to the *Crudities* and its panegyrics titled *Laugh and Be Fat: A Commentary Upon the Odcombyan Banket* (1612). Taylor's obsession with Coryat continued in

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<sup>328</sup> Victor Skretkovicz, 'Poems of discovery: John Taylor's Barbarian, Utopian and Barmooda tongues,' *Renaissance Studies* 6.3 (1992): 398.

<sup>329</sup> Joanna E. Gates, 'Travel and Pseudo-Translation in the Self-Promotional Writings of John Taylor, Water Poet,' in *Travel and Translation in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Carmine G. Di Biase (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 268.

<sup>330</sup> Taylor, *The sculler rowing from tiber to thames with his boate laden with a hotch-potch, or gallimawfry of sonnets, satyres, and epigrams. with an addition of pastorall equiuocques or the complaint of a shepheard* (London: E.A., 1612), sig. B1<sup>r</sup>.

1613 with the publication of *Odcomb's complaint of Coriats funeral Epicedium*, which takes the form of a mock elegy composed in the imagined event of Coryat's drowning en route to Istanbul. Later that year, Taylor resurrected his muse in *The Eighth Wonder of the World, Or Coriats Escape From His Supposed Drowning* (1613).

If the line between pastiche and parody in Taylor's many homages to Coryat is unclear, the response of Coryat himself sheds some light. Michael Strachan makes this point in a chapter of *The Life and Adventures of Thomas Coryate* titled 'Friends and Enemies,' in which he boldly claims Taylor for the latter camp.<sup>331</sup> Even though the tone of Taylor's mockery is similar to that of Coryat's friends in the panegyrics, the difference comes down to their contrasting social strata: 'it was one thing for the wits and gallants to flatter him with their notice by laughing at his antics and quite another to be publicly called a dunce by an upstart waterman.'<sup>332</sup> Coryat apparently never acknowledged Taylor in print, but Taylor ventriloquises a reaction to his tributes in *Eighth Wonder of the World*:

A Pamphlet printed was *The Sculler* nam'd  
Wherein Sir *Thomas* much my writing blam'd;  
Because an Epigram therein was written,  
In which he said he was nipt gald and bitten.  
He frets, he fumes, he rages, and exclames,

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<sup>331</sup> Strachan, *The Life and Adventures of Thomas Coryate* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962) 150-6. Other critics who have emphasised the parodic tone of Taylor's works include P. N. Hartle and Joanna E. Gates. Hartle suggests that the playful tone of Taylor's satire is sustained by the collective acknowledgement of a shared measure of reality: 'reader and writers sharing a normative sense of social and cultural value, against which the literary eccentricity of Coryate or the political eccentricity of a monopolist or a papist are readily ascertained.' Hartle, "'All his works sir": John Taylor's Nonsense,' *Neophilologus* 86 (2002): 158. For Gates, Taylor's mockery of the panegyrics and parody of Coryat 'constitute what I maintain is a clever appropriation, meant to develop his Anglophile persona.' 'Travel and Pseudo-Translation,' 268.

<sup>332</sup> Strachan, *Life and Adventures*, 149.

And vowes to rouze me from the River Thames.<sup>333</sup>

This enmity, whether real or imagined, sheds some light on the function of folly as a tool of advancement. Coryat's anger paints a picture of Taylor as an upstart tradesman infringing on the elitism of the literary clubs. If we conceptualise the clubs as a closed sphere, in which wit entrenches careerist networks, it appears that the violation of these threatens the viability of the entire project.

Taylor's exact posture towards Coryat and his Sireniacal Gentlemen seems to be one of ambivalence, an ambivalence that betrays a mixture of class anxiety, resentment, and genuine aspiration.<sup>334</sup> Bernard Capp emphasises this point, observing in Taylor an 'amphibious' cultural identity, which straddled the world of urban trade in which he worked and the courtly literati with whom he sought to ingratiate himself.<sup>335</sup> Capp and Rebecca Fall view Taylor's attempted participation in courtly culture as a democratising gesture with normative effect. Capp reads Taylor's corpus as educative: an attempt to communicate elite classical culture to a more urban, popular audience.<sup>336</sup> Fall makes this point even more strongly and argues for a democratising

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<sup>333</sup> John Taylor, *The eighth wonder of the world, or Coriats escape from his supposed drowning With his safe arriuall and entertainment at the famous city of Constantinople; and also how hee was honourably knighted with a sword of King Priams. With the manner of his proceeding in his peregrination through the Turkish territories towards the antient memorable city of Ierusalem.* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1613), sig. A5<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>334</sup> As James Mardock notes, this ambivalent positioning is amplified in a 1614 pamphlet titled *The nipping and snipping of abuses* (London: Ed Griffin, 1614). 'The Spirit and the Muse: The Anxiety of Religious Positioning in John Taylor's Pre-War Polemics,' *The Seventeenth Century* 14.1 (1999): 8-10. In his 'Apollogie in defence of Naturall English *Poetrie*,' Taylor attacks the expectation that learning equates to literary flair and wit in a tone that oscillates between anxious and vitriolic. Most suggestive for this reading is a closing allusion to Coryat:

If Art alone made men excel,  
Me thinks *tom Coriat* should write exlent well:  
But he was borne be like in some crosse yeere,  
When learning was good cheape, but wit was deare. (sig. C1<sup>r</sup>)

<sup>335</sup> Bernard Capp, 'John Taylor 'The Water-Poet': A Cultural Amphibian in 17<sup>th</sup>-Century England,' *History of European Ideas* 11.1-6 (2012): 538-9.

<sup>336</sup> Capp, 'John Taylor,' 541.



impulse more anarchic than educative. Taylor, she asserts, renders his works intentionally illegible in order to prioritise ‘access over understanding.’<sup>337</sup>

Whether or not Taylor’s primary goal is democratising, his disdain for tavern literary culture is vividly disclosed in *Laugh and Be Fat*. Taylor’s pamphlet takes as its object the authors of the panegyrics rather than the main text of the *Crudities*. Taylor recreates the panegyrics, titling each with the name of the original writer with macaronic inflections, while making up a few new panegyrists of his own, including a ‘Prickesong’. These verses mock the panegyrists through a stylistic pastiche in which the original verse and author are merged. Taylor’s response to Hoskyns in ‘Cabalistical, or Horse verse’ typifies the collection.

Hold, holla, holla, weehee, stand I say  
Here’s one with horse-verse doth thy praise display  
Without all sense, or reason, forme, or hue:  
He kicks and flings, and winces thee thy due.  
He maketh shift in speeches mysticall,  
To write strange verses Calabisticall;  
Much like thy booke and thee, in wit and shape  
Whilst I in imitation am his Ape.

