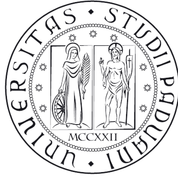

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CICLO XXVI

"Armine... thou art a foole and knaue":
The Fools of Shakespeare's Romances

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Abstract

La mia tesi propone un'analisi dettagliata dei personaggi comici nei *romances* Shakespeariani (*Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* e *The Tempest*) in particolare quelli creati appositamente per Robert Armin, attore comico di punta dei King's Men in quel periodo. Nel primo capitolo traccio la presenza di Armin nei quattro testi, individuando cioè gli indizi che rimandano alla sua figura e alla tipologia di comicità tipica dei suoi personaggi precedenti in Shakespeare e di quelli presenti nelle sue stesse opere. I quattro personaggi creati per lui da Shakespeare vengono analizzati in profondità nei seguenti capitoli, raggruppandoli a seconda dei loro ruoli sociali o professioni. Nel secondo capitolo mi occupo dei fools criminali, considerando *Pericles* e *The Winter's Tale*, dove i personaggi di Boult e Autolycus sono rispettivamente un ruffiano di bordello e un delinquente di strada. Nel terzo capitolo mi concentro invece sui personaggi che esibiscono o vengono discriminati per una reale od imputata deficienza congenita (*natural folly*): il principe Cloten in *Cymbeline* e Caliban in *The Tempest*. Per ciascun caso discuto il rapporto del personaggio con le fonti shakespeariane ed eventualmente con la tradizione comica precedente o contemporanea a Shakespeare, il ruolo all'interno del testo, e il modo in cui il personaggio suscita l'effetto comico. Una parte importante di questi due capitoli è dedicata ad un analisi storico-testuale dei personaggi in rapporto alla situazione storica dell'Inghilterra di fine Cinquecento/inizio Seicento per quanto riguarda lo sfruttamento della prostituzione, la criminalità derivante dal vagabondaggio (secondo capitolo, Boult e Autolycus), e la nozione di disabilità mentale in medicina e società (terzo capitolo, Cloten e Caliban). Nel corso dell'analisi dei personaggi cerco in particolare di evidenziarne le ambiguità e i tratti tragicomici, che sono importanti in relazione allo specifico genere drammatico a cui questi testi afferiscono. Inoltre, discuto la drammatizzazione dei personaggi in rapporto alla nozione di follia sia come depravazione nel tardo medioevo e nel rinascimento, sia come giocosa e risibile innocenza nei precedenti lavori di Robert Armin, cercando di dare ulteriore forza alle recenti linee di ricerca che vedono l'opera di Shakespeare come il risultato di una collaborazione con i suoi attori e in particolare con il suo comico principale. Il capitolo conclusivo raccoglie le analogie tra i quattro personaggi e mette a fuoco le differenze tra questi e i personaggi comici precedenti interpretati da Armin.

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Preface

Pericles, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* are a group of plays which have caused quite a controversy among recent criticism as concerns the choice of a conventional label that best describes their genre.[1] Edward Dowden in 1877 was the first to call them *romances*, a label that was supposed to emphasise the uncommonness of the circumstances and the "grave beauty" or "sweet serenity" of their atmospheres;[2] a label that is still widely used, but which in Shakespeare's time indicated chivalric tales in verse, and not drama. At the same time, if the plays do seem to have a lot in common with Greek romances, through medieval romances, contemporary prose or verse romances (e.g. Sidney's *Arcadia* or Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*) and Elizabethan dramatized romances (*Clyomon and Clamydes*, *Cambises*, *Love and Fortune*, *Mucedorus*), on the other the term is a little restrictive to account for the freedom Shakespeare shows in the handling of its conventions.[3] The other label with which these plays are commonly referred to is *tragicomedies*, which aptly takes into account the literary influences of other authors, such as Beaumont and Fletcher, who were testing this dramatic mode in Shakespeare's time,[4] after borrowing it from

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[1] For an overview of such issues see for example Barbara A. Mowat, "What's in a Name? Tragicomedy, Romance or Late Comedy", in Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard, eds., *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works*, Vol. 4, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, pp. 129-149, Gordon McMullan, "What is a 'late play'?", in Catherine M.S. Alexander, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's Last Plays*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 5-28 or Gordon McMullan, "'The Neutral Term'?: Shakespearean Tragicomedy and the Idea of the 'Late Play'", in Subha Muckherji and Raphael Lyne, ed., *Early Modern Tragicomedy*, Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007, pp. 115-132.

[2] Edward Dowden, *Shakspere*, London: Macmillan, 1877, pp. 55-56.

[3] For Shakespeare and romance see Howard Felperin, *Shakespearean Romance*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972, pp. 3-54. Also Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

[4] Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* was premiered in 1608 and probably first published in 1609. In any case, it almost certainly postdates *Pericles*. Beaumont and Fletcher wrote the tragicomedy *Philaster* probably in 1608-1609 but, since it shares some names and motifs with *Cymbeline*, scholars debate whether it predates Shakespeare's play or not. On tragicomedy see Verna A. Foster, *The Name and Nature of Tragicomedy*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003 esp. ch. 3 on Shakespearean tragicomedy, Joan Hartwig, *Shakespeare's Tragicomic Vision*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972, David L. Hirst, *Tragicomedy*, London and New York: Methuen, 1986, Marvin T. Herrick, *Tragicomedy: Its Origin and Development in Italy, France and England*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962, esp. ch. 8.

the Italian tradition, that found its greatest representative in Gianbattista Guarini, the first theorist of the genre (*Compendio della Poesia Tragicomica*, 1601) and the author of the tragicomic play *Il Pastor Fido* (1590). However, such a label adds the issue that other plays could fit into this category, such as *All's Well That Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida* or *The Merchant of Venice*. So sometimes the two names have been fused to call the plays *romantic tragicomedies*. Or other scholars have decided to go for the "neutral" designation "late plays" which, if on the one hand keeps problems of genre reasonably at bay, on the other may include also the texts written after *The Tempest* and does not seem completely fitting for *Pericles* which, being a collaborative work, is a "late" play for Shakespeare but not for George Wilkins; besides, this label shifts the question onto the definition of what "late writing" exactly means, in connection with authorship and style.[5] So it is clear how any name we give to these plays – *romances*, *tragicomedies*, *romantic tragicomedies*, *tragicomic romances*, *late* or *last plays*, *late Shakespearean comedies*, etc. – is cogent and problematic at the same time. However, being forced to choose a designation I have decided to stick mainly with the traditional *romances*, for reasons of clarity and completeness (as well as conciseness). This term actually includes the concept of tragicomedy: indeed, comparing these texts with the plots of pre-Shakespearean plays like *Mucedorus*, *Placy Dacy* or *Love and Fortune*, Barbara Mowat argues that "romance stories as dramatized on the early English stage are in essence tragicomic" in the sense that they "preceded formal 'breakdown' into tragedy and comedy".[6]

At any rate, whatever term is used to refer to *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest,* few critics currently object to the fact that these four plays do actually

[5] McMullan, "'The Neutral Term'", p. 122. On this topic see also Gordon McMullan, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007 or Russ McDonald, *Shakespeare's Late Style*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
[6] Mowat, "What's in a Name?", p. 140.

belong to the same group. Scholarly estimates have it indeed that they were all written in the years between 1607 and 1611, after the period of the great tragedies, in a row broken only by a possible revision of *King Lear* in 1610. Even if they may share something with earlier texts, their themes and general tone sets them quite some way apart from what came before: the blend and juxtaposition of tragic and comic elements are certainly at the core, in that beginnings that portray emotions typical of tragedies (e.g., Leontes' jealousy, Cymbeline and Prospero's revenges as well as that of Antiochus against Pericles), though deprived of the same sense of greatness,[7] lead to potentially disastrous consequences that are resolved through the key element of reunion, forgiveness and reconciliation, which pave the way for the conventional comic ending with marriages. These plays stage actual and feigned deaths, tempests and shipwrecks, savage beasts, royal children lost in early childhood, the relationship between fathers and daughters, cross-class romantic unions, perilous quests, great geographical distances, the passing of time and marvellous sea, mountain or country sceneries. All of this is accompanied by a powerful evocation of wonder, the use of the supernatural element, music, masques and spectacular stage effects, which were designed to take advantage of the Blackfriars Theatre – which the King's Men acquired in 1608 – and entice the more refined tastes of its audience.

Given their hybrid and experimental nature I thought it would be compelling to explore more in depth the role and nature of mirth and merriments in these texts, to see how they interact with the tone and issues of the plays. To do so, I have chosen in particular to concentrate on the character that in most of Shakespeare's plays is devoted to laughter-making and witty satire: the Clown or the Fool. Indeed, as in any other previous Shakespearean text, also in the romances we may find more than one character endowed with

[7] See Barbara Mowat, *The Dramaturgy of Shakespeare's Romances*, Athens (GA): University of Georgia Press, 1976, pp. 7-30.

comic traits, yet only one of them in each play has the star clown part and offers the most effective potential for laughter; that was indeed the part that Shakespeare designed to be played by the leading comedian of the company – which in the period of the late plays was Robert Armin – conforming to his persona and specific performance style.

So, approaching Armin's parts in the romances I asked myself some questions: does the clown in these texts look more like the clown in the tragedies, who usually appears in an isolated scene at the turning point of events to provide the audience with comic relief, or does he look more like the clown of the comedies, where he usually has a greater part? Does he join in the general marvel? What kind of themes does he bring into play? Do his skills or functions change in relation to the new dramatic and theatrical experience Shakespeare offered to his audience? What kind of response does he call for? What is the effect of "mingling kings and clowns", an often quoted critique by Sir Philip Sidney to what he called "mongrel tragi-comedy"?[8] Besides, given that *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* were not only among Shakespeare's last texts but also, as far as we know, among the last plays of the King's Men that starred Armin, did the playwright exploit the style of the actor playing the clown in the same way he did in the previous texts? And did the actor, approaching the end of his career, have anything new to offer the playwright? Thus the first chapter of my thesis focuses on the relationship between actor and role: after an introductory section where I give an overview of the life and works of Robert Armin along with the particular features of his clowning style as opposed to those of Will Kemp, his predecessor in Shakespeare's company, I move on to consider the parts in the romances he was likely to have played in the early performances: Boult, Cloten, Autolycus and Caliban. In particular, I close-read the texts to highlight the clues pointing at Armin's own person,

[8] Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry or The Defence of Poesy*, Geoffrey Shepherd and R.W. Maslen, eds., Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002, p. 112. The first edition came out posthumously in 1595.

physical characteristics, clowning style and outlook. The following chapters are devoted to a thorough discussion of each of the four characters, which are grouped according to their professions or social roles. So the second chapter examines the criminal fools in *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*, where Boult and Autolycus are respectively a brothel male-bawd and an eclectic rogue. In the third chapter, then, we find Cloten and Caliban from *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*, characters who display or are scorned for their real or alleged natural folly. In each case I consider the relationship between the role and Shakespeare's sources as well as the influences from previous comic traditions, and the ways in which the character elicits laughter. An important part of the chapters, however, is dedicated to a contextualization of the characters in the social, historical and cultural environment of the period. So I analyse Boult as a representative of the flourishing economy of prostitution in early modern England and Autolycus as a multifarious mirror of the consequences deriving from masterlessness and vagrancy. With Cloten and Caliban, instead, I explore the theme of natural folly or congenital deficiency in medicine and society, considering how the texts describe their condition. Throughout the analyses I also seek to emphasise any additional links between the characters and the outlook of Robert Armin as expressed in his works, in order to give a further contribution to recent trends in research that view Shakespeare's work as the result of a collaboration with his actors and in particular with his leading comedian, who – it is important to note – was the only published member of the company in the period besides the playwright. Finally, the conclusive chapter lists the analogies between the characters – in order to justify the grouping of the four texts also from the point of view of comedy – and the differences between them and the previous roles created for Armin in Shakespeare.

My reference edition for Shakespeare's plays is *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (second edition), edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Bible quotations are from the King James Version (*The Holy Bible*, London: Robert Barker, 1611).

I would like to thank the staff and librarians of the British Library and Senate House Library in London, where I carried out most of my bibliographic research, as well as the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the Shakespeare Institute Library in Stratford-upon-Avon (University of Birmingham) and the Frinzi Library of the University of Verona. My gratitude goes also to the Italian Association of Shakespearean and Early Modern Studies (IASEMS) and its executive board – Maurizio Ascari, Maria Cristina Cavecchi, Donatella Pallotti, Alessandra Petrina and Laura Tosi – for their scholarly advice and enthusiastic encouragement. I also thank Helen Hackett, Mario Melchionda, Paola Bottalla, Monica Santini, Andrew Hadfield and Denis Renevey for sharing with me their ideas about possible directions my research could take. Certain bibliographic resources would have been very difficult to retrieve, especially towards the end of my PhD work, without the prompt help of Sara Trevisan, Carla Trivellato and Licia Cavalet, whom I wholeheartedly thank.

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1. Actor and clown in Shakespeare's romances

1.1 Armin, the new clown

When William Kemp (d. 1610?) left Shakespeare's company in 1599 he was replaced as the new leading comic actor of the Lord Chamberlain's Men – and successively King's Men – by Robert Armin (1568-1615). It is not clear exactly why Kemp's professional relationship with the playwright who had written for him such roles as Costard in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Launcelot Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice,* Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* or Falstaff abruptly came to an end, whether he thought it was time to work his way doing what he was best at, jigging,[1] or whether the company itself forced him out in order to make room for Armin, the newly recruited comedian, and thus meet the demand for a less physical and more sophisticated type of clowning.[2] It is a fact, though, that after this occurrence Kemp left the theatre and went on tour with a successful nine-day morris dance performance from London to Norwich.