(sig. C3<sup>v</sup>-C4<sup>r</sup>)

Taylor mocks Hoskyns by comparing his verse to the main text of *Crudities* and, in doing so,

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<sup>337</sup> Rebecca L. Fall ‘Popular Nonsense according to John Taylor and Ben Jonson,’ *SEL* 57.1 (2017): 87.

nullifies intellectual and class divides between Hoskyns, Coryat and Taylor himself. Here the frenetic linguistic energy of nonsense is reduced to embodied spasms – ‘he kicks and flings, and winces thee thy due’ – by the author.

Another tribute, addressed to ‘Henricius Peacham’, is appended with a verse in ‘The Utopian Tongue.’ In it, Taylor borrows and expands on Peacham’s linguistic invention in his panegyric for the *Crudities*. Peacham’s original verse, a fascinating study in its own right, follows.

NY thalonin ythsi *Coryate* lachmah babowans  
O *SIAM* Europam Americ-werowans  
Poph-himgi Savoya, Hessen, Rhetia, Ragousie  
France, Germanien dove Anda-louzie  
Not A-rag-on ô *Coryate*, ô hone viliscar.  
Einen trunk Od-combe ny Venice Berga-mascar.

(*Crudities*, sig. 11<sup>r</sup>)

The verse disperses recognisable geographic references – Europe, America, Savoy, France, Germany, Odcombe, Venice and Bergamo – amongst an array of incongruous nonsense. One way of deciphering meaning in the poem, which Peacham highlights through capitalisation, is phonetic. For instance, *SIAM* when read aloud parses into “ass I am”, a fairly standard mockery of Coryat. Likewise ‘Not A-rag-on ô *Coryate*,’ has an obvious spoken meaning – alluding to the trope of Coryat’s nakedness – which punctuation and accenting obscure.<sup>338</sup> The needless

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<sup>338</sup> While references to Coryat’s nudity abound, their original source is unclear. One possible inspiration may be Hermann Kirchner’s *Oration in Praise of Travel*, which Coryat translates and includes in his paratext. In this oration, Kirchner compares the process of travelling to that of aggregating wisdom in the style of Aristotle. He

hyphenation of ‘Od-combe’ in the final line acts as something of a decoding key, showing the reader how to trace meaning in the poem by eliding needless punctuation. The poem presents an antagonistic link between typography and semantics: the materiality of script obscures meaning that is later revealed through a phonetic reading. Thus, the semiotics of Peacham’s ‘Utopian’ tongue signal a preference for spoken word – a key feature of oratorical tavern culture – over written. The sociability of the clubbing world is the environment on which the deliverance of meaning is contingent.

John Taylor’s tribute to Peacham in *Laugh and Be Fat* borrows many features of the original poem, now dramatically transformed to satirise tavern sociability.

Thoytom Asse Coria Tushrump codsheadirustie,  
Mungrellimo wish whap ragge dicete tottie,  
Mangelusquem verminets nipsem barelybittimsore  
Culliandolt travellerebumque, graiphone trutchmore.  
Pusse per mew (Odcomb) gul abelgik foppery shig shag  
Cock a peps Comb sottishamp, Idioshte momulus tag rag.

(sig. D3<sup>v</sup>)

Taylor appropriates Peacham’s preference for the phonetic over the written in a new way. In the place of obstructive punctuation, Taylor uses its opposite: the elimination of space between otherwise legible words (for example, ‘nipsem’ and ‘barelybittimsore’). While Taylor borrows Peacham’s tension between typography and phonetic meaning, he adds a new conceit: many of

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writes, ‘This doth witness Zamolxis and infinite more, who having travelled from their owne houses, naked in a manner, destitute of all better discipline and nurture, and voyde of humanity, have returned home singularly furnished and adorned with all kinde of qualities of the minde’ (*Crudities*, sig. M1<sup>v</sup>).

his macaronic endings are recognisably Latinate. The phrase ‘travellerebumque’, for instance, combines the transparent English roots of ‘traveler’ and ‘bum’ with Latin inflection. This device gestures towards classical learning while subverting the pretence with an accessible vernacular meaning. In the final line, ‘Idioshte momulus’ is again suggestive of English roots: ‘idiot’ and ‘Momus’ (the Greek personification of mockery, revived in 1446 by Leon Battista Alberti’s *Momus or The Prince*). Read in tandem with the rough vernacular ‘tag rag’ – which invokes Coryat’s nudity while generating tongue-twisting aural pleasure – Taylor appears to construct a derisive pastiche, combining pretentious form with highly-accessible meaning. Taylor’s venture into Latinity may be bold given his working-class roots, but it is pointedly subversive. In Taylor’s hands, linguistic coding becomes a farce of affectation – or, to borrow one of the few entirely English words in the verse, ‘foppery’ – the transparency of which is foregrounded for laughs.

Taylor returns to the Utopian tongue in *Odcumb’s Complaint*, using it to deliver an epitaph for the supposedly drowned Coryat. This poem contains an additional apparatus: Utopian translator, Caleb Quishquash.

Nortumblum callimumquash omystoliton quashte burashte,  
Sribuke washday solushtay perambulushte;  
Grekay sons Turkay Paphay zums Jerusalushte.  
Neptus esht Ealors Interremoy diz Dolorushte,  
Confabuloy Odcumbay Prozeugmolliton tymorumynoy,  
Omulus oratushte paralescus tolliton umbroy.

The same in English, translated by Caleb Quishquash, *an Utopian borne*, and principall Secretary to the great *Adelontado of Barmoodoes*.

Here lies the wonder of the English nation,  
Involv'd in *Neptunes* brinish vasty maw:  
For fruitlesse travel, and for strange relation,  
He past and repast all that e'er eye saw.  
*Odcomb* produc'd him; many Nations fed him,  
And worlds of Writers, through the world have spred him.

(sigs. B3<sup>r</sup>-B3<sup>v</sup>)

As in Taylor's previous experiment with Utopian, Latin macaronics dominate his endings: in particular the masculine vocative suffix '-te'. These inflections are awkwardly imposed on fairly-transparent vernacular roots: so, 'solushtay perambulushte' or 'Turkay Paphay zums Jerusalushte.' The repeated insertions of '-ush' also strain against these Latinate endings: the repetition presents it as a grammatical inflection, but it has no Latin correspondent. The construction of Caleb Quishquash intensifies this burlesque humour, as his translation actively undermines the affectation of the original verse. This is partially because too many of the recognisable words in the Utopian verse – for example, geographic names like Turkey, Greece/k, Paphos and Jerusalem – make no appearance in the English translation. Thus the mock translator adds nominal realism to Taylor's linguistic invention, while furthering its parody. Both within the untranslated Utopian verse itself, and in its discordant relation to Quishquash's translation, burlesque play does and undoes linguistic codification.