Armin's recruitment in Shakespeare's company coincided with the creation of a new type of stage clown, very different from Tarlton and Kemp. First of all, Armin did not have the same physical abilities as his predecessors. Kemp, like Tarlton, was of tall, robust and athletic build and had stunning physical skills.[3] He became famous by performing in England, Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark as a morris-dancer.[4] Morris dances were traditional folk choreographies where a lot of leaping and capering was involved and where dancers usually wore bells on their legs so that their jerky movements created both sound and

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[1] A jig, like the morris dance, was a particular type of Elizabethan folk dance. See below.

[2] See Christopher Sutcliffe, "Kempe and Armin: The Management of Change", *Theatre Notebook*, 50 (1996), pp. 122-134 and Martin Butler, "Kemp, William (d. in or after 1610?)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2011 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15334, accessed 16 July 2012].

[3] Information about Kemp's early life is extremely scanty and uncertain. David Wiles has produced the most exhaustive biography of Kemp yet, therefore my discussion of the actor's life and style is chiefly indebted to his book, *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. Wiles, p. 24.

[4] Wiles, pp. 31-34

rhythm. These dances were originally performed at court but they later reached the lower population, so that by the early sixteenth century they were normally to be seen at church festivals. They were the result of the combination between two other types of dance: the *round* or *carole*, where dancers faced each other, and the processional, where the dancing group moved along the city streets.[5]

At some point in his life, Kemp realized that the best way to pursue popularity and wealth was through theatre companies, rather than personal patronage, so in the early 1590s he joined the Lord Strange's Men. [6] In 1594, when Lord Strange died, a rearrangement of the acting companies took place and Kemp, along with other members of his company, moved over to the Lord Chamberlain's Men, who performed at the Theatre and the Curtain.[7] At the Curtain, especially, he had the chance not only to continue dancing but also to offer solo improvisation performances which he particularly enjoyed, as Tarlton had done. Besides, at the end of the plays where he performed the clown part, the audience eagerly awaited his jigs, that is rhyming pieces of verse, frequently centred on a bawdy occurrence, accompanied by music and lascivious group dancing. The presence of such a postlude also influenced the way in which Kemp's parts were managed in plays. Wiles notes that his clowns are generally absent from the final scene of the play and that their storyline is left off, as it were, "suspended". This is because the clown could have his own grand finale after the play where, through the jig, he could part from the audience in the manner he liked.[8] Because Kemp was a skilled solo comedian who loved improvising, we must not assume that the parts that Shakespeare wrote for him were played as they were originally: the actor could always add, cut or change his own lines and create a greater personal interaction with the audience, by

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[5] Mary E. Lamb, *The Popular Culture of Shakespeare, Spenser and Jonson*, New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 72.
[6] Wiles, pp. 34-35.
[7] Butler, 'Kemp', 2011.
[8] Wiles, p. 113. In pp. 43-60 Wiles discusses also four extant texts of jigs attributed to Kemp: two jigs of *Rowland* (1591), the jig of *Rowland's Godson* (1590) and that of *Singing Simpkin* (1595).

means of direct address, downstage playing or topical allusion.[9] Kemp's clown roles generally share some features. It is impossible to be certain about the actor's origins[10] but in performance his clowns (with the exception of Falstaff) are usually low class male subjects, namely simple-minded or unskilled servants: these characteristics, along with the use of extemporization, helped building the image of the clown as a plain Englishman, a figure very close to a large portion of the audience. Usually his comic characters are quite separated from the main plot of the play, and live in self-contained merriments[11] which generally do not add anything important for our understanding of the texts. They speak in prose – something which is related to the clown's role as an improvisator – so that they may result more spontaneous and funny. His characters are often quite dull, keen on laziness or loitering, eating, drinking and physical buffooning, so that they become the butts of others' laughter. In some cases, they may be quick-witted enough to make a fool of someone else, like Launcelot Gobbo, who deceives his old father in *The Merchant of Venice*; however, the example of Launce in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is more typical. In the scenes where he appears he is generally either alone or he speaks to some other servant seen as the reliable character of the two, constantly reminding the audience that the other is a fool who speaks nonsense and deserves ill-treating. Therefore Launce, no matter how bright his quips can be, is always perceived as a creator of quite a basic and undemanding type of humour, and not as the repository of some kind of uncommon knowledge, as Armin's fools will be. The same can be said for the swain Costard in *Love's Labour's Lost*, who shows a peculiar ineptitude with words – i.e. malapropisms, something which characterizes also Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* and – but overall has more relations with the main

[9] Sutcliffe, "Kempe and Armin", p. 124.
[10] Though it has been conjectured that he might have been connected with a rich Catholic family of Kent, the Kempes of Ollantighe (Butler, 'Kemp', 2011).
[11] Wiles, pp. 101-103.

characters of the play than the rest of Kemp's roles. On the other hand there is quite an evident separation from the main plot in plays like *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Romeo and Juliet,* where Kemp is respectively the beggar Christopher Sly, the protagonist of the induction to the actual play, and the Capulets' servant Peter, a minor character who interacts only with the Nurse and with the musicians who play after Juliet's death.[12]

Armin was a different kind of artist, therefore when he took the lead as the new comedian of the company, he subverted many of the clown role conventions set by Kemp before him. First of all he was an intellectual and a member of a socially relevant guild, that of the goldsmiths,[13] so that in his roles he generally did not raise laughter by projecting the image of the common low-class Englishman; on the contrary he strove to affirm his being *different*, both from the other characters on stage and from the audience and showed off his pride in being external to social dynamics and hierarchies.[14] Consequently, Armin's collaboration with Shakespeare's company determined the success of a series of fool roles which criticism has usually indicated as "witty fools" or "wise fools". The most representative members of this category are the "licensed fools", that is jesters in motley hired by a nobleman to entertain the court. They are "licensed" because they enjoy a degree of freedom of speech. The first and one of the most striking roles of this type is Touchstone in *As You Like It* (first performed in 1600), that was anticipated by Tutch, the educated, city-bred, sly fool of Armin's own play *Two Maids of More-Clacke.*[15] Then the roles of Feste in *Twelfth Night* (1600-1601), Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida* (1602), Lavatch in *All's Well That Ends Well* (1602-1603), and the Fool in *King Lear* (1605) followed. Other playwrights

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[12] Here I refer to the Peter of the Folio. In Q2 of *Romeo and Juliet* Peter has 55 lines and is allowed contacts also with Juliet's parents and Romeo.
[13] See 1.4.
[14] Wiles, p. 138.
[15] Robert Armin, *The History of the Two Maids of More-Clacke, with the Life and Simple Maner of Iohn in the Hospitall*, London: N.O., 1609. See 1.4.

wrote similar roles for him, therefore we find that in the same period Armin was listed in the cast of Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1599) as Carlo Buffone and in that of Marston's *The Malcontent* (1604) as Passarello. However, it is worth remembering that while it is reasonable to think that, because Armin was a sharer and an established member of the King's Men, there was always a role for him in any of Shakespeare's plays written after 1600, it does not mean that in every play we must find a witty fool like Touchstone or Feste. Sometimes Armin also played minor or more conventional clown-roles: the clown in *Othello* or *Anthony and Cleopatra*, the Porter in *Macbeth*, Pompey in *Measure for Measure,* the First Gravedigger in *Hamlet* or perhaps also Nym in *Henry V.* He might have also taken up some of the roles previously performed by Kemp. We can only try to guess what these are, but in the dedicatory epistle of *The Italian Taylor and His Boy,* Armin did refer to the fact that he was playing the role of Constable Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598-1599):

> Likewise, most affable Lady, kinde and debonere, the second of the first which I sawcily salute, pardon I pray you the boldnes of a Begger, who *hath been writ downe for an Asse* in his time, and pleads under *forma pauperis* in it still, not-withstanding *his Constableship and Office* (sig. A3r)[16]

Unlike Kemp, Armin was a much more versatile type of actor, and indeed there are plays where there is not a proper clown or fool role. For instance in *Timon of Athens* Armin's part was probably that of Apemantus, the Cynic philosopher, or in *Julius Caesar* he was probably the patrician Casca.[17] However, these last two characters do support Wiles' statement that Armin tended to play the role of socially relevant figures, rather than settling with country bumpkins.

From the point of view of physique Armin was the opposite of Kemp. In some plays, in particular, comments are made about his characters' short stature. In *Twelfth Night*, for instance, Feste, before donning his disguise as "Sir Topas the curate", says: "I am *not tall*

[16] Robert Armin, *The Italian Taylor and his Boy. By Robert Armin, Seruant to the Kings Most Excellent Maiesti*e, London: 1609. Italics, except in "*forma pauperis*", are mine.
[17] Wiles, pp. 152, 154.

enough to become the function well, *nor lean* enough to be thought a good student" (IV.ii. 7-8). Besides, we can learn some more details about him by analysing the nicknames he was given during his life. One of these, which we find on the title page of some of his works,[18] is "Snuff", which the *OED* defines as "the charred part of a candle wick", gives the idea of something small and of little importance. Then, in his dedication to Lady Mary Chandos in the Preface to Gilbert Dugdale's *A True Discourse of the Practices of Elizabeth Caldwell* (1604), Armin writes:

> Your good honor knowes *Pinck's poor heart*, who in all my services to your late deceased kind lord, never savoured of flatterie or fixion: and therefore am now the bolder to present your vertues, the view of this late truth.[19]

Hotson notes that a "pink" in the Elizabethan Age was each of the many little holes or cuts that could be used to decorate textiles. As for the "poor" addition, this might be a trait of modesty which Armin felt suitable to mention: indeed the word "Armine" in jargon meant "beggar" or "wretch".[20]

Moreover, his roles suggest that he was not particularly handsome. Thersites, for instance, is called "botch of nature" (*Troilus and Cressida*, V.i.5), an expression that alludes to something unfinished or carried out badly (*OED*). Moreover, some of his fools have grotesque features that associate them with animals: namely, Armin seems to feel a great affinity with dogs. So, for instance, Apemantus is called "dog" (I.i.204, 206), Thersites is called both "dog" (II.i.7, 52, V.i.57) and "cur" (II.i.41, 54, 87, V.i.26), Carlo Buffone is

[18] Specifically, in *Quips Upon Questions* (1600) and *Foole Upon Foole* (in the 1605 edition; the jestbook was first published in 1600). See 1.4.

[19] Gilbert Dugdale, *True Discourse of the Practices of Elizabeth Caldwell*, London: James Roberts, 1604, sig. D4v.

[20] Leslie Hotson, *Shakespeare's Motley,* London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1952, p. 114. Still as concerns Armin's stature, there is another possible piece of evidence in William Kemp's *Nine Daies Wonder* (London: E.A., 1600) – a report on his jig from London to Norwich. Here the author accuses somebody of libel, as he states that his work was written "to reprove lying fools" (sig. A2v), and he attacks a youth "a little stooping in the shoulders" (sig. D3v), a "penny poet"(sig. D4v) and author of "beastly ballets" (sig. D4v). Bart Van Es identifies this unspecified individual with Armin himself (see Bart Van Es, *Shakespeare in Company*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 165-166.)

termed a "feast-hound or banquet-beagle"[21] and Lear's Fool refers to himself when he says that "truth's a dog must to kennel" (*King Lear*, I.iv.110). Kemp, on the other hand, never degrades himself to the animal level but on the contrary his Speed in the scene with the dog in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* raises his pet to the human level[22] not only because he talks to him but also because he considers him capable of human feelings or lack of feelings. In Armin's case, intellectual ability and wisdom contrast sharply with the kind of physical image his fools project.

To sum up, he was of small build, almost dwarfish, though not skinny, and quite ugly too. He was certainly no dancer, but he was skilled in mimicry, singing and ballad-making. In the preface to his play *Two Maids of More-Clacke* he writes that he was "requested both of Court and Citty, to shew" Blue John "in private",[23] so that it may be deduced that Armin, aside from theatre performances, also engaged in one-man shows in private households where he gave a sample of his talent as mime of the natural fools he observed when he was on tour.[24] His own works, then, give support to the idea that he was a singer (perhaps a countertenor, as in the dedication to *A Nest of Ninnies* he writes "such a one died in your debt, and thats a Countertenor many a one sings");[25] in *Two Maids* in particular both Blue John and Tutch have some sung lines, while in Shakespeare's plays many of Armin's fools sing – for example Touchstone, Feste, Lavatch, or Lear's Fool. Songs and ballads are two of the various communication codes Armin could use on stage. His artistic and intellectual skills implied that he was free of any traditional constriction; while Kemp's fools had to stick to prose, because of their limited social relevance, Armin's could switch to verse.

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[21] Ben Jonson, *Every Man Out of His Humour*, Helen Ostovich, ed., Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001. Characters, l. 25.
[22] Wiles, p. 148.
[23] Robert Armin, *An Old Spelling Critical Edition of The History of the Two Maids of More-Clacke*, Alexander S. Liddie, ed., New York: Garland, 1979, p. 104.
[24] C.S. Felver, *Robert Armin, Shakespeare's Fool: A Biographical Essay*, Kent: Kent State University Press, 1961, p. 15.
[25] Robert Armin, *A Nest of Ninnies Simply of Themselves Without Compound*, London: T.E., 1608, sig. A2v.

Finally, it has been noted how, in accordance with his solo-career as a morris-dancer, Shakespeare's former comedian tended to dominate the stage, so that his characters are normally to be found – often alone on the stage – in a sub-plot which, though not vital for the dynamics of the play, was an acclaimed entertainment for the audience, together with the separate postlude where the actor could shine even more. Armin, on the contrary did not dominate the stage as much as Kemp, so neither did he normally engage in long monologues nor did he extemporise. His fools would prefer instead to prove their wit by battling verbally with a series of unfortunate victims or "foils".[26] Consequently in the texts we may see how they take advantage of a privileged fool-master relationship, and/or they move in groups, often made up of three elements: Feste, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew in *Twelfth Night,* the Fool, Poor Tom and Lear in *King Lear*, or Pompey, Elbow and Froth in *Measure for Measure* are just some examples of such trios, who are very well represented also in the later plays, as will be shown.

1.2 Erasmus, wise fools and Armin's descending parabola

The hallmark of Armin's clowning – and the object of most attention from criticism on the stage clown in Shakespeare – was, as I anticipated earlier, the "fool" proper or "licensed" fool, a character present in works datable to the time span between 1600 and 1605 – from *As You Like It* to *King Lear*. Touchstone in *As You Like It* is the first of the series of professional entertainers who pretend to be witless in order to beat their foils by wittily bending words and logic to their will – for this reason they may be defined, in early modern terms, "artificial fools". The novelty of the stage fool, with respect to the earlier clown – is that he has the privilege, deriving from his master's consent, to satirize anyone he likes, up to a certain point,

[26] Wiles, pp. 159-162.

without being punished. According to Jacques, this type of activity can even heal the world of its vices:

> JACQUES Cleanse the foule bodie of th'infected world,
> if they will patiently receive my medicine (*As You Like It,* II.vii.62-64)

All of Shakespeare's witty fools, then, acquire the extraordinary function of offering a distorted perspective through which characters in the scene and audience alike may consider the events that take place in a different way. Some of them are endowed with even more skills than others. Feste, in this sense, is the most "professional" or "artificial" fool of all because his witticism is combined both with the talent of mimicry and with that of minstrelsy, thus making the most of Armin's multiple skills – Touchstone, for instance, only seldom sings.

However, there is another reason why Armin's witty fools are particularly compelling. The arrival of the new comedian in the company seems to have brought about in Shakespeare's dramatic wit the embracement of the type of philosophy that Erasmus proclaims in his *Praise of Folly* (1511).[27] In this book the allegorical figure of Folly (*Stultitia*), represented by a fool in motley, comments on the folly of the world. She seeks to prove that, though human beings generally despise the idea of folly, she is the most worshipped deity of all because she is to be found everywhere. She attempts to answer the fundamental question "Who is the real Fool?" and by the end of her analysis she succeeds in demonstrating how folly is universal in the human world. To achieve in part this result she catalogues many different typologies of people – e.g. from friends, husbands and wives to noblemen, schoolmasters, lawyers, theologians, scientists, members of the Church, philosophers, even Jesus Christ himself – and, one by one, she shows how each of them, for diverse reasons, is a fool. She drives home her point that without folly there would be no life,

[27] The first translation into English came out in 1549 (Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folie or Moriae Encomium. A Booke Made in Latine by That Great Clerke Erasmus Roterodame. Englisshed by Sir Thomas Chaloner Knight*, London: Thomas Berthelet, 1549).

because in order to live and put up with other people everyone needs to delude themselves and turn a blind eye on their defects. In general, to support her arguments she makes a selective use of the authoritative sources by referring for instance to the classics, to philosophers and also to the Scriptures. The novelty of Erasmus' approach is that in his essay it is Stultitia itself who, by holding up a mirror to society, seeks to expose its absurdity at all levels. The style that Erasmus uses in the book is called *serio ludere*, or "joking seriously", that is to tell the truth by apparently raising laughter.[28] Armin's wise fools, then, are not Erasmian in the sense that they are similar to the different categories of fools described in the essay, but rather they can be identified with the voice of Stultitia, who cynically expresses her views on the human world. While with her sharp irony she gradually demolishes the whole society, she also demonstrates how the individuals who are traditionally considered the seat of folly, natural fools, are actually the only sane ones, because they manage to be inherently happy without using self-illusory stratagems:

> idiots, fools, nitwits, simpletons [...] have no fear of death, and that surely frees them from no small evil. They're also free from pangs of conscience. Tales of the dead hold no terrors for them, and they've no fear of ghosts and specters. They are neither tortured by dread of impending disaster nor under the strain of hopes of future bliss. In short, they are untroubled by the thousand cares to which our life is subject. They don't feel shame, fear, ambition, envy, or love. Finally, if they come still closer to dumb animals in their lack of reasoning power, the theologians assure us they can't even sin.[29]

She continues reflecting on how fools are exquisitely positive people, as it seems that they have received from the gods the "gift of relieving the sadness of human life".[30] Therefore their particular mirth has earned them, if not the esteem, at least the affection of the so-called "wise", who in some cases consider them essential for their well-being:

> They are moreover the favourites of kings, so much so that many great rulers can't eat a mouthful or take a step or last an hour without them, and they value their fools a long way above the crabbed wiseacres they continue to maintain for the sake of appearance. The reason for their preference is obvious, I think, and shouldn't cause surprise. Wise men have nothing but misery to offer their prince; they are confident in their learning and sometimes aren't afraid to speak harsh truths, which will grate

[28] See Indira Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008, pp. 171-173.
[29] Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, Anthony H. T. Levi, ed., Betty Radice, transl., London: Penguin, 1993, p. 55. This translation, like the first English translation of 1549, is based on the last text revised by Erasmus himself, which was published in 1532.
[30] Erasmus, p. 55.

> on his delicate ear, whereas clowns can provide the very thing the prince is looking for – jokes, laughter, merriment, and fun.[31]

But the important thing is that "they are the only ones who speak frankly and tell the truth" while the purported wise man "has two tongues, as Euripides also says, one to speak the truth with, the other for saying what he thinks fits the occasion".[32] Shakespeare and Armin's wise fools or "artificial fools", then, are the result of the combination between the qualities of a natural fool with the irony and superior knowledge of Erasmus' Stultitia. With an important disclaimer, though, which Stultitia herself makes explicit:

> The words which would cost a wise man his life are surprisingly enjoyable when uttered by a clown. For truth has a genuine power to please if it manages not to give offence, but this is something the gods have granted only to fools.[33]

Not only does this statement overturn our understanding of Erasmus' arguments – is Stultitia reliable? Are we actually supposed to believe her thesis or is it all meant to raise laughter? – but it also clarifies once again the role of the wise fool on the stage. Armin himself seems to show how his thinking is indebted to Stultitia's kind of philosophy (or *foolosophy*)[34] displayed in the last quotation above when he states that "fools artificial with their wits lay wait",[35] a concept reworded and clarified in *As You Like It* when Duke Senior says that Touchstone "uses folly as a stalking horse and under cover of that he shoots his wit".[36] Besides, Armin makes a large use of the Erasmian wise/fool dichotomy in his works, and especially in *Quips Upon Questions*. The following examples from Armin's jestbook and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* show how both Snuff and Feste label the ordinary thinking of their interlocutors as folly:

> Who began to live in the worlde?
> Adam was he […] and was thus disgraced,
> better for him, he had been the last.

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[31] Erasmus, pp. 55-56
[32] Erasmus, p. 56.
[33] Erasmus, p. 57.
[34] Stultitia calls those who think themselves wise *morosophoi* or "foolish-wise" (see Erasmus, p. 13).
[35] Robert Armin, *Foole Upon Foole Or Six Sortes of Sottes*, London: 1600, sig. A4r.
[36] *As You Like It*, V.iv.104-105. M.C. Bradbrook, *Shakespeare the Craftsman. The Clark Lectures 1968*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968, pp. 57-58.

Thou art a foole: why? For reasoning so,
but not the first, nor last, by many mo. (*Quips Upon Questions,* sig. A1r)

FESTE Good madonna, why mournest thou?
OLIVIA Good fool, for my brother's death.
FESTE I think his soul is in hell, madonna.
OLIVIA I know his soul is in heaven, fool.
FESTE The more fool, madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul, being in heaven. Take away the fool, gentlemen. (I.v.62-68)

The greatest feature Erasmus' Folly and Shakespeare's wise fools share is that, through a particular style made up of quibbles and chop-logic plus a cunning blend of matter and irony,[37] they all comment on folly. Thus, for instance, Touchstone exposes the folly of court manners and of choosing country life, Feste the folly of suffering and melancholy and mean Thersites the folly of bringing war. But the most Erasmian fool of all is undoubtedly *King Lear's* Fool, and there is a general accordance among scholars that with this character Shakespeare reaches the real apex of the genus of the stage fools. This is chiefly due to the fact that it is the only one employed in a tragedy[38] – perhaps, we may add, the darkest tragedy of all. He is the fool most deeply connected with the central action of a play. The foil against whom he sharpens his wits is not a simpleton or a melancholic, but an old man turning mad because of his own tragic actions: Lear, the protagonist. The Fool satirizes his master's decision to give away his lands to his daughter – thus becoming dispossessed and at the mercy of Goneril and Reagan's whims – and he does that through an exquisite deployment of the theory of foolish wisdom and wise folly. The two memorable examples that follow illustrate the point:

FOOL [to Kent] Sirrah, you were best take my coxcomb.
KENT Why, Fool?
FOOL Why? For taking one's part that's out of favour. Nay, and thou canst not smile as the winds sits, thou'lt catch cold shortly. There, take my coxcomb. Why, this fellow has banished two on's daughters and done the third a blessing against his will. If thou follow him, thou must needs wear my coxcomb. (Quarto, I.iv.94-101)

FOOL The lord that couselled thee

[37] R.H. Goldsmith, *Wise Fools in Shakespeare,* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1958, pp. 13-14.
[38] Thersites is actually a court jester in *Troilus and Cressida*, but while the play was listed under the tragedies in the First Folio, it is quite a problematic text that does not well fit the genre and is inherently different from any of Shakespeare's great tragedies.

> 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. (Quarto, I.iv.135-142)

Lear's Fool marks the point when the jester's wisdom attempts to attain its highest result: curing the real, actual, tragical folly of a madman, though he ultimately fails. It is the play where the reversal of roles is most evident: the fool becomes paradoxically the sane one of the two. Also the use of songs, mixed to witty talk, is pushed to the limit of its possibilities, as they do not only entertain the audience or display Armin's talent, but they become also an effective means to deploy the fool's prophetic power and his *foolosophy* – this is very well displayed in the second quotation above, which is actually a song. All the features which are to be found in the earlier, clever fools and which heavily contributed to the creation of this new category of comic characters also endow the quintessential Fool of *Lear*, whose wits are directed to the most elevated aims. At the same time, though, he is also the one who reaches the highest degree of humanity: while normally characters like him tend to be quite insensitive and egotistical, the feeling of sincere love and affection which ties him to his master is the reason why he is the only one who accepts to stay with ranting Lear when no one else lingers.

The Fool's early withdrawal in III.vi of *King Lear* marks the point where this type of character definitively exhausts his power. Lear's madness reaches its peak and at the same time human institutions collapse so that there is no longer need of the distorted perception of a Fool who, not being part of the human world based on power and politics, comments on the folly of ordinary life.[39] Thus, Lear's Fool is normally considered Armin's greatest effort and the last of his and Shakespeare's fools. The end of the era of the fool in Shakespeare is

[39] See Roberta Mullini, *Corruttore di Parole: Il Fool nel Teatro di Shakespeare*, Bologna: CLUEB, 1983, p. 67.

concretely enacted with the abandonment of the character in a key moment of the text of *King Lear*. In the Quarto, after uttering the last line in the mock trial against Goneril ("Cry you mercy, I took you for a join-stool"; III.vi.47) and leaving the stage a few lines later, he is not to be seen any more. More dramatically, in the Folio version of the play the Fool definitively departs after famously announcing: "I'll go to bed at noon" (III.vi.43). After Lear's Fool there is apparently a grey area where Armin is still the same talented actor but in the texts the fool is not a professional court entertainer any more: the importance of such a character diminishes and he starts going out of fashion. According to Mullini the decadence of the stage fool, who represents a figure whose license is proportional to the power of the king, has historical reasons: it documents indeed a mutating conception of the royal institution at the end of Elizabeth's reign, coinciding with the increasing power of the middle classes. For this reason, the presence of the court fool on stage seems an expression of the Elizabethan, more than of the Jacobean society.[40]

Whatever the reason for the playwright's choice of writing this type of fool out of his plays, criticism on Armin but also on the shakespearean clown generally does not pay more than passing attention to the comic characters after Lear's Fool: these, except very few exceptions, are regarded as not interesting enough any more because they do not make any step forward in the definition of the genre. Thus the fools of the romances belong to this neglected group of characters. Felver's comment at the end of his long excursus on Armin's characters in Shakespeare is emblematic: "the later fools contribute little or nothing new to the genre which reaches its supreme expression in the part of Lear's Fool".[41] Before concluding his discussion by looking quite attentively at the "saucy clowns" of Marston's *The*

[40] See Mullini, *Corruttore*, pp. 57-58 and Roberta Mullini, *Il Fool in Shakespeare*, Rome: Bulzoni, 1997, pp. 91-94.
[41] Felver, p. 62.