A final verse of Taylor's, also in *Odcomb's Complaint*, engages with Peacham's linguistic precedent in a different way. Taylor's 'Epitaph in the *Barmooda* Tongue' – arguably his most

ludicrous linguistic experiment – is transcribed in ‘blackletter’ typeface, making it dramatically stand out from the pamphlet while adding an element of mock archaism. The poem is accompanied by a caption that specifies that the verse ‘must be pronounced *with the accent of the grunting of a hogge*.’<sup>339</sup>

Hough gruntough wough Thomough Coriatough, Odcough robunquough  
Warawough bogh Tomitogh sogh wogh termonatogrough  
Callimogh gogh whobogh Raga-magh demagorgogh palemogh,  
Lomerogh nogh Tottertogh illemortogh eagh Allaquemquogh,  
Teracominogh Jagogh Jamerogh mogh Carnogh pelepsogh,  
Animogh trogh deradrogh maramogh hogh Flandragh calepsagh.

(sig. B2<sup>v</sup>)

Here Taylor seems to directly invert the logic of Peacham’s original verse. Whatever meaning the verse generates is clearest in a skim reading: removing the macaronic endings leaves us with a first phrase roughly equating to ‘hog grunting with Thomas Coryat.’ Odcomb follows, modified by ‘robunquough’ – a word whose clearest correspondent seems to be nautical: ‘robond’/‘roband’, the rope used to secure the sail of a boat to the yard above it. This is likely a typical lampooning of the contrast of Coryat’s modest Odcombian roots and his voyages. (By drawing on his own exposure to the nautical world, this manoeuvre also foregrounds Taylor’s integration of his trade with his literary persona as ‘water-poet.’) Unlike in Peacham’s Utopian poem, however, whatever meaning is gleaned from a silent reading of the poem is compromised when it is read aloud, as the caption specifies it should be, an act which forces the orator to

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<sup>339</sup> As absurd as the form of Taylor’s invention is, Victor Skretkovicz points out its engagement with genuine travel accounts. According to such accounts, Bermuda was considered uninhabited, and the only language that could be attributed to the island would be one spoken by its many resident hogs. ‘Poems of discovery,’ 395-6.

disintegrate into animalistic grunting. In contrast to Peacham's original poem – the syntactic logic of which is only disclosed through the act of spoken oration, and thus demands an enclosed, sociable setting – any attempt at speaking the Bermudan tongue reduces the orator to absurdist slapstick.

As a richly inventive engagement with European discovery and the imagined cultures of the periphery, Taylor's verses deserve more note than they are often given.<sup>340</sup> As satire, their object is fairly clear. Joanna Gates presents Coryat's 'inflated polyglot style', and the pretensions to the 'languages of the learned' displayed by the panegyrists more generally, as the targets of Taylor's satire.<sup>341</sup> Capp's cursory view is that the verses indicate the mixture of awe and 'flippant scepticism' with which Taylor and his readers viewed the culture of the elite.<sup>342</sup> Victor Skretkowicz has catalogued the occurrence of these mock languages – including the dedication to Coryat at the beginning of *Three Weekes, Three Daies, and Three Houres Observations and Travel from London to Hamburg* (1617) – and concludes that mock translation was one of Taylor's preferred means of satirising Coryat's global outlook.

Yet a closer inspection of how Taylor's mock languages operate to create and then undo meaning, straining against each other with legibility on the one hand and incomprehensibility on the other, reveals nuance to his burlesque. Taylor's preoccupation with these parodic languages may be in part due to their ability to operate as a meta-language for the closed interpretive communities generated by Menippean textual circuits. The target of Taylor's satire does not

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<sup>340</sup> Bernard Capp reduces them to 'merely playful sallies' and notes that it 'would be wrong to make very much of them.' *The World of John Taylor the Water-Poet, 1578-1653* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 54.

<sup>341</sup> Gates, 'Travel and Pseudo-Translation,' 268-9.

<sup>342</sup> Capp, *World of John Taylor*, 54.

seem to be learning in and of itself, but instead that coupling of learning and sociability that stratified discursive networks and manifested in the self-referential literary games of tavern culture. Whether combining semantic transparency with Latin inflections or simulating the norms of oratorical tavern culture for mocking ends, Taylor's linguistic games figure as barbed commentary on networks from which he felt barred.

However, as Gates notes with reference to Taylor's pseudo-translation, these parodies are not exclusively satirical. Instead, Taylor's linguistic games are themselves deployed in the service of his quest for literary self-promotion.<sup>343</sup> A second look at Taylor's reference to Coryat in *The Sculler* sheds lights on this curious interplay of parody and self-aggrandisement.

What matters for the place I first came from  
I am no Duncecomb, Coxecomb, Odcomb *Tom*  
Nor am I like a wool-pack, cram'd w' Greek,  
*Venus* in *Venice* minded to goe seeke;  
And at my backe returne to write a Volume,  
In memory of my wits *Gargantua* Colume.  
The choysest wits would neuer so adore me;  
Nor like so many Lackies run before me,  
But honest *Tom*, I enuy not thy state,  
There's nothing in thee worthy of my hate;  
Yet I confesse thou hast an excellent wit:  
But that an idle braine doth harbour it.  
Foole thou it at the Court, I on the Thames,  
So farewell Odcomb *Tom*, God blesse King *James*.

(sigs. B1<sup>r</sup>-B1<sup>v</sup>)

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<sup>343</sup> Gates, 'Travel and Pseudo-Translation,' 268-77.



In spite of his protestations, Taylor makes no attempt to disguise his envy of Coryat. His tone towards Coryat's foolery is one of ambivalence – if the assonant momentum of 'Duncecomb, Coxecomb, Odcomb Tom' suggests venom, his later admission that Coryat is adored by the 'choyest wits' suggests begrudging admiration. This ambivalence finally finds balance in Taylor's creation of plural spheres at the close, through which both he and Coryat serve as presiding fools: one in the court, one on the Thames. Taylor's games of imitation at once satirise Coryat and authentically harness his persona in pursuit of self-advancement, a tension best sustained through the co-existence of plural spheres.