Malcontent (1604)*,* Wilkins' *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* (1605-1607) and Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy* (1607-1611), he devotes a couple of lines just to pointing out the characters that Armin might have played in Shakespeare's romances, with slightly more emphasis on Autolycus. Felver bases this discussion on *The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company*[42] by T.W. Baldwin, who devotes a whole section on the company comedian's roles and offers his theories on Armin's parts also after *King Lear*, though he does not provide enough support to his arguments, which are partly challenged by subsequent critics, especially by David Wiles. Bradbrook in 1968, discussing Armin's later career, does not mention any of the characters after Lear's Fool.[43] One of the very few exceptions is Wiles who, in his chapter on Robert Armin*,* does indeed take into consideration, though again quite briefly, the characters of Cloten, Autolycus and Caliban, especially in relation to the already mentioned conventions of Armin's roles as opposed to Kemp's.[44] One of the latest works about actors and their roles in Shakespeare's company is David Grote's *The Best Actors in the World: Shakespeare and His Acting Company*[45] but his discussion of Armin's later parts is more based on speculation rather than accurate analysis, so it seems far from constituting as serious a work of reference as Wiles' book. Considering general discussions of the clown or fool in Shakespeare we get to similar conclusions. Landmark studies like Olive M. Busby's *Studies in the Development of the Fool in the Elizabethan Drama*[46] and Goldsmith's *Wise Fools in Shakespeare* only discuss Shakspeare's court fools, and recent publications are only slightly more satisfactory. Robert H. Bell in *Shakespeare's*

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[42] Thomas W. Baldwin, *The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1927.
[43] See Bradbrook pp. 67-74.
[44] See Wiles, pp. 153-154, 155-157, 160-161 and 162. Most of all, though, he discusses the character of Cloten.
[45] David Grote, *The Best Actors in the World: Shakespeare and His Acting Company*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002. See especially pp. 192-193.
[46] Olive M. Busby, *Studies in the Development of the Fool in the Elizabethan Drama*, Humphrey Milford: Oxford University Press, 1923.

Great Stage of Fools[47] gives an account of the comic roles over the whole course of Shakespeare's theatrical career, but as concerns the clowns of the romances he considers only *The Tempest* without even mentioning, at the very least, Autolycus from *The Winter's Tale*. A more complete overview is given by Bente A. Videbæk in *The Stage Clown in Shakespeare's Theatre*:[48] all of the romances are taken into consideration though they are all inserted into the "minor roles" chapter of the book, which of course gives more space to Kemp's major clowns and Armin's court fools. It is interesting, however, that though the author places Caliban in the category of the "servant clowns" with the comic characters of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *Timon of Athens*, he at least attempts to find a common ground between the other three romances, whose clowns are grouped under the debatable label "miscellaneous clowns", along with the Gravediggers in *Hamlet* and the Murderers in *Richard III*. Yet, he neglects Cloten from *Cymbeline*. The only few attempts that have been made to isolate the clowns of the romances from the plethora of Shakespeare's comic characters and discuss them together have resulted not so much in thorough monographs but in articles which, however, consider only select issues, as for example John Russell Brown's "Laughter in the Last Plays" and Joan Hartwig's "Cloten, Autolycus, and Caliban: Bearers of Parodic Burdens"[49] which, however, does not include *Pericles*.

Yet, because of the peculiar type of texts where they are inserted, I believe that Armin's last fools in Shakespeare do have more interesting features than are usually given credit for. Therefore, in the chapters to come I will attempt to examine as exhaustively as possible the comic roles in Shakespeare's romances, by looking at them from different

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[47] Robert H. Bell, *Shakespeare's Great Stage of Fools*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

[48] Bente A. Videbæk, *The Stage Clown in Shakespeare's Theatre*, Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1996.

[49] John Russell Brown, "Laughter in the Last Plays", in John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris, ed., *Later Shakespeare*, London and New York: E. Arnold, 1965, pp. 103-126; Joan Hartwig, "Cloten, Autolycus, and Caliban: Bearers of Parodic Burdens" in Carol McGinnis Kay and Henry E. Jacobs, eds., *Shakespeare's Romances Reconsidered*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978.

perspectives. I will start by tracing the presence of Armin in *Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale and The Tempest*, to investigate more systematically how the actor's personal and artistic traits forged his last characters. To attain this, Armin's own works will also be helpful. Therefore it will be convenient to start by giving an account of the life of the actor and his writings.

1.3 Life and times of Robert Armin

Robert Armin was born in Norfolk in 1568, four years after Shakespeare: his father, John, was a tailor of King's Lynn who had at least two more children.[50] The first record we have of him tells us that in 1581 he started an apprenticeship with John Lonyson, a goldsmith of Lombard Street in London.[51] In 1582 Lonyson died but, because Armin would die a free man, it means that he was either trained by some other goldsmith and completed his term eleven years later or was freed of his apprenticeship beforehand.[52] As Bradbrook notes, the goldsmiths were a socially elevated craft in London at the time, so Armin's family had to be quite wealthy, which explains also how he had enough money to get a good education,[53] that included tuition in Latin and Italian. His initiation to the multifarious art of theatrical clowning, though, was apparently due to his intimacy with Richard "Dick" Tarlton, the most popular clown of the age, who, at some point between 1581 and 1588, the year of his death, started considering Armin his "adopted" son. In a 1600 jestbook put together posthumously under the name of *Tarlton's Jests*,[54] we are told an anecdote about how Tarlton first met

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[50] Martin Butler, "Armin, Robert (1563–1615)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2012 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/647, accessed 16 July 2012].
[51] Felver, p. 10.
[52] Hotson, p. 117 and Felver, pp. 11-12.
[53] Bradbrook, p. 51.
[54] A jestbook, as will be later clear, may be generally defined as "a collection of comic prose tales or anecdotes designed for the entertainment of the reader", though other types of texts, like jest-biographies or collections in verse may occasionally fit the genre (F.P. Wilson, "The English Jestbooks of the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries", *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 2 (1938/1939), 121-158, p.122).

Armin. The anonymous author says that Tarlton, who had already made much money at the time, owned a few properties in London. One of these was a tavern in Gracious Street which he let to a man who was indebted to Armin's master. Young Armin was often sent by his master to collect the money in installments from this man. One day the man did not have money to pay Armin so he told him that

> hee must beare with him. The man's name being Charles, Armin made this verse, writing it with chalke on a wainescot:
>
> > O world, why wilt thou lye?
> > Is this Charles the Great! That I deny.
> > Indeed Charles the great before,
> > But now Charles the Lesse, being poore.
>
> Tarlton comming into the roome, reading it, and partly acquainted with the boyes humour, comming often thither for his master's money, tooke a piece of chalk, and wrote this ryme by it:
>
> > A wagge thou art, none can prevent thee;
> > And thy desert shall content thee.
> > Let me divine. As I am,
> > So in time thou'lt be the same,
> > *My adopted sonne therefore be*,
> > *To enjoy my clownes sute after me*.
>
> And see how it fell out. The boy reading this, so loved Tarlton after, that regarding him with more respect he used to his playes, and fell in a league with his humour: and private practise brought him to present playing, and at this houre performes the same, where, *at the Globe on the Banks side men may see him.*[55]

However, because the incident is never mentioned in any of Armin's works, we do not know if this story is myth or reality, or if it was simply meant to tell people that Armin was as good a clown as the more famous Tarlton.[56] In particular, as Nora Johnson claims, it voices the audience's perception of the clown as a "mystical clown being, an almost essential identity":

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[55] *Tarlton's Iests Drawne Into Three Parts: His Court-wittie Iests, His Sound Cittie Iests, His Country Prettie Iests. Full of Delight, Wit, and Honest Myrth*, London: Thomas Snodham, 1613, sig. C2r. Italics are mine. The jestbook was first printed in full in 1611, but this version is not extant. Yet, in the preface to his 1844 edition of the text, James Halliwell-Phillips claimed he was using that version (*Tarlton's Jests and News Out of Purgatory*, James O. Halliwell-Phillipps, ed., London: F. Shoberl, 1844, p. 2). The first part of the text was originally printed probably in the 1590s and the second part was inserted in 1600 by the London printer Thomas Pavier. There may have been other reprints before 1611 – perhaps one came out in 1608 – but none of these versions are extant. See Peter Thomson, "Tarlton, Richard (*d.* 1588)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26971, accessed 19 Sept 2012]. Feather ascribes the work to Armin himself. See J.P. Feather,"A Check-List of the Works of Robert Armin", *Library*, 26 (1971), pp. 165-172 (168).

[56] Felver, p. 13.

> Like Simeon in the temple, Tarlton embodies the longing of the people of London for their next comic savior. The story exists because there is a prevalent desire to make the representative of mirth something more than well rehearsed. He is a unique individual. He is chosen.[57]

At any rate, from this passage we learn that by 1600 Armin was already a well-established member of the Chamberlain's Men at the Globe. It also tells us something about the process of becoming a comic actor or the training of an early modern comedian which, all in all, does not differ much from that of our contemporary comedians. The art of clowning, like any craft, was learnt through imitation of expertise: a new comedian's style was the product of a tradition which he reworked to best suit his tastes and capabilities and from which he diverged to create his own particular technique. As I will exemplify in a moment, though Armin developed into a very different clown from Tarlton, he still retained some of his attitudes towards his own preparation, so that the mark of the master was still somehow recognizable in his art. Tarlton, as the first "professional clown" in the Elizabethan age, was also the one who had the greatest influence on subsequent comedians. John Singer, for example, the clown of the Admiral's Men between 1594 and 1603, had worked with Tarlton while they were both members of the Queen's Men,[58] probably in 1583.[59] Kemp's name was also frequently linked with his in that he was considered by his contemporaries Tarlton's successor, both in the favour of the general public and in that of the Queen, who enjoyed his performances on the stage.[60]

Few details are known about how Armin spent the years between 1590 and 1599. The first dramatic company in which Armin worked was probably the provincial troupe of Lord Chandos' Men, patronized first by Giles and then by William Brydges, the fourth Lord Chandos. With this company he had the chance to travel around the country, namely in the

[57] Nora Johnson, *The Actor as Playwright in Early Modern Drama*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 28.
[58] Wiles, p. 11.
[59] See Edmund K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951, p. 339.
[60] Wiles, p. 28.

West Midlands, York and East Anglia, where he encountered and examined some of the natural fools he would be using as a basis for his stage clown performances. If new evidence arose actually confirming the relationship between Armin and Tarlton, we could observe that this kind of "scientific method" employed in the art of clowning is one of the most valuable lessons which the student might have learned from the master, who also drew inspiration from real madmen and natural fools to prepare his sketches.

Another company with which Robert Armin's name is associated is that of the Children of the King's Revels,[61] who performed Armin's own play *Two Maids of More Clacke*[62] at the Whitefriars. In these boys' performances he was probably the only adult actor. The title page of this last work, along with that of *Quips Upon Questions (A Clown's Conceit on Occasion Offered)*, published in 1600, showcases the author's pseudonym "Clunnico de Curtanio Snuffe", that is "Snuff, the Clown of the Curtain". This may indicate that Armin joined the Chamberlain's Men when they were still performing at the Curtain in the summer 1599, before moving to the Globe. The truth, though, is that there is no absolute certainty that Armin replaced Kemp as soon as he left Shakespeare's company in 1599, so Felver makes two more hypotheses: either Armin referred to himself as the clown of the Curtain while already performing at the Globe because he knew that in that way people would recognize him more easily and his printed works would sell, or in 1599-1600 he was a member not of Lord Chamberlain's Men but of another company that was performing at the Curtain, perhaps

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[61] A very short-lived company of which not much is known; managed by Martin Slater, actor of the Lord Admiral's Men. They probably acted until 1608 or 1609 (see Chambers, pp. 64-68 and also Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 232-242).

[62] The earliest extant edition is that of 1609, though references to particular events occurred in the Elizabethan period suggest the play might have been written before Armin joined the Chamberlain's Men. Evidence is very controversial, though, so it has also been suggested that the extant edition is a Jacobean reworking of an Elizabethan original (See Armin, *Two Maids,* A.S. Liddie, ed., pp. 13-24).

the Earl of Derby's Men.[63] To these, Wiles adds the convincing possibility that Armin actually joined the Chamberlain's Men in 1599 at the Globe, but he sporadically continued to perform solo at the Curtain, which was a more suitable venue for improvisations and jigs than the Globe.[64] However, records suggest that after Armin was officially hired, his membership in the Chamberlain's/King's Men was uninterrupted until he retired in 1613. He had his will written in 1614, where he declared himself a Citizen and Goldsmith of London, and he died one year later, perhaps after an illness. His burial as "goldsmith and player" is recorded in the Register of the Parish Church of St Bodolph in Aldgate.[65] At the time, he had already been awarded the title of gentleman and owned a coat of arms that displayed on the shield the figure of an ermine, the animal with which his name was associated.[66]

1.4 The clown in print: Armin's works

Before being widely known as a talented stage comedian, Armin started off as a writer of poems, cheap ballads and pamphlets, of which only a small portion is extant. In 1590 he wrote a preface to a religious tract entitled *A Brief Resolution of the Right Religion*,[67] but at the time he probably already had some reputation as an author. In 1592 the satirist Thomas Nash in his *Strange Newes* referred to him as a son of Elderton, a popular ballad writer of the time:

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[63] Felver, p. 24. The Earl of Derby's Men were also known as Lord Strange's Men. They became the Earl of Derby's Men when in 1593 their patron became Lord Derby. See also Chambers, p. 402 and Terence G. Schoone-Jongen, *Shakespeare's Companies: William Shakespeare's Early Career and the Acting Companies*, 1577-1594, Farnham: Ashgate, 2008, pp. 103-118.
[64] Wiles, p. 138.
[65] Armin, *Two Maids,* 1979, p. 4.
[66] Indeed, the pronunciation of the word "ermine" at the time was "armin" (Hotson, p. 112).
[67] C.S., *A Briefe Resolution of a Right Religion Touching the Controuersies, that are Nowe in England,* London: Roger Ward, 1590. The preface is on sig. A1v.