In a reading of *The Sculler*, Melanie Ord traces an emergence of distinct strata of ludic sociability. Taylor's poem 'ends with a wish to establish separate, but complementary, spheres of influence,' Ord writes, 'with Coryat "at the Court" and Taylor "on the Thames", the landmark that cuts specifically through the heart of the city and establishes Taylor as a specifically London poet and would-be wit.'<sup>344</sup> The cartographic symbolism of the Thames represents not simply division, but the opportunity for dual self-advancement. Taylor's desire to entwine his poetic persona with his vocation – as 'water-poet' and 'sculler' – defensively foregrounds his artisanal background, but also harnesses the symbolism of water to represent radical mobility between spheres. Taylor's poetic persona betrays a desire for symbolic distillation with the Thames, a distillation literalised as his paper boat dissolved en route to Queenborough. With this pointed symbolism, Taylor embodies a complication and dissolution of class boundaries. For Capp, this

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<sup>344</sup> Ord, 'Provincial Identification,' 138.

positioning speaks not to ‘a simple division between elite and popular modes, but rather the formation of distinct (if overlapping) cultural strata within the ranks of the literate.’<sup>345</sup>

Shared between both Taylor and the club members is an outlook of heightened class consciousness: Taylor of his origins in the artisanal class, the club members of their complex status as vocational aristocrats. In the ludic sociability of the clubs, the younger children of the gentry carve out a sphere for their own self-assertion. If this mobility is radical in concept, in execution it is strikingly familiar: through Menippean discourse, wits make brazen display of their membership of a philological in-crowd. In his vision of foolery on the Thames, Taylor expresses a longing to establish just such a sphere, built on the same tenets of self-advancement via an aesthetic of *serio ludere*. The collective nonsense output of Taylor and the clubs channels class anxiety into an ambivalent, and frequently parodic, approach to those forces seen as ‘above’ and an elitist view of those below. If Taylor’s burlesques are at times venomous about the clubs that sideline him, in his display of wit he nonetheless emphasises his rhetorical ability in their own game. This construction of distinct yet aesthetically-intersecting spheres invokes the vivid elasticity of Menippean forms, reshaped and pluralised to generate new circuits of knowledge.

## **A World Turn’d Inside Out**

Taylor’s extended dialogue with *Crudities* is one expression of a growth (and displacement) of nonsense from Coryat’s paratext into a broader oeuvre. Coryat is an active engineer of this

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<sup>345</sup> Capp, ‘John Taylor,’ 540.

process, publishing *Coryat's Crambe* to capitalise on the success of the panegyric verses in 1611, a year which also saw the publication of a pirated edition of *Crudities* titled *The Odcombian Banquet*. When the works in Taylor's triplex response to Coryat – *Laugh and Be Fat*, *Odcomb's Complaint* and *The Eighth Wonder of the World* – were published in quick succession, a school of nonsense for which *Crudities* had been the generative catalyst had distinctly outgrown it. In textual terms, this proliferation of nonsense might figure as an increasingly bloated paratext encroaching on the sphere of the main text. With a rhetorical side-step, this paratext assumes cartographic properties to become an ever-enlarging periphery displacing the core. If, to borrow Coryat's gustatory metaphor, the paratext has become engorged, the core seems at risk of withering away. This final section looks at the way this expanding nonsense movement was accompanied by a poetics that emphasised a colonising periphery: that is, an aesthetic of the periphery turned unflinchingly inwards.

### **1. The Periphery Enfolded: Aesthetics of a Civil War**

One central claim of this chapter has been that nonsense verse describes a chiasmatic relation between core and periphery. This pattern finds new force in the nonsense writings of Cavalier poets during the Civil War. These writings adopt the aesthetic of the periphery developed by Jacobean tavern culture, and inject it with a new nihilistic gravity to capture the state of national disarray in the 1640s and 50s. *Sportive Wit: The Muse's Merriment* (1656) contains some of the most striking examples of this use of the periphery as a mirror for English introspection. An anonymous poem in this collection, 'A Fancy,' is ostentatious in its use of nonsense motifs.

When Py-crust first began to reign,

Cheese-pairings went to warre,  
Red Herrings lookt both blew and wan,  
Green leeks and puddings jarred.  
Blind *Hugh* went out to see  
Two Cripples run a race,  
The Ox fought with the Humble Bee,  
And claw'd him by the face.<sup>346</sup>

The poem's opening line invokes the enduring (equinoctial) pasticrust motif, and positions the Civil War and Interregnum periods as continuous with the oeuvre of nonsense verse. The representation of the 'reigning' Py-crust bitterly commentates on the execution of Charles I, and represents the new governing regimen through a symbol of nonsense. Likewise, the popular language of gastronomy is reconfigured as a metaphor for civil conflict, with the complements of paired cheeses and leeks and puddings turning on themselves. This culinary chaos gives in to sensory confusion and impossibilia: the sight of 'Blind *Hugh*' (a possible reference to staunch parliamentarian Hugh Peters) and the racing cripples. In the final lines, a stand-off between Ox and Bee produces an unclear victor, with the extremities of scale dividing the two making the 'clawing' of either equally unlikely. An avatar of these disordered times is the Red Herring, once a token misdirect, but now unidentifiable because of sickly colouring. The characteristic profusion of nonsense strategies in this poem draws distinctly on early precedents and, in taking Britain as its subject matter, uses an aesthetic of the periphery to capture Royalist dismay.

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<sup>346</sup> *Sportive wit the muses merriment, a new spring of lusty drollery, joviall fancies, and a la mode lamponnes, on some heroic persons of these late times, never before exposed to the publick view collected for the publick good by a club of sparkling wits, viz. C.J., B.J., L.M., W.T., cum multis alsis* (London: Nath Brock, 1656), 48.

Another poem of this period, published in John Mennes' *Wit Restor'd* (1658), engages these themes in a more historically-contingent way. The poem 'Ad Johannuelem Leporem, Lepidissimum Carmen Heroicum,' composed by Mennes' friend (and fellow member of the Order of the Fancy) John Smith, is claimed by Timothy Raylor as an account of the Battle of Naseby in 1645.<sup>347</sup> This historical mooring, however, does not lead Smith to adopt a valorising tone. Instead, the poem bursts with nonsense devices. Among the most recognisable are classic gastronomic motifs of 'butter'd Flownders' and a 'Lobsters thigh', both of which harken to the original panegyrics.<sup>348</sup> Most overt of all is Smith's reference to Coryat himself, and his much-lampooned introduction of the fork to Britain, when he invokes Parliamentary general Philip Skippon and describes his 'Beauty equall to fork-bearing' (D3'). with this comparison, Smith represents the eccentric traveller as an absurdist mascot of the Interregnum.

An even more polemical rendition of these themes may be a poem attributed to a 'T.W.', which adds a new layer of eschatological gravity to the nonsense tropes.<sup>349</sup>

I am asham'd of Thee, ô Paracelsie,  
 I understand thou dwell'st not beyond Chelsie.  
 But th'Alpes is my country, and I come  
 Where the Equinoctiall is Solstitium:  
 Where Aetna's fiery furnace still disgorges,  
 More furious flames than any in my forge is.