> Hough, Thomas Deloney, Philip Stubbs, Robert Armin, etc. Your father Elderton is abused. Revenge, revenge on coarse paper and want of matter, that hath most sacrilegiously contaminated the divine spirit and quintessence of a penny a quart.[68]

Also the Cambridge scholar Gabriel Harvey in his *Pierce's Supererogation* (1593) groups him with Thomas Deloney and Philip Stubbes, but disdainfully dismisses him as a "common pamphleteer of London".[69] A dedicatory epistle to Mary, the widow of Lord Chandos (William Brydges, d. 1602), where Armin expresses all his loyalty to his former master, was published in the preface to Gilbert Dugdale's *True Discourse of the Practises of Elizabeth Caldwell* in 1604.[70] Also, Christopher Sutcliffe very convincingly attributes to Armin the anonymous comic pamphlet *A Pil to Purge Melancholie* (1599),[71] which displays the signatures "Snuffe" and "Snipsnap", the latter of which, along with the series of technical terms connected to tailoring contained in the text, may point at the author's familiarity with that craft. Armin came indeed from a family of tailors.

The same type of knowledge probably inspired also the narrative poem *Phantasmo, or The Italian Taylor and His Boy*, a 1,400-line verse adaptation in alternate rhyme of Fable V, Night VIII, of Giovanni Francesco Straparola's collection of tales *Le Piacevoli Notti* (1553).[72] It is the story of the apprentice of a tailor who learns the art of magic and competes with his master: he learns to turn into different creatures and objects, among which a ruby ring of a princess whom he eventually manages to marry. Though the poem was published in 1609,

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[68] Thomas Nash, *The Apologie of Pierce Pennilesse. Or Strange Newes, of the Intercepting Certaine letters, and a Conuoy of Verses, as They Were Going Priuilie to Victuall the Lowe Countries*, London: John Danter, 1593, sig. D4v.

[69] Gabriel Harvey, *Pierces Supererogation or A New Prayse of the Old Asse. A Preparatiue to Certaine Larger Discourses, Intituled Nashes S. Fame*, London: John Wolfe, 1593, sigg. Aa1r and Aa1v. See also Edwin Nungezer, *A Dictionary of Actors and of Other Persons Associated with the Public Representation of Plays in England before 1642*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1929, pp. 16-17.

[70] Gilbert Dugdale, *True Discourse of the Practices of Elizabeth Caldwell*, London: James Roberts, 1604, sigg. D4r-D4v.

[71] *A Pil to Purge Melancholie: or, A Preprative [sic] to a Pvrgation: or, Topping, Copping, and Capping: Take Either or Whether: or, Mash them, and Squash them, and Dash them, and Diddle Come Derrie Come Daw them, All Together*, London: William White, 1599.

[72] Giovan Francesco Straparola, *Le Piacevoli Notti*, Vol. 2, Venice: Comino da Trino, 1553. The fable appears in Straparola's second volume of tales. The first volume came out in 1550, printed again by Comino da Trino in Venice.

Feather suggests that it was actually composed one decade earlier, in the mid-1590s, when translations of this type of stories were very popular.[73]

In 1600 Armin published a first version of the jestbook *Foole Upon Foole or Six Sortes of Sottes.* Here Armin tells the stories of six different fools, some of whom he had the chance of studying while he travelled with Lord Chandos' Men. On the title page are listed all the characters he presents:

> A flat foole   A fatt foole.
> A leane foole   and   A cleane foole.
> A merry foole   A verry foole.
>
> Shewing their liues, humours and behauiours, with their want of wit in their shew of wisdome. Not so strange as true.[74]

Among the fools he describes there is the famous Will Sommers (d. 1560; the "merry foole"), King Henry VIII's jester, and the John i'th' Hospital (or Blue John) that will be found in Armin's only extant play *Two Maids of More-Clacke.*[75] The jestbook was published in different editions during Armin's life. Chambers refers to a 1601 and a 1602 edition but none of these is extant.[76] We do have the 1605 edition, where the "Clunnico de Curtanio Snuffe" pseudonym which has been discussed in the previous section becomes "Clunnico del Mondo Snuffe", that is "Snuff, the Clown of the Globe", referring to the fact that Armin was now the leading comedian of the King's Men at the company's new playhouse. A later edition, that of 1608, which displayed Armin's name on the title page as well as his alias, underwent a major change: the stories of the six fools, previously unlinked, become part of a broader narrative frame. This enlargement, which earned the text the new title *A Nest of Ninnies,* consists in the addition of a moralising induction where the allegory of The World, a woman with a hangover, calls up a doctor in search of relief. When she finds the cynic philosopher Sotto, he

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[73] Robert Armin *The Collected Works of Robert Armin*, Feather, J.P., ed., New York and London: Johnson Reprint Company, 1972, Vol. 2, Introduction to *The Italian Taylor and His Boy* (the book is unpaginated).
[74] Armin, *Foole Upon Foole*, sig. A1r.
[75] See below.
[76] Chambers, p. 300.

shows her in his crystal sphere the six fools that she is pregnant with. Then the anecdotes from the original text follow, with the addition of a moral teaching at the end of each story.

In 1600 Armin publishes another jestbook, again under the alias "Clunnico de Curtanio Snuffe": *Quips Upon Questions or A Clownes Conceite on Occasion Offered.*[77] An imaginary interlocutor asks questions to which the Clown answers by witty conceits and concludes them with a verse moral or "quip". To compose the book Armin might have partly worked from his imagination and partly remembered extemporizing solo performances at the playhouse when the audience, according to custom, threw at the clown questions about general issues (e.g."Who first began to live i'the world?")[78] or about some real incident occurred at the theatre (e.g. "Why barkes that Dogge?" or "What ayles that Damsell?").[79] What is interesting about this particular work is that it may be taken as a demonstration of Armin's skills in mimicry. Because he was not the kind of artist who during extemporizing performances would engage in long direct conversations with the audience, he may have preferred instead to impersonate different characters at a time and dialogue with himself or with his bauble (called Sir Timothy Truncheon, to whom the prefatory epistle is dedicated) – a type of show akin to Feste's when he stages Sir Topas in *Twelfth Night.*[80]

Armin was also a playwright. He wrote many plays for the theatre but unfortunately only one is extant that can be incontrovertibly attributed to him. It is *Two Maids of More-*

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[77] Robert Armin, *Quips Upon Questions or A Clownes Conceite on Occasion Offered,* London: 1600. Armin's alias is printed on the title page, sig. A1r.
[78] Sig. A1r.
[79] Respectively sigg. A1r and D3r.
[80] The theory of ventriloquism and the performance of multiple voices on the part of Armin is warmly supported by critics like Wiles (pp. 138-139) and Richard Preiss ("Robert Armin Do the Police in Different Voices", in Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel, eds., *From Performance to Print in Shakespeare's England*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 208-227 (220)). However, because *Quips Upon Questions* is a particularly difficult text to decipher, in that it provides the reader with flows of speech where nothing helps us establish either the limits of the lines of dialogue or who says what, Nora Johnson cautions that we can only guess what Armin's stage practices may have been, as the text does not make clear how it should be read. In her view, such uncertainty made the readers who had not seen Armin's performances free, in a sense, to build their own idea of the clown, so that he became "a figure for communal production" or "a publicly owned fool" (Johnson, *The Actor as Playwright*, pp. 33-34).

Clacke,[81] first published in 1609 but probably written much earlier, possibly even before Armin joined the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Here is a brief synopsis of the main line of the plot: Sir William Vergir, Knight of More-Clacke, has married the supposed widow Lady Humil, whose son is in love with Mary, one of Sir William's daughters. Not only is this love unrequited but Sir William disapproves both of this marriage and of the possible marriages of his daughters with their true loves: Toures for Mary and Filbon for Tabitha. Thus he announces that he will consent to their marriages only if two impossible conditions are fulfilled: Toures can marry Mary only if she dies and is restored to life, while Filbon can marry Tabitha only if he becomes a woman. The two daughters attempt to elope but only Mary succeeds. In the meantime James, Lady Humil's supposed dead husband comes back and reveals himself to the Lady, while her son tries to convince Sir William that he is the right husband for Mary by telling him that the Lady is cheating on him. Meanwhile Mary dies and is buried but then comes to life again, while Filbon comes up to Sir William disguised as a nurse. When he strips off his clothes also his condition is fulfilled. In the end, in spite of the parents' attempts to avoid it, both couples manage to get married. Though the comedy has not received much attention from criticism, it seems to have some literary value and interesting themes. Its highly complex plot combines love intrigues, disguises, jests and romance but probably its key feature is that Armin wrote for himself the two roles of the natural and the artificial fool, respectively Blue John i'th' Hospital and the servant Tutch. Towards the end of the play the comic effect is maximized when Armin, the actor, plays Tutch disguised as Blue John. Tutch is seen as the character who most influenced the creation of the clown part in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*: the name *Touchstone* might be an evident hint not only at

[81] Robert Armin, *The History of the Two Maids of More-Clacke, with the Life and Simple Maner of Iohn in the Hospitall*, London: N.O., 1609.

Armin's trade as goldsmith,[82] but also at the jester of *Two Maids*. Besides, *As You Like It* was the first play in which Armin appeared after Kemp's dismissal, so Felver suggests that Shakespeare might have named his clown *Touchstone* to capitalize on the earlier success of the role of Tutch.[83] The title page of the play is interesting not simply because it declares explicitly that Armin is a King's Man,[84] but because it displays the only image we have of him. It is actually a woodcut of Armin as Blue John, wearing a long blue buttoned coat, the livery of Christ's Hospital in London. Wiles comments that "he is marked out as a [natural] fool by the objects which hang from his belt: a handkerchief to mop his dribble, and a pen and inkhorn which signify that this adult has yet to complete his schooling".[85]

There is one last work which is often associated with the name of Robert Armin. It is the historical play entitled *The Valiant Welshman* or *The True Chronicle History of the Life and Valiant Deedes of Caradoc the Great, King of Cambria, now called Wales*,[86] published in 1615 by one "R.A. Gent", which tends to be identified with Armin both because in the period there was no other playwright with the same initials, and because by 1615 the actor had acquired the status of gentleman. Though the play appears to be incomplete and its literary value is debatable, linguistic analyses of *The Valiant Welshman* compared with the corpus of Armin's attested works have partially supported the attribution to him,[87] but some critics have challenged this view, chiefly on the grounds of spelling discrepancies.[88] The author seems to have heavily drawn upon Shakespeare's works for some scenes, in particular upon *King Lear,*

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[82] A touchstone is "a piece of fine-grained dark schist or jasper formerly used for testing alloys of gold by observing the colour of the mark which they made on it" (*OED*).
[83] Charles S. Felver, "Robert Armin, Shakespeare's Source for Touchstone", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 7 (1956), p. 137.
[84] The title page reads: "Written by Robert Armin, Seruant to the Kings Most Excellent Majestie" (sig A1r). The same sentence can be found also on the title page of *The Italian Taylor and His Boy*.
[85] Wiles, pp. 140-142.
[86] R.A. Gent., *The Valiant Welshman* or *The True Chronicle History of the Life and Valiant Deedes of Caradoc the Great, King of Cambria, now called Wales*, London: George Furslowe, 1615.
[87] For example A.S. Liddie in his 1979 edition of the play (see appendix B).
[88] See Wiles, p. 207, n. 17,. Felver also disagrees with this attribution.

Macbeth, Hamlet, Cymbeline, possibly *The Tempest*, and also upon Jonson's *The Alchemist.* The play was written for Prince Charles' touring company and, though Armin was not a member of the company, he might have made a guest appearance as the foolish Sir Morion,[89] son of a Welsh Earl, who falls in love with the Fairy Queen but eventually shows her only his ineptitude.

1.5 Armin in the romances, 1608-1612

As we have seen, biographical details on Armin tell us that he wrote his will in 1614 and that on the following year he died. Though we do not have much factual information about his life in the years between 1609 and 1615, we can draw one more clue about his later career from the text of *Henry VIII* or *All Is True*, a play performed at the Globe in June 1613 and presumably the collaborative work of Shakespeare and Fletcher. At the beginning of the play the Prologue declares:

> PROLOGUE I come no more to make you laugh.
> [...] Only they
> that come to hear a merry bawdy play,
> a noise of targets, or to see a fellow
> in a long motley coat guarded with yellow,
> will be deceived. (Prologue, 1; 13-17)

Here, Shakespeare's choice to omit Henry's court jester Will Sommers seems to be similar to the way in which he treated the same type of situation in *Henry V*. When Kemp decided to leave the company, the playwright chose to have Falstaff die, therefore cutting the actor and the character out of that play and all the other plays to come. Falstaff was such a popular character with the audience that if Shakespeare had chosen instead to give the part to somebody else, the final result would probably have been disappointing – and Armin was surely not suitable to play such a part. The same might have happened when Shakespeare and Fletcher wrote *Henry VIII*, so that the reason why we have no Will Sommers is because

[89] Wiles, p. 143 and Johnson, *The Actor as Playwright*, p. 50.

Armin was not there to play him. As John Southworth puts it, "better perhaps no Will at all than a Will played than anyone other than his biographer and the outstanding player of fools in his time".[90] Armin's last precise connection with a play dates back to 1610, when his name appears in the character list of Jonson's *The Alchemist*, where he probably played the tobacco-man Abel Drugger, who in IV.vii says:

> FACE Thou must borrow
> A *Spanish* suit. Hast thou no credit with
> the Players?
> DRUGGER Yes, Sir: did you never see me play
> the fool? (IV.vii.67-69)[91]

In the same year John Davies of Hereford dedicates a commendatory poem to Armin in the section "To Worthy Persons" of his *Scourge of Folly*:

> *To honest-gamesome Robert Armin,*
> *That tickles the spleene like an harmeles vermin.*
> Armine, what shall I say of thee, but this,
> Thou art a foole and knaue? Both? fie, I misse;
> And wrong thee much, sith thou in deede art neither.
> Although in shew, thou playest both together.
> Wee all (that's kings and all) but players are
> Vpon this earthly stage; and should haue care
> To play our parts so properly, that wee
> May at the end gaine an applauditee.
> But most men ouer-act, misse-act, or misse
> The action which to them peculier is;
> And the more high the part is which they play,
> The more they misse in what they do or say.
> So that when off the stage, by death, they wend,
> Men rather hisse at them then them commend.
> But (honest Robin) thou with harmelesse mirth
> Dost please the world; and (so) amongst the earth
> That others but possesse with care, that stings;
> So makst thy life more happy farre then kings.
> And so much more our loue should thee imbrace.
> Sith still thou liu'st with some that dye to grace.
> And yet art honest (in despight of lets),
> Which eames more praise then forcèd-goodnesse gets.
> So, play thy part, be honest still with mirth;
> Then when th' art in the tyring-house of earth,
> Thou being his seruant whome all kings do serue,
> Maist for thy part well playd like praise deserue;
> For in that tyring-house when either bee,

[90] Here Southworth clearly refers to Armin's account of Will Sommers in his jestbook *Foole Upon Foole.* John Southworth, *Fools and Jesters at the English Court*, Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 2003, ch. 14. On Kemp and *Henry V* see also James Shapiro, *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare*, London: Faber and *Faber*, 2005, p. 48, and Hotson, pp. 76-77.
[91] Ben Jonson, *The Selected Plays of Ben Jonson. Volume 2: The Alchemist, Bartholomew Fair, The New Inn, A Tale of a Tub*, Martin Butler, ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Y' are one mans men and equall in degree. [92]

The fact that he addresses to Armin in the present tense confirms that in 1610 the actor was still playing the fool. Therefore Armin must have left the company some time between 1610 and 1613. One hypothesis could be made: if Shakespeare had felt the need to warn the audience, right at the opening of the play, that they would not see a motley fool in *Henry VIII*, it means that the news of Armin's retirement had not been known for long. Shakespeare had to tell the audience explicitly: they came with the expectation of seeing such a loved actor in such a loved role that they simply could not think of a Henry VIII-play without Will Sommers in it. The point, then, is that Armin must have retired either in 1613 or not very long before. However, what is more important for the present analysis is that, if this is the case, Armin must have been part of the cast in all the original performances of Shakespeare's romances. *Pericles*, the first play of the group, was probably first seen at the Globe between April and June 1608, during a brief reopening of the theatres in between closures due to the plague.[93] As Felver notes, Armin's bursts of literary activity – i.e. publication of major texts, not simply pamphlets or prefaces – tended to occur in periods of time when, for some reason, he was not busy in the playhouse.[94] There were two such periods in Armin's career. The first one was between 1599 and 1600, when he published *Foole Upon Foole* and *Quips Upon Questions*; the title page of this second work states that it was "clapt up by a Clowne of the Towne in this last Restraint, having little else to doe",[95] referring probably to the restraint imposed upon playhouses by the Privy Council in June 1600: players were temporarily not allowed to play at the Curtain and only twice a week at the Globe.[96] The second period was in

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[92] John Davies, *The Complete Works of John Davies of Hereford*, Alexander B. Grosart, ed., Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1878, II, pp. 60-61.
[93] William Shakespeare, *Pericles*, The Arden Shakespeare, Suzanne Gossett, ed., London: Methuen, 2004, p. 54.
[94] Felver, p. 69.
[95] *Quips Upon Questions*, Air.
[96] Wiles, p. 138. See also Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages 1300 to 1660: 1576 to 1660 (Vol. 2)*, Oxon: Routledge, 2002, p. 22.

1608-1609, the timespan during which theatres were closed for the plague,[97] when *A Nest of Ninnies, Two Maids of More-Clacke* and *The Italian Taylor and His Boy* were first printed. After that, we have to skip to 1615 when *A Valiant Welshman* was published, if we accept that Armin was indeed its author. What is important, though, is that there were no further publications before 1613, which means that in that period Armin was probably still very busy acting in the theatre. All these clues, then, seem to indicate that Armin was still active when, according to an early record, *The Tempest* was performed at court on November 1, 1611.[98] Therefore, as between 1608 and 1611 he was still an actor and sharer of the company, Armin must have had at least one role cut out for him in each of the romances: *Pericles* (1608), *Cymbeline* (1609-1610), *The Winter's Tale* (1609-1610) and *The Tempest* (1611),[99] and that role was presumably a comic one of the fool type. Let us now examine the texts one by one.

1.5.1 *Pericles*

Pericles is, among the four romances, the text where Armin's presence is most difficult to trace and where straightforward references to the actor are least easy to find. However, being familiar with the type of clown persona Armin projected, it is possible to deduce quite confidently the main character he played in early performances. *Pericles* draws most of its humour and comedy from the keepers of the brothel of Mytilene where Marina,

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[97] Gurr, p. 78.

[98] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest,* The Arden Shakespeare, Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan, ed., London: Methuen, 1999, p. 6.

[99] While we know fairly well the timespan to which these four play belong to, it is far more difficult to get to a precise chronology. *Pericles* was certainly the first of the four, as it was entered in the Stationers' Register on 20 May 1608, but the exact order of the other three is hard to establish, as there is no unequivocal external evidence that confirms it. The order criticism largely prefers, and the one I also refer to, is *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* but this has sometimes been challenged, notably by Taylor and Wells who, in the Oxford edition of Shakespeare's works, invert the order of *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*, and place the Folio version of *King Lear* in the middle. Such a choice has encouraged some scholars to find topical and stylistic reasons to justify the established order with *Cymbeline* preceding *The Winter's Tale*, but the only actual conclusion we can get to is that, without any real external evidence pointing to a specific chronology of the plays, any order is equally possible. For a discussion of the "question of chronology" of Shakespeare's romances see McMullan, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing*, pp. 78-81.

Pericles' daughter, is conveyed after being abducted by pirates. In the brothel scenes (IV.ii and IV.vi, or Scenes 16 and 19 in the Oxford edition) we find a Bawd, her husband Pander and their servant Boult (or Bolt, in the alternative spelling).[100] To have a clue about which part Armin could have had we should look for the comic characters that have most lines in the play, as normally the actor would get a leading comic role. It is quite curious that in *Pericles* the Bawd has 104 lines, and is the female character that comes second in the play for number of lines (after Marina). However, it seems highly unlikely that Armin played the Bawd: he was already in his forties at the time, and there is no evidence from other texts that Armin ever played the woman in performance (though he probably had the skills to do it). The Pander also does not seem a suitable role for him, as with its 31 lines it is too brief to display satisfactorily the qualities of the comedian. The logical role for him seems that of the servant Boult, who has 83 lines and, as will be seen in the following chapter, a greater comic potential than the other brothel-keepers. Armin had already played a very similar, though larger, role in *Measure for Measure* (1604), where he was undoubtedly the brothel tapster Pompey, who is again the clownish servant of the Bawd.[101] Evidence for this connection between actor and character is given by the Folio text of the play, where the first entrance of Pompey is accompanied by the stage direction "Enter Clowne" (I.ii.175), which identifies not only the dramatis persona but also the type of actor, in this case the company comedian. Unfortunately there is no such straightforward indication in any of the early texts of *Pericles,* but we do find a few features about Boult that become particularly significant only if we

[100] One of the greatest problems *Pericles* poses is that of authorship, as it is almost certainly a collaborative work between Shakespeare and the playwright and pamphleteer George Wilkins (d. 1618). However, stylistic evidence points at Wilkins as the author of the first nine scenes – broadly speaking, Act 1 and 2 – while Shakespeare presumably wrote the remaining three acts, so that the brothel scenes are generally regarded by criticism as his (see *Pericles*, Gossett, ed., pp. 68-69 and MacDonald P. Jackson, *Defining Shakespeare: 'Pericles' as Test Case*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 80-81).

[101] Felver (p. 64) assumes that Armin played the small part of Fresco, a bawd's servant, in Tourneur's *Atheist Tragedy* (1607-1611). The date of the play is not certain though, so it might have been performed after *Pericles*. However also this example shows how Armin was frequently employed for this type of role.

consider him a character created specifically for Armin. The first is his name which, as it appears in the First Quarto of 1609, is a variant spelling of the word "bolt". The *OED* defines it thus: "an arrow; especially one of the stouter and shorter kind with blunt or thickened head, called also *quarrel*, discharged from a cross-bow or other engine" or also "a stout pin for fastening". Suzanne Gossett, who in her Arden edition of the play has chosen to modernize the spelling, explains how both definitions, applied to the name of the character, "carry relevant phallic associations", given that Boult is "the 'man' of the brothel".[102] The significance of such an interpretation in relation to the themes of the play will be discussed later on. However, this particular name seems also to connect the brothel keeper with the idea of folly. Indeed the word "boult" or "bolt" was to be frequently found in the proverb which came to be modernized into "the fool's bolt is soon shot" and which, according to *OED,* was very common between the thirteenth and the eighteenth century, with the meaning that those who lack wit give away their intentions or speak their mind before the time is proper to do so. Shakespeare in particular refers to the fool's bolt a few times; in *As You Like It* we have the following exchange:

DUKE SENIOR By my faith, he [Touchstone] is very swift and sententious.
TOUCHSTONE According to the *fool's bolt*, sir, and such dulcet diseases. (V.iii.62-64)[103]

In *Henry V* the Duke of Orléans says to the Constable of France:

ORLÉANS You are the better at proverbs by how much 'a fool's bolt is soon shot'.
CONSTABLE You have shot over.
ORLÉANS 'Tis not the first time you were overshot. (III.vii.118-121)

In these two examples the bolt may stand simply for anything a fool says, but while the Duke of Orléans intends the proverb as a way to offend his foil, Touchstone exquisitely reverses the usual meaning of the phrase to emphasise his own quickness of wit, thus making the fast release of the shot an important requirement for the court fool. In *Much Ado About Nothing*

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[102] *Pericles*, Gossett, ed., p. 70, n. 42.
[103] Here and in the next three quotations the italics are mine.

Beatrice expresses the traditional association of the bird-bolt, "a kind of blunt-headed arrow used for shooting birds" (*OED*), with the fool:

> BEATRICE He [Benedick] set up his bills here in Messina, and challenged Cupid at the flight; and *my uncle's fool*, reading the challenge, subscribed for Cupid and challenged him at the *bird-bolt*. (I.i.37-40)

While on the one hand it is ironic that the fool, stepping in for Cupid in the challenge against Benedick, should be using the bird-bolt, which is specifically the god's favourite weapon, on the other Douce interestingly comments that, as opposed to the flight, the bird-bolt was "an inferior kind of archery used by fools, who, for obvious reasons, were not permitted to shoot with pointed arrows: whence the proverb 'a fool's bolt is soon shot'".[104] The same association is made by Olivia in *Twelfth Night*, reproaching Malvolio for his touchiness:

> OLIVIA Oh, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste
> with a distempered appetite. To be generous,
> guiltless and of free disposition, is *to take those*
> *things for bird-bolts that you deem cannon-bullets:*
> there is no slander in an allowed fool, though he do
> nothing but rail; nor no railing in a known discreet
> man, though he do nothing but reprove. (I.v.86-92)[105]

Armin too refers to the fool's boult in a couple of occasions: at the end of Jack Oates' story in *Foole Upon Foole* and in the conclusion to *The Italian Taylor and His Boy*, where it indicates a rash critique by someone who is supposedly wise:

> This was a flat foole, yet now and then a blind man may hit a crow, and you know a fooles boult is soone shot. (*Foole Upon Foole*, p. 72)[106]
>
> Me thinkes some perfumde Polititian, that practiseth more the Pennie than the Penne, rashly reades, and rudely returnes, this fooles boult, *Tis ballade stuffe*: to him, I answere thus.[107] (*Italian Taylor,* sig. I2r)

The phrase was so common in the early modern age that we cannot infer that Shakespeare derived the phrase from Armin. It is interesting, however that three out of the four references to the fool's bolt in Shakespeare are connected with a court jester, – i.e., all the occurrences

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[104] William Shakespeare, *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare*, Edmond Malone and James Boswell, eds., London: F.C. and J. Rivington, 1821, pp. 9-10 n.1.
[105] Italics are mine.
[106] Robert Armin, *A Shakespeare Jestbook, Robert Armin's 'Foole Upon Foole' (1600): a critical, old-spelling edition*, Henry Frederick Lippincott, ed., Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1973.
[107] "Tis ballade stuff" is marked in italics in the original.

except that in *Henry V* – and in all these cases the symbol has a positive connotation. This is especially true in the case of Touchstone, who displays a certain pride in defining himself a fool, and refers to the "fool's bolt" as the powerful product of his creative process.