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<sup>347</sup> Raylor, *Cavaliers*, 181-5.

<sup>348</sup> John Mennes, *Wit restor'd in several select poems not formerly publish't*. (London: R. Pollard, N. Brooks and T. Ring, 1658), sig. D3'.

<sup>349</sup> The poem is undated, but we might speculate from its positioning in Malcolm's broadly chronological anthology that he dates it as slightly earlier than *Sportive Wit*. Malcolm, *Origins of English Nonsense*, 216. 'T.W.' may refer to Thomas Woodward, who O'Callaghan classifies as 'Donne's young friend and fellow poet' in the 1590s. *The English Wits*, 20. If Woodward's lifespan and career rivalled the length of Taylor's, this Civil War poem might, likewise, represent a metamorphosis of his earlier sociable poetry.

The great Etruscan Emperour of Greece,  
Or Ptolomy that wonne the golden fleece;  
Or great Don Quixott, that swomme o're to Spaine,  
Or else St George the Dragon that hath slaine,  
Are nought to the Planets erraticall  
Which are plaine nets to catch poore men with all.<sup>350</sup>

The operating device of this poem is Swiss physician, theologian and philosopher Paracelsus (1493-1541), a Hermetic thinker known for his prognostications about oncoming calamity.<sup>351</sup>

The poem enacts a transportation that is at once geographic and symbolic: Paracelsus is discovered to reside in local Chelsea, while the poet envisions his English world as Paracelsus' native Swiss Alps. Accompanying this geographic exchange between periphery and core is eschatological chaos, two planes of knowledge here synthesised in the figure of the volcanic Mt Etna. Prognostics about the end-times are merged with the language of geographic extremity: Alpine terrain, fermenting Sicily. In the latter half of the poem, the feats of classical figures and picaresque heroes are confused, until this list of dubious champions are faced with an over-riding force: the movements of the 'Planets erraticall' dictating end times. The astrological signification of end times is merged with existing nonsense motifs – equinox, solstice, planets – to capture an assault on the English world through the image of a periphery folding in on itself.

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<sup>350</sup> Malcolm, *Origins of English Nonsense*, 216.

<sup>351</sup> These prognostications were later association with the Thirty Years War. Eugen Weber, *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), 86.

## 2. Emblem and Cipher: Encoding the Civil War

John Taylor's publication of *The World Turn'd Upside Down* in 1647 captures the increasing predominance of a nonsense aesthetic turned in on a perceived English core. The pamphlet's title is the latest iteration in a motif Taylor had experimented with before. *The World Turn'd Upside Down* is itself a republication of Taylor's earlier *Mad Fashions, Od Fashions* (1642) with few modifications, save the change in the title. Yet Taylor first trials this notion in an even earlier pamphlet, *The World Runs on Wheeles* (1635). The cover of this pamphlet shows a devil and a woman (perhaps a courtesan, given the later denotation of this figure as 'whorish *Flesh*') towing a globe poised on a chariot (Figure 10). The world in this depiction is stylised with the artifice of a globe miniature; continents are obscured by an earth grid and are surrounded by a belt with the signs of the zodiac. In his introductory explication of the emblem, Taylor lays out a standard moralistic frame:

*The Devill, the Flesh, the World* doth Man oppose  
And are his mighty and his mortall foes:  
*The Devill* and the whorish *Flesh* drawes still,  
*The World* on *Wheeles* runs after with good will.<sup>352</sup>

This moral dilemma Taylor considers a 'Picture topsie-turvie', and he closes the explication by concluding that the emblem represents 'The World turn'd upside downe, as all men know' (sig. A1<sup>v</sup>).

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<sup>352</sup> Taylor, *The world runs on wheeles, or, Oddes between cartes and coaches* (London: Henry Gosson, 1635), sig. A1<sup>v</sup>.

So, when *The World Turn'd Upside Down* was published in 1647, an assiduous reader would note that the rotation had been a long time coming. Yet if the woodcut of *The World runs on Wheeles* follows a certain devilish logic, the woodcut supplied to adorn *Mad Fashions* (and the later *World Turn'd Upside Down*) defies sense and relation (Figure 11). The woodcut presents a miscellany of nonsense, the only unifying theme of which is a reversal of order. The top of the woodcut is bookended by an upside-down church on the left and a candle on the right (neither item to scale). Between them, an eel and fish float through the sky (in the oeuvre of nonsense, one can't help but wonder if the fish is brainless and buttered). Directly below the church is a horse driving a chariot; below the candle is a wheelbarrow pushing a labourer. On the bottom of the frame are two mirrored pairs, a dog and a cat, both stalked by their prey. In the



Figure 10. Frontispiece to *The World Runs on Wheeles*, 1635.



Figure 11. Frontispiece in *The World Turn'd Upside Down*, 1647.



centre of this frame is a man wearing trousers and boots on his upper-body, and a shirt and gloves on the bottom. With this union of laboured stylistic symmetry and absurdist content, the woodcut figures as a pictorial expression of nonsense. Throughout the pamphlet, the woodcut emerges as an organising principle, representing the ‘Transform’d Metamorphosis’ of Britain.<sup>353</sup> At the close of the pamphlet, after anticipating the eschatological redemption of the tarnished ‘Church Militant,’ Taylor concludes that the woodcut ‘is the Emblem of the times’ (sig. A4<sup>v</sup>). This focalisation of the emblem echoes earlier nonsense precedents, including the woodcut by William Hole that inspired so many of the panegyrics published with *Crudities*. Yet by producing pictographic renditions of written nonsense, these emblems bring the idea of codification back into the frame by presenting a blunt, and highly literal, alliance of signifier and signified.