Let us get back to *Pericles* now. It is impossible to know if Shakespeare's two mentions of the fool's bolt in relation to characters played by Armin – i.e. Touchstone and Feste – might have somehow given him the idea of creating for the actor a character named "Boult". It is equally impossible to know if perhaps Armin liked the idea that the lines he uttered on stage and those he wrote for publication could be considered the "bolts" of a fool: indeed the quotation above from *The Italian Taylor* can have an alternative meaning, as "this fooles boult" may be even referred to the whole poem in the sense of "the creation of a fool". However, what we can note is that "Boult" is a very telling name, not only because it stresses or alternatively satirizes the supposed virility of the brothel keeper with the suggestion of a phallic shape, but also because, through the resonances such a word would have for the Jacobean playgoers, the character became immediately configured as *the* fool of the play, even more so because the first of the two brothel scenes begins indeed with Pander calling out "Boult" and the servant replying "Sir" (Sc. 16, 1-2), before the audience understands what the "profession" of these two characters is. The character, then, is immediately given a special prominence and definition both on the stage and in the text: it would have been very disappointing if the comedian playing him had not been Robert Armin who, in 1608, was still "the fool" of the King's Men.

In spite of his position as a servant in a brothel, Boult also shows a series of peculiarities and skills that would have been quite telling for a Jacobean audience if he was played indeed by Armin. It is significant for instance that, though Boult is only the third-in-command, he is the one who is most involved in matters of money. While his superiors talk

about money in abstract terms, he is the one who has the most concrete relationship with it: he negotiates prices and asks for tips, so that in his lines we find a series of expressions dealing with money, gold and precious items:

BOULT I cannot be bated *one doit of a thousand sesterces* (Sc. 16, 49)

BOULT I beseech your honour, *one piece* for me. (Sc. 19, 143)

BOULT To take from you the *jewel* you hold so dear (Sc. 19, 180)

MARINA Here, here's *gold* for thee. (*Gives Boult the money.*) (Sc. 19, 204)[108]

Lonyson, Armin's first master when he was an apprentice goldsmith, was the Queen's Master Worker of her monies at the Royal Mint in the Tower of London. Therefore Armin himself at least at the beginning of his career, but probably also after his first master died, worked at the Mint so, being into the coinage of money he "must have found himself at the very centre of England's dealings with standards of gold and silver", as Hotson points out.[109] Boult becomes to the eye of the spectator a particularly apt and reliable character when it comes to talking about different currencies, like the *piece* or the *doit,*[110] or about the monetary value of Marina. In the third quotation above Boult compares Marina's virginity to a jewel. This image is not very frequent in Shakespeare: it occurs only one other time in *All's Well That Ends Well*.[111] So there is a special force in this if it is uttered by Armin the goldsmith. Hotson conjectured also that part of Armin's apprenticeship as goldsmith might have involved expertise in gems and precious stones,[112] which is reflected in some passages of the works of Armin, as for instance in *Two Maids of More-Clacke*:

Dig ho, this golden beach, whose glittering sands
shewes with the sunne as Dyamonds set in gold,
fitly intombs a jewell of much worth,
whose living beauty stains all lapidary. (Sc. XVII, 9-13)

[108] Italics are mine.
[109] Hotson, p. 116.
[110] "A small Dutch coin formerly in use, the eighth part of a stiver, or the half of an English farthing" (*OED*)
[111] Uttered by Diana: "My chastity's the jewel of our house" (*All's Well That Ends Well*, IV.ii.47)
[112] Hotson, p. 118.

or in Armin's choice to use Straparola's tale of Maestro Lattanzio and Dionigi as a source for his *Italian Taylor and His Boy*. The fact that the protagonist turns into a ruby ring in Princess Violante's casket of gems would give Armin the chance to display his knowledge in the properties and connotations of stones. Shakespeare must have been also aware of this talent of Armin's and he gave his comedian the chance to show off his skills on stage: for example in *Twelfth Night* he has Feste tell Orsino "thy mind is a very Opal" – i.e. full of love, as the Opal is Venus' stone – and then as Sir Topas he gives him a name that recalls the topaz, a stone which was purportedly effective against lunatics for love.[113]

In a similar way, if Armin had actually played Boult, his linguistic knowledge would have been dignified by Shakespeare's choice to insert one of the two Italian expressions of the play in one of his lines:

> BOULT Faith, I must ravish her, or she'll disfurnish us of all our *cavalleria* and make our swearers priests. (Sc. 19, 20-21)[114]

Bradbrook states indeed that Armin was "pathetically proud of his learning"[115], and this becomes evident in some of the prefaces to his works, where he uses Latin formulas, or when characters played or created by him have lines spoken in the same classical language, as for instance Feste and Sir William Vergir in *Two Maids.*[116] More significantly, Armin almost certainly knew Italian himself, as *The Italian Taylor and His Boy* was published in a period when there was no known translation in English of Straparola's fables.[117]

Other than Armin's intellectual skills, also the actor's physical traits, though in a less direct way than in other plays, work their way into the text of *Pericles.* If we admit that

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[113] Hotson, pp. 118-122.
[114] Emphasis is mine. The other expression in Italian is a motto read out by Thaisa: "*Piú per dolcezza che per forza*" ("More by delicacy than by force; Sc. 6, 27).
[115] Bradbrook, p. 54.
[116] E.g. Feste: "*Cucullus non facit monachum"* ("The hood does not make the monk")(I.v.51-51); Sir William Vergir: "*Tardi venientis* Iohn, you must be whip't./ *Quaso preceptor, non est tibi quid.* (You are late John, you must be whipped. As your teacher I cannot do anything for you) (Sc. VI, 137-138). See Armin, *Two Maids*, 1979, p. 255, n. 137-138.
[117] See 1.2.

Armin was indeed Boult, then the shortness of the actor, very visible for the audience, makes the two allusions to legs highly ironic:

> BOULT I am glad to see your honour in good health.
> LYSIMACHUS You may so. 'Tis the better for you that your resorters *stand upon sound legs*. (Sc. 19, 30-32)

> BOULT What would you have me do? Go to the wars, would you, where a man may serve seven years f*or the loss of a leg* and have not money enough in the end to buy him a wooden one? (Sc. 19, 195-198)

Finally, when Marina shows herself reluctant to comply with the Bawds' requests, he says:

> BOULT If your peevish chastity [...] shall undo a whole household, let me be *gelded like a spaniel*. (Sc. 19, 148-150). [118]

Indeed we have already discussed the frequent association of Armin's characters with the idea of dogs. Boult, in this sense, does not make an exception either.

1.5.2 *Cymbeline*

Cymbeline is the darkest of Shakespeare's romances and we do not have many comic parts to choose from. Thus, though again there is no straightforward fool role, there can be little doubt that Armin played here the part of Cloten, the evil prince, son of Cymbeline's second wife (the Queen), and suitor of Imogen. It is interesting that he is conceived as a mentally retarded individual; for this reason he would certainly be appealing for Armin who in his own works, namely *A Nest of Ninnies* (or *Foole Upon Foole,* where all the fools described, with the only exception of Will Sommers, are natural fools) and *Two Maids,* had explored the implications of natural folly and was himself an expert in the rendering of such characters: Blue John, as I have already recalled, was his most unforgettable role. All this to say that if Shakespeare inserted in his play a fool of the natural type and Armin was still part of the Company, as evidence suggests,[119] then the comedian would certainly take the role for

[118] Emphasis is mine, here and in the previous quotations.
[119] See 1.5.

himself, as that would give him the chance to show off what he could do best. Cloten is dubbed "fool" as many as fourteen times in the play: Pisanio and Cloten's lords never bear such an association, therefore it does not seem justifiable that Armin should have been playing one of those characters when there was one much more palatable and more important for the dynamics of the play that would let the comedian exploit his mastery to the full. Let us now search for evidence from the text itself.

The play gives us a few hints about the physical features of Cloten. The most significant is also the one that comes first. In I.iii, the scene where Cloten first appears, he is telling his attendant lords about the duel against Posthumus:

> CLOTEN I would they had not come between us.
> SECOND LORD (*aside*) So would I, till you had measured *how long a fool* you were upon the ground. (I.ii.21-23)

As often happens in plays casting Armin, Shakespeare does not fail to insert mocking allusions to the physical shape and size of the actor. Here the Second Lord's aside ironically indicates Cloten's shortness. The line may mean that, even as a fool, Cloten's stature does not make him a real threat for his opponent but only a little ridiculous impediment. Indications about the size of Cloten seem apparently discordant in the text. The greatest problem in this sense is posed by the fact that in Act IV Cloten decides to dress up in Posthumus' clothes and eventually, when his head is cut off by Guiderius, his body is mistaken by Imogen for that of Posthumus. Yet, for Cloten's body to be actually mistakable for Posthumus', the actor playing Cloten should be physically very similar to Richard Burbage, who almost certainly played Posthumus. Some theories have it even that the actor playing Posthumus doubled as Cloten,

as the two never appear on stage in the same scene.[120] Another option is that put forward by David Grote who, believing that Armin was not part of the cast of *Cymbeline,* proposes instead Henry Condell as the best candidate for Cloten, because in the early performances of Shakespeare's company he would usually be the "mirror image" of Burbage on stage.[121] However, both Baldwin and Wiles do not agree on this point, as they are both convinced it was Armin who played the foolish prince.[122] The conjectures about Cloten's actor being physically similar to Posthumus' are cogent only if we do not take into consideration the fact that in spite of Cloten's declaration

> CLOTEN How fit his [Posthumus'] garments serve me! Why should his mistress who was made by him that made the tailor, not be fit too? (IV.i.2-4)

the characters he encounters after he has donned Posthumus' clothes do not share his view and immediately recognize him for his foolishness.

> CLOTEN Thou villain base,
> know'st me not by my clothes?
> GUILDERIUS No, nor thy tailor, rascal,
> Who is thy grandfather: he made those clothes,
> which, as it seems, make thee.
> CLOTEN Thou precious varlet,
> My tailor made them not.
> GUIDERIUS Hence then, and thank
> the man that gave them thee. Thou art some fool.
> I am loath to beat thee. (IV.ii.82-88)

According to this, then, Wiles suggests that the result of Cloten's body inside Posthumus' clothes is so grotesque that Imogen's description in these terms

> IMOGEN I know the shape of's leg: this is his hand:
> His foot Mercurial: his Martial thigh:

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[120] See for instance Stephen Booth, "*King Lear", "Macbeth", Indefinition and Tragedy,* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983, p. 150. He notes that Posthumus and Cloten battle offstage at the beginning and we first see Cloten when Posthumus has already left and that the gentleman's advice to change shirt would be charged with a different significance if Cloten was the same actor as Posthumus. Leah Marcus ("Cymbeline and the Unease of Topicality", in Kiernan Ryan, ed., *Shakespeare: The Last Plays*, London: Longman, 1999, pp. 134-168) suggests that Simon Forman makes a mess of pronouns when describing what Cloten and Posthumus in his account of a 1611 *Cymbeline* performance, so this might mean that the two characters were played by the same actor. Forman conflates their actions. She refers to the point where Forman states: "And how one of them [Belarius' son] slewe Cloten, the Queen's son, going to Milford Haven to seek the love of Imogen, the King's daughter, whom he had banished also for loving his daughter". See Alfred Leslie Rowse, *The Case Books of Simon Forman: Sex and Society in Shakespeare's Age*, London: Pan Books, 1976, pp. 309-310 for the full account.

[121] Grote, p. 155.

[122] See Baldwin, p. 241 and Wiles, pp. 153-154.

becomes tragicomic.[123] Therefore, it should not be taken as an actual fact that the bodies of the two characters are similar in size and shape, because otherwise Imogen's mourning scene would result completely devoid of the tragicomic implications Shakespeare wanted to infuse it with, and the final effect on the audience would not be the one the passage was created for. The audience too needs to be sure that this is not Posthumus' body, and the best way to do it is to feature a body that is not like that of Burbage at all, but rather the opposite.[124] Hence all the humour of the scene can be liberated, otherwise it is just tragical. However, the connotations of this scene will be discussed more thoroughly in the third chapter.

Besides, the passage I have just quoted bears other relations to Armin as an actor. It is significant indeed that the tailor, after being mentioned once in Cloten's soliloquy at the beginning of IV.i, is referred to three more times in IV.ii: four times in all in a relatively short portion of the play.[125] The mention of the tailor is not just there for the sake of Guiderius's jesting about a very bad tailor whose hand is recognizable in the suit of a fool that does not fit. In fact it is a very proper allusion to insert at this point, because it satirizes Armin's own origins: his father and brother were tailors of Norfolk and tailoring was an art he himself knew and felt associated with – two of his nicknames were "pink" and "snipsnap"[126] and his choice of the source material for *The Italian Taylor and His Boy* reflects this interest. However, it is very ironic of Shakespeare to have Guiderius establish a blood relation between Cloten and his supposed tailor, "who is thy grandfather", when it is very likely that John Armin, the actor's father, made clothes for his children. Armin's grandfather was

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[123] Wiles, p. 154.

[124] Some clues about Burbage's physical shape are to be found in Shakespeare's plays. In *Hamlet* Gertrude utters the controversial allusion to Hamlet as "fat and scant of breath" (V.ii.240). In *Romeo* and *Juliet* Romeo is "a portly gentleman" (I.v.65), where "portly" may stand for "stately" but also "stout" (*OED*). Judging from these hints, then, Burbage was physically quite different from Armin.

[125] "Why should his mistress, that was made by him that made the tailor, not be fit too? (IV.i.3-4)

[126] See Christopher Sutcliffe, "The Canon of Robert Armin's Work: An Addition", *Notes and Queries*, 43 (1996), p. 174.

actually a fletcher[127] and not a tailor so if Shakespeare had known about his actor's family the lines become even more cuttingly ironic as that would explain why Cloten's supposed tailor did not do such a good job.