As these examples attest, by the 1630s and 40s Taylor’s early scepticism towards the stratified ludic games of the literary clubs evolved into a new embrace of the nonsense form. Yet this embrace does not seem to emerge from the aesthetic and social pleasure of nonsense, but instead reflects a new appreciation of its political utility as a codified language of critique. This change coincides with a substitution of Taylor’s earlier poetics of maverick class discontent – marked by vitriol and sycophancy in turn – to a more complex political positioning. First and foremost, this complexity is religious: throughout the 1640s Taylor released a number of pamphlets, including *Mad Fashions* and *A Swarme of Sectaries, and Schismatiques* (both 1641) critiquing the extremity of Puritan reforms.<sup>354</sup> Taylor’s pamphlets are careful not to isolate a

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<sup>353</sup> Taylor, *The world turn'd upside down: or, A briefe description of the ridiculous fashions of these distracted times*. (London: John Smith, 1647), A2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>354</sup> James Mardock describes the complexity of Taylor’s religious positioning, reminding us ‘that history does not often confine itself to binaries like Cavalier-Roundhead or Laudian-Puritan. Taylor was fiercely opposed to Popery

single sect for criticism; instead, he condemns extremism on both sides, and advocates for moderation and Royalist unity.<sup>355</sup> As Mardock observes, the form of nonsense is essential to realising this diplomatic strategy. The superfluity of nonsense conveys a scene of disarray which leaves little room for agency. Instead, Taylor repeatedly uses the passive voice to describe a metamorphosed England without charging Puritans with wrong-doing.<sup>356</sup> On the topic of his Royalist allegiance, however, Taylor's position is more definite. His backing of Charles is, according to Mardock, strategically disguised through reference to the Irish rebellion of 1641. In these references Mardock finds 'a prayer for the success of the English armies in putting down the Irish as code for a vehement rebuke of those who would take arms against their king in Britain.'<sup>357</sup> By the time Parliament assumed control in the 1650s, Taylor's use of nonsense as a codified mode of critique seems to have been entrenched.<sup>358</sup> *Nonsense upon Sence: or, Sence upon Nonsense* (1651-2) is often cited as an example of this, and the paradox of *serio ludere* is emphasised in the pamphlet's title.

Part of this appreciation of codified nonsense seems to result from Taylor's induction into the Cavalier class. At the same time, his use of folly has a different tone to that marking the earlier literary games of the Mitre/Mermaid groups. It seems to be guided primarily by utility,

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and radical schismatics alike, although on his travels he had made many friends both Puritan and Catholic. Like many of his contemporaries, he was dismayed by the iconoclastic tendencies of radical Protestant sects and defended the ceremonialism of the Laudian programme, which he saw merely as decency and reverence for good English tradition. On the other hand, he also lamented the decline of preaching in the established church and advocated a militant Protestant involvement on the Continent.' 'The Spirit and the Muse,' 2-3.

<sup>355</sup> Mardock, 'The Spirit and the Muse,' 3.

<sup>356</sup> Mardock, 'The Spirit and the Muse,' 3-4.

<sup>357</sup> Mardock, 'The Spirit and the Muse,' 4.

<sup>358</sup> See P.N. Hartle, "All his works sir"; Warren Wooden, *Children's Literature of the English Renaissance* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1986), 172. Emily Cock builds on their observations to explore the way the tropes of nonsense (such as impossibilia, puns and *conjunction oppositorum*) act to embed critique into the form of the poem. "Nonsense is Rebellion": John Taylor's *Nonsense upon Sence, or Sence, upon Nonsense* (1651-1654) and the English Civil War,' *Ceræ* 2 (2015): 1-23.

rather than the pleasure of cryptic exegetical games. For Warren Wooden, this political utility disqualifies Taylor's later nonsense from Chesterton's class of 'pure' nonsense verse, which delights in incongruity for aesthetic ends.<sup>359</sup> O'Callaghan takes this a step further, arguing that the new turn in nonsense verse is a departure from humanist culture: 'these are not forms of learned relaxation employed by the professional classes, nor is there any sense this play arises out of pedagogic exercises.'<sup>360</sup> Clearly, Taylor's Cavalier works embrace folly as a mode of political utility rather than play. Yet, while this view of the political utility of folly – a view for which Thomas More has often been seen as a mascot – emerges from Taylor's practice, it seems to reduce the more complex, aesthetic workings of the Menippean mode. In fact, the transition between the early nonsense of the literary clubs and this later Civil War and Interregnum output seems diminishing. While the playful epistemic circuits formed by the panegyrists delight in problematising interpretation, these later nonsense verses instead demand it, and demand its crudest form: pure substitution and translation. In this way, the political realities of the 1640s and 50s seem to circumscribe epistemological play; duress and utility produce a less complex form of Cavalier nonsense.

One instance of this utilitarian version of nonsense is Smith's 'Ad Johannuelem,' which Raylor specifically classes as a private code for illicit Cavalier communication.<sup>361</sup> Smith's poem is in a fairly standard form of nonsense mock-epic, complete with a long set of digressive scholarly footnotes. Raylor extensively glosses this poem and its footnotes to extrapolate coded

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<sup>359</sup> Wooden, *Children's Literature*, 172.

<sup>360</sup> O'Callaghan, *The English Wits*, 171.

<sup>361</sup> Raylor, *Cavaliers*, 182; 200-02. Raylor invokes the work of Lois Potter on the use of literary form (especially romance) to encode illicit correspondence. *Secret Rites and Secret Writing: Royalist Literature, 1641-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

references to the Battle of Naseby (1645), a searing military defeat for the Royalists which marked the beginnings of the Parliamentary ascent. These references include key figures of the battle – such as Lord Warwick Mohun, Phillip Skippon, Thomas Fairfax, Cromwell, Charles I himself – as well as the site of the conflict in Northamptonshire, and Raylor’s interpretive comments range from highly inferential to fairly indisputable. In the latter camp are references to a popular Civil War analogue, the conflict between Caesar and Pompey, ‘fought with (*f*) *Cæsar* on th’ (*g*) *Æmathian* plaines, / First with his dreadfull (*g*) *Myrmidons* came in / And let them bloom in the Hepatick veines’ (sig. D2<sup>v</sup>). In his annotation in footnote (*f*) at the close of the poem, Smith elaborates ‘*Æmathia*, is a very faire Common in *Northamptonshire*, *Strabo. lib. 321*’ (sig. D2<sup>v</sup>). Likewise, in his annotation in footnote (*g*), Smith makes a simple substitution, saying ‘These *Myrmidons* were *Cornish-men*’ (sig. D2<sup>v</sup>). So, Raylor elaborates straight-forwardly, Smith compares the two wars by situating the classical conflict in Northamptonshire, the site of Naseby, and invoking Cornishmen as soldiers. On the other hand, an example of the more inferential style of interpretation is Raylor’s comment that a reference to Pompey as ‘once Tapster of *New-Inne*’ (sig. D2<sup>v</sup>) invokes Oliver Cromwell, who was frequently lampooned for being a brewer before his parliamentary career. In a similar vein, Raylor observes that an allusion to Pheander, a general ‘so modest...that he was called the Maiden Knight’ (sig. D2<sup>v</sup>) is intended to summon the contemporary Thomas Fairfax, who was infamously meek.

Somewhere between these interpretive extremes – the self-explanatory on the one hand, the somewhat arcane on the other – is Smith’s reference to Endymion, the eternally slumbering youth, in the opening verse of the poem.

I Sing the furious battails of the Sphæres  
Acted in eight and twenty fathom deep,  
And from that (a) time, reckon so many yeares  
You'l find (b) *Endmion* fell fast asleep.

(a) There began the *Vtopian* accompt of years, *Mor: Lib. I. circa finem.*

(b) *Endimion* was a handsome young Welshman, whom one *Luce Moone* lov'd for his sweet breath; and would never hang off his lips: but he not caring for her, ate a bundance of toasted cheese, purposely to make his breath unsavoury; upon which, she left him presently, and ever since 'tis proverbially spoken [as inconstant as *Luce Moone.*] The *Vatican* cobby of Hesiod, reads her name, Mohun, but contractedly it is *Moone. Hesiod. lib. 4. Tom. 3.*

(sig. D2<sup>r</sup>)

Raylor observes that Smith's glossing in footnote (b) refers to Lord Warwick Mohun, who was viewed as inconstant for switching allegiance between King and Parliament. Yet we should note the time and labour it takes us to reach Smith's reference to Mohun – which reads practically as an aside – compared to his reference to Northamptonshire, or the Cornishmen of note (g).

Footnote (b) brims with nonsense tropes: gustatory allusion, mock exposition, and anachronistic play (*Endymion* as a handsome young Welshman being one example, toasted cheese another) which delights in chaos and category mistakes for their own sake. In a formal sense, footnote (b) is not a straight substitution; it is discursive, tangential, garrulous, with its reference to Mohun appearing as an afterthought at the end.

In outlining the interpretive manoeuvres of Raylor, I do not mean to problematise his conclusions, which are compelling. Rather, the array of interpretive actions required by the poem reveals its striking inconsistencies in form. The contrast between literal exposition and inference

speaks to the historically-awkward positioning of the poem, and the problematics of the Cavalier codification of nonsense broadly. ‘Ad Johannuelem’ buckles beneath the contradictory demands of the earlier tropes of nonsense on the one hand – with their celebratory semiotic nihilism – and those of ciphered communication on the other. The use of literal substitution and glossing rejects the playful anti-interpretive stance of the literary clubs. Footnote (*b*) exemplifies the mock scholarship of the nonsense tradition – it brings readers on a tangential journey that takes them further and further from the myth of Endymion, delightfully entangling it in anachronisms of the contemporary world. The reference to Lord Mohun, however, even figuring as a mock phonetic transcription, obstructs this. The vast nonsense edifice constructed by playful tangents is dismantled as it meets real-world literalism.

### **Turning out Folly: Between Play and Utility**

The intent of this chapter has been to illustrate the dynamic possibilities of global folly: an aesthetic language that spans sociable and political spheres, accommodating the demands of play, polemic and, ultimately, political duress. A contention of this chapter is that global folly adheres to a rhythm of chiasmus, an interplay of core and periphery that leaves geographic and social hierarchies unmoored. Thus global folly is complicit in a number of ‘turnings-out’: the exoticised Englishman, the politically-dispersed nation. Arguably, this process generates another, less visible, turning out: the gradual tightening and re-shaping of folly under the pressures of political duress. ‘Ad Johannuelem’ illustrates the disorienting inconsistencies of an aesthetic language torn between the pleasure of ludic freestyle and the demands of ciphered communication.

Raylor argues that the tension between serious allusion and the nonsense mode in ‘Ad Johannelem’ results in tonal chaos. In fact, he perceives these elements as combative, creating a scenario in which ‘mock-poetic genre and nonsensical mode attempt to neutralise (by rendering absurd or meaningless) the serious elements admitted into the poem.’<sup>362</sup> However, viewed within the dizzying epistemological frame of humanist folly – in particular, its tradition of rejecting the literalist exegete, from Maarten van Dorp to Malvolio – we could also consider the opposite: the blunt utility of codification (especially for political means) threatens the nonsense aesthetic. Raylor concludes that the use of nonsense in the poem figures as ‘minimalization techniques’ which attempt, and fail, to ‘erase defeat and its unfinished form.’<sup>363</sup> With this failed strategy, Royalist dismay is etched into the turbulent form of the poem, a response to Naseby that included ‘denial, minimalization, and, finally, silence.’<sup>364</sup> Yet the tension between freestyle nonsense play and the folly of political duress also plays a part in constructing this inconsistent tone. In ‘Ad Johannelem,’ we view an aesthetic turning-out: a form that problematises and pluralises the interpretive act collides with a political function that demands it. If the fool’s prerogative for sanctioned speech (enduringly attributed to the self-stylised play of Thomas More) once helped ignite humanist folly as a mode, this function also circumscribes its aesthetic potential. Responding to the demands of political duress, Cavalier folly turns out of interpretive play and into a coded singularity.

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<sup>362</sup> Raylor, *Cavaliers*, 185.

<sup>363</sup> Raylor, *Cavaliers*, 185.

<sup>364</sup> Raylor, *Cavaliers*, 185.

# Conclusion

Titian's *Flaying of Marsyas* (Figure 12) offers a forceful return to the Nietzschean dialectic with which this thesis opened. The painting represents Dionysian and Apollonian forces in stark opposition: grotesque satyr Marsyas is flayed alive for an act of hubris against Apollo. Titian's work is distinctive in its violence, and arresting in the *form* of its violence. The act of flaying is a pointed means of punishment because it yields the interiority of the object to the voyeuristic gaze

of the subject. In Titian's rendition, this exposure of viscera appears an end unto itself. When we view the body of the fool as an allegorical object, we might read Apollo's act of flaying as an expression of exegetical desire: the desire to transcribe and demystify interiority. In the literal open-and-shut logic of the Silenus Box, to read is to wrench. By positioning foolish bodies at an intersection of philological culture and material fact, this thesis has sought to trace the reverberations of the interpretive act, and the stakes of its

failure. These stakes, too, are suggested in the violence of Titian's image: if the form of Apollo's violence speaks to exegetical desire, its intensity discloses the high socio-political stakes of interpretation. In its brutality, Apollo's punishment suggests a libidinal outburst against the conditions of interpretive allegory.

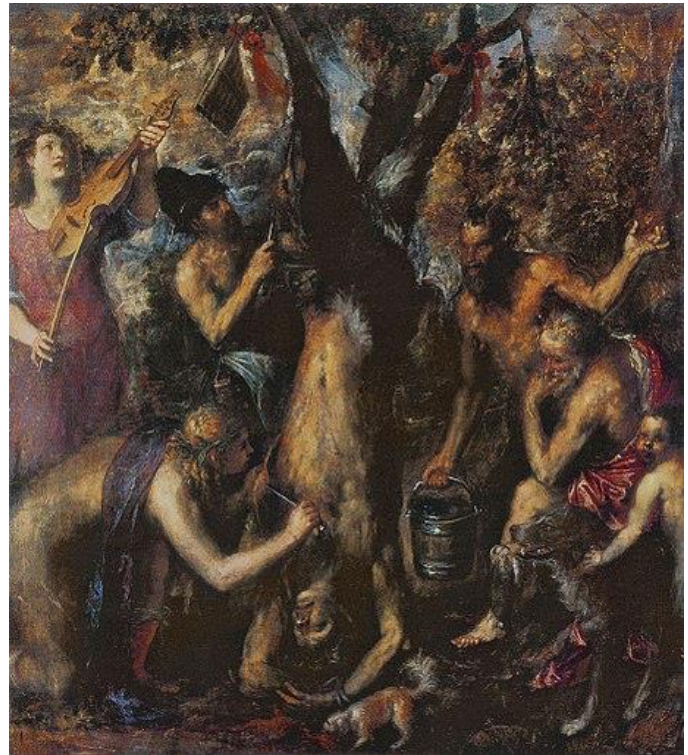


Figure 12. Titian, *Flaying of Marsyas*, c. 1570-76.



This thesis has enumerated these socio-political stakes through exploring the action of folly, as interpretive allegory, in a number of discursive fields: disciplinary debate, political counsel, mental illness, and globalism and travel. In each sphere, allegorical folly projects networks of interpretation, networks that can be configured to realise various epistemological, political and ethical ends. In the first two chapters, this thesis suggested that anxieties about inclusion in these epistemological networks might be used to persuade. Chapter One argues that Menippean modes, by producing irony as a codified form, construct exegetes – often with Scholastic credentials – whose literalism bars their comprehension. By centring marginal exegetes, these texts commentate meta-critically on the value of assuming particular interpretive frames: whether those of philological study, or the Pauline *Philosophia Christi*. Chapter Two transported this device to the Tudor Court, showing how interludes can dramatise moments of interpretive failure. *Magnyfycence* and *The Play of the Wether* merge the Menippean notion of codified folly with the function of the *specula principum* genre to produce an audacious twist: in these plays, folly's exegetes are analogues of Henry VIII, caught in interpretive negotiations with courtier-fool characters. By staging intervals of interpretive failure, followed by redemptive recognition, these interludes offer political counsel with a generative emphasis on monarchic self-awareness.

In its final two chapters, this thesis suggested that the Menippean aesthetic preference for marginalised bodies and forms enables a renegotiation of allegorical folly's scope and audience. In Chapter Three, I looked at the intersection of allegorical folly and mental illness via two Shakespearean fool-exegete pairings: Feste and Malvolio, and Lear's Fool and Lear. In *Twelfth*

*Night*, a familiar instance of interpretive failure through literalism leads to suggestive repercussions: Malvolio is maddened in the dark room. In some ways *King Lear* seems to pick up where *Twelfth Night* leaves off: the mentally-frail Lear gains epistemological closure (significantly, the closure of *self*-knowledge) via his fool, a reconfigured humanist avatar. If Feste is punitive, Lear's Fool is recuperative, facilitating an epistemological network founded on shared disability.

Chapter Four sketched a similar recuperation. It showed how travel literature and global motifs enabled a new form of codified, sociable folly: the nonsense verse of Jacobean tavern culture. The interpretive networks solidified through this sociable culture are, again, manifest in a figure on the margins: resentful 'water-poet' John Taylor. Ultimately, however, Taylor becomes central in the production of a new kind of nonsense: the nihilistic output of the Civil War that figures Cavalier discontent through images of an alien, peripheral England. With its renegotiation of the periphery into the core – both through the transportation of global motifs, and Taylor's induction into a new Cavalier status – this Civil War output disperses the hierarchies of allegorical folly, whether social or geographic.

In reading Titian's painting as an allegory for interpretation – an allegory for allegory – we might detect the stakes of interpretation, not just in Apollo's violence, but in its consequences. The outburst of violence in the painting does not leave the exegete untouched: Apollo himself, kneeling in a pool of Marsyas' blood, succumbs to the viscosity of the scene. Suggestively, then, this wrenching open of allegory leads Marsyas' gross embodiment to soak into Apollo's proportional form. This dynamic interplay of embodiment – alternating between

allegory and exegete – has been a central theme of this thesis. Exegesis, in particular exegetical failure, is figured many times over through an intensification of embodiment: Poliziano's lamias are blind, Magnificence and Malvolio maddened, Jupiter physically confined by Heywood's dramaturgy. Erasmus provides one way of conceptualising this trajectory in *Adagia*, when he introduces the image of the 'Reverse Silenus,' a device he uses to target clerical hypocrisy. The Reverse Silenus combines alluring shape with corrupted mind:

In every class of mortal men everywhere there are those of whom you would say, were you to inspect their outward bodily form, that they are human beings, and distinguished beings too; open the Silenus, and inside you will find maybe a pig or a lion, a bear or a donkey. Your experience will be the converse of what we are told in the fables of the poets about Circe's magic spells.<sup>365</sup>

The Reverse Silenus is one way of modelling this rhythm of embodiment – it physically manifests a flawed epistemological base. The Silenus and Reverse Silenus position allegory and exegete in a swivelling interplay of embodiment. Here the Dionysian and the Apollonian become enmeshed, even symbiotic: the precarity of epistemological systems is playfully captured in an aesthetic of the grotesque.

If we can trace the relationship between allegory and exegete through an interplay of embodiment, this interplay ultimately exhausts itself. *King Lear* liberates the body from this interpretive spiral by etching out new forms of knowledge that *emerge from* embodiment, rather than manifesting in it. Here the Menippean preference for subaltern bodies and forms enables a

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<sup>365</sup> Erasmus, *Adages*, 250.

reconfiguration of epistemic circuits: the bodies co-opted for interpretive allegory produce new forms of knowledge of their own. In *King Lear*, the humanist artificial fool becomes an adjudicator of communal disabled knowledge. In seventeenth-century nonsense verse, the fetishisation of the global ‘periphery’ comes to modulate the Englishman abroad, and then Civil War England itself. The three bodies of Menippean play – that of the allegory, the exegete, and the subaltern – challenge epistemological structures through their hybridising proximity. This renegotiation does not negate knowledge, but instead generates multiple, mobile epistemic spheres. By focusing on the vitality of Menippean forms we can continue to press for a more expansive view of the humanist project, one which presents apparently-closed literary networks as dynamic, mobile and surprisingly porous. In disentangling Renaissance Humanism from the many cultural tendrils obscuring it, we might view a surprising avatar at the centre of its literary production: a figure more Dionysian than Vitruvian.

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