As anticipated, Cloten is called "fool" numberless times in the play, especially by his attendant lords. There are a couple of variants to the term, though. One is "ass", which traditionally carries meanings of "clumsiness, ignorance and stupidity" and is used to indicate "an ignorant fellow, a perverse fool, a conceited dolt" (*OED*). For instance

> CLOTEN Come, I'll to my chamber. Would there had been some hurt done!
> SECOND LORD (*aside*) I wish not so, unless it had been the *fall of an ass*, which is no great hurt. (I.ii.33-36)

or

> SECOND LORD That such a crafty devil as his mother
> should yield the world this ass! (II.i.51-52)

Other times the meaning is less explicit:

> CLOTEN When a gentleman is dispos'd to swear, it is not for any standers-by to curtail his oaths. Ha?
> SECOND LORD No, my lord; (*aside*) *nor crop the ears of them*. (II.I.10-13)

which of course refers to the long ears of an ass. In another occasion the allusion is only phonetic:

> FIRST LORD Your lordship is the most patient man in loss, the most coldest that ever turned up ace. (II.iii.1-2)

Nosworthy notes indeed that the word "ace", which indicates the face with one pip in a dice, had the same pronunciation as "ass", and Shakespeare himself exploited this correlation in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V.i.312-317.[128] The epithet would have a clear meaning here; besides, apart from the list of characters who at some point are called "ass" in Shakespeare,[129] it is quite usual for the clown to be termed so, especially in the plays before 1599, when Kemp was still in the company. Also Armin's roles are associated with this idea. In *Twelfth*

[127] See Hotson, p. 107, for Armin's family tree.
[128] William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*, The Arden Shakespeare, Nosworthy, J.M., ed., London: Methuen, 1955, p. 53, n. 2.
[129] E.g. Hamlet, Othello, Prince Hal, Dogberry, Bottom, the Dromios, etc.

Night Sir Toby announces Feste's entrance saying "Welcome, ass. Now let's have a catch" (II.iii.17).[130] Later on, the fool relates to Orsino how he is treated by his "friends":

> FESTE Marry, sir, they praise me, and make an ass of me. Now my foes tell me plainly I am an ass [...] (V.i.15-16)

While the Fool reflects on the overturn of the world in King Lear:

> FOOL May not an ass know when the cart draws the horse? (Quarto, I.iv.217-218; Folio, I.iv.206-207)

In the graveyard scene in *Hamlet*, the protagonist resents the First Gravedigger's disrespect for the dead. When he throws up a skull from the ground, the prince says: "This might be the pate of a politician which this ass now o'er-offices" (V.i.77-79).

However, the word can also be connected with Armin's own several allusions to being or to playing the part of an ass. For convenience I will quote here again the passage from the dedicatory epistle to *The Italian Taylor and His Boy*, which was taken to mean that Armin played Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing*:

> Likewise, most affable Lady, kinde and debonere, the second of the first which I sawcily salute, pardon I pray you the boldnes of a Begger, who hath been writ downe for an Asse in his time, and pleads under forma pauperis in it still, not-withstanding his Constableship and Office. (sig. A3v)

In the preface to *A Nest of Ninnies* Armin writes:

> I have seene the stars at midnight in your societies, and might have commenst *like an asse as I was*, but I lackt liberty in that, yet I was admitted in Oxford to be of Christs Church, while they of Al-foules gaue ayme, such as knew me remember my meaning. (sig A2r)

Also, in the farewell note to *A Pil to Purge Melancholie* there is a series of allusions to the author of the work as an ass, and Sutcliffe uses this fact as one of the arguments to support his attribution of the work to Armin:[131]

> So I am very well content to beare the Asses burden on my backe for once... I am not able to endure a pair of straight leather shooes on my feete, my heeles being sore. [...] I rest beholding unto you [...] for bidding me, Come up Asse into a higher roome [...] (sig. B4v)

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[130] Sir Toby responds to Feste's entrance line: "How now, my hearts. Did you never see the picture of 'we three'?" (II.iii.15-16). Feste alludes to traditional paintings or inn signs depicting two fools and captioned "We Three": this implied that the third fool was the person who was looking at the picture and was reading its description asking himself the question: "who is the third ass?".

[131] See Sutcliffe, "The Canon", p. 175.

The text of *Cymbeline* is also peculiar because it contains the only direct suggestion we have of Armin's particular way of uttering his lines on the stage; Belarius tells his sons that he has recognized prince Cloten:

> BELARIUS Long it is since I saw him,
> but time hath nothing blurred those lines of favour
> which then he wore: the snatches in his voice,
> and burst of speaking were as his. (IV.ii.104-107)

The *OED* defines a "snatch" as "a catch, check, or hesitancy" and then quotes specifically these lines, while the "burst of speaking" indicates a varying intensity of the tone, made up intermittently of explosive peaks and quieter parts. We cannot be totally certain whether Belarius' description applies only to the role of Cloten, because being a natural he was supposed to be distinguishable from the other roles, or if that was the way Armin habitually played, also performing his more popular jester parts. However, this kind of jerky speech is reflected in the prose of Armin's characters, both in his own works and in Shakespeare's. This is particularly perceivable in the longer lines, as for instance:

> CLOTEN So, get you gone. If this penetrate, I will consider your music the better: if it do not, it is a vice in her ears, which horse-hairs and calves'-guts, nor the voice of unpaved eunuch to boot, can never amend. (II.iii.26-29)

> TUTCH Change your marke, shot at a white, wil say,
> come sticke me in the clout sir, her white is
> black, tis crept into her eye, and wenches with
> black eyes the white's turned up are but as custards, [...] (Sc. XII, 52-55)

Indeed Wiles suggests that text itself, full of parenthetical clauses and subordinations, is specifically made to take advantage of the actor's delivery style and enables him to change register in each part of the speech, thus suggesting "a multiplicity of voices engaged in an internal dialogue".[132]

[132] Wiles, pp. 159-160.

1.5.3 *The Winter's Tale*

In *The Winter's Tale* Armin's part is undoubtedly that of Autolycus. The astrologer Simon Forman, in his account of a performance of the play at the Globe on May 15, 1611, seems fascinated with the character of Autolycus:

> Remember also the rogue that came in all tattered like Coll Pixie; how he feigned him sick and to have been robbed of all that he had. How he cozened the poor man of all his money. And, after, came to the sheep-shearing with a pedlar's pack and there cozened them again of all their money. How he changed apparel with the King of Bohemia's son, and then how he turned courtier, etc. Beware of trusting feigned beggars or fawning fellows.[133]

Besides his report of the plot, it is interesting that he should be calling Autolycus a "pixie", which, is "a supernatural being with magical powers, typically portrayed as small and human-like in form, with pointed ears and a pointed hat" (*OED*). Except for the supernatural powers, we may agree that this description indicates very aptly the physical appearance of Armin: short, apparently human but at the same time not totally so. However, the text of *The Winter's Tale* too offers a few more explicit references to Autolycus' height. In V.ii the Clown and the Shepherd, now noblemen, convince Autolycus to give up his life as a rogue:

> CLOWN And I'll swear to the Prince thou art a tall fellow of thy hands, and that thou wilt not be drunk; but I know thou art no tall fellow of thy hands, and that thou wilt be drunk; but I'll swear it, and I would thou wouldst be a tall fellow of thy hands.
> AUTOLYCUS I will prove so, sir, to my power.
> CLOWN Ay, by any means prove a tall fellow. (V.ii.161-167)

The repetition of the phrase "tall fellow" in relation to Armin-Autolycus, instead of pointing at the meaning of "tall" as "valiant", becomes overtly ironical here, stressing the physical impossibility of the character actually to become a "tall fellow".

Of all the roles taken up by Armin during his career, Autolycus is the one that most of all mirrors the personality of the actor, both on and off stage. Autolycus enters the stage in IV.iii immediately showing off his skills, introducing himself to the audience through a song. He is the comic character that first uses songs in the romances and at the same time the one

[133] Quoted in Rowse, p. 311.

who makes use of this mode of expression most extensively. The first song he sings in the sheep-shearing feast scene somehow recalls Armin's practices as a goldsmith and lapidary, as among the items he advertises with the aid of music there are a "bugle-bracelet", "necklace amber", "golden coifs and stomachers" (IV.iv.223-225).

Evidence that Armin was a singer does not come only from Shakespeare – e.g., Feste, Touchstone, Lear's Fool, as we have seen – but, even more significantly, from *Two Maids*, where both Armin's characters have sung lines: Tutch has four sung lines and Blue John two.[134] Though the length of the sung parts in Armin's play does not compare to those in Shakespeare, it nonetheless proves the point that the actor could sing. However, as between the composition and early performances of *Two Maids* and those of *The Winter's Tale* some ten years passed, it is possible that Armin's skill in singing developed further, so that Shakespeare inserted more sung lines for him in his plays than the actor did for himself in his own works. In Shakespeare's play, Autolycus' skill in singing is justified by his main profession. When he talks to the Clown the first time, in the scene where he pretends he has been robbed, he describes the "thief" in these terms:

> AUTOLYCUS I know this man well; he hath been since an ape-bearer, then a process-server, a bailiff; then he compassed a motion of the Prodigal Son, and married a tinker's wife within a mile where my land and living lies; and, having flown over many knavish professions, he settled only in rogue. Some call him Autolycus. (IV.iii.93-99)

In just a few lines Autolycus tells us everything we need to know about his past and present: we learn he is an "ape-bearer", that is "one who carried a monkey about for exhibition, a strolling buffoon" (*OED*)[135] and one who puts up puppet shows such as that of the Prodigal Son: he is a wandering showman, basically, as well as a husband, an ex-bailiff and a rogue. The play shows him in three of these roles: as a rogue, peddler and strolling showman, but in particular we see him as a balladmonger. Each of these different identities of Autolycus will

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[134] Blue John's sung lines: scene X, 38-39; Tutch's sung lines: scene XII, 43-46 (*Two Maids,* Alexander S. Liddie, ed., 1979).
[135] The *OED* quotes Autolycus' line as example for the meaning of "ape-bearer".

be discussed in the next chapter. Here I would just like to point how they are relevant for a definition of Armin's personality as a performer. Both actor and character represent protean and eclectic individuals: they make their living through the entertainment of an audience, they sing, they act. They project several identities at once. Armin is the goldsmith apprentice, but also the tailor's son, the natural (Blue John) and the artificial fool (Tutch). In *Two Maids of More-Clacke* he is both Tutch and Blue John, respectively the artificial and the natural, but he is also the Tutch that disguises as Blue John and as a Welsh knight in order to trick Sir William Vergir into believing that one of the conditions he has imposed on the marriage of his daughter is fulfilled. In *Twelfth Night* he is Feste and Sir Topas, in *Cymbeline* he is Cloten and the fool disguised as Posthumus and in his own *Quips Upon Questions* he shows off his talent in mimicry. At the same way, Autolycus is the ever-changing character who cannot be captured in one fixed identity, to the point that it is impossible to define him clearly. More than other characters played by Armin before him, he is master of disguise: so he enters all "tattered" to deceive the Clown, then at the sheep shearing feast, as the stage direction in IV.iv.219 informs us, he is "wearing a false beard, carrying his pack", and finally he tricks the Clown and his father into believing he is a courtier. Also Armin's professional identity is changeable: as well as an actor he was also a playwright, a poet, a pamphleteer and a well acknowledged ballad-maker of his time. This last detail might be significant to interpret the way Shakespeare conceived of Autolycus. At the time Shakespeare was writing the play, in 1609 or 1610, Armin was probably at the peak of his popularity as a writer, given that the years 1608 and 1609 coincided with his period of greatest productivity. In 1609, in particular, *The Italian Taylor and His Boy* came out, so that Armin's fame as a ballad-maker would shine one more time. It is then quite apt that Shakespeare in 1609-1610 should be hinting at Armin as the writer of petty poetry by giving Autolycus the chance of selling ballads of the

type that the wide public particularly enjoyed and of the type that Armin himself would write at the time. On top of that, by staging the clown of *The Winter's Tale* as a shape-shifter, Shakespeare was possibly alluding directly to the content of Armin's latest published work, which featured an equally protean Boy who, thanks to his magical skills, was able to turn into a steed, a fish, a ruby ring and a finally a fox.

Yet, Shakespeare's tribute to Armin as an author of ballads is also quite ironic. In early modern England the authors of street ballads did not usually coincide with the peddlers and balladmongers who sold them. While the latter were the street performers of the texts, the former usually remained anonymous as their names did not appear on the broadsides sold to customers.[136] In the case of Armin-Autolycus, then, Shakespeare almost makes fun of the popular author of ballads, whose role as the creator of the texts that were enjoyed by so many people is degraded to that of the simple seller trading somebody else's goods. Indeed Armin relied a lot on his printed material, and he was a writer with an eye on the market; but making of Autolycus a peddler Shakespeare somehow brings forward once again Hamlet's opinion that clowns should not speak more than is set out for them, possibly referring to William Kemp's practice of extemporising in his scenes.[137]

The same type of irony is shown towards Armin the goldsmith in the play. Like the ballad author, the goldsmith is the creator of something, but in this case Autolycus just sells off the artistic products:

> AUTOLYCUS I have sold all my trumpery; not a counterfeit stone, not a [...] brooch, [...] bracelet, horn-ring to keep my pack from fasting. They throng who should buy first, as if my trinkets had been hallowed and brought a benediction to the buyer; (IV.iv.597-603)

The whole situation is doubly ironic for Armin, as Autolycus is actually selling not authentic jewels but fake ones. In this way Shakespeare at once acknowledges and jestingly lessens

[136] See Natascha Würzbach, *The Rise of the English Street Ballad 1550-1650*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 13-16.
[137] *Hamlet*, III.ii.38-39. See also Sutcliffe, "Kempe and Armin", pp. 123-124.

Armin's skills both as a writer and as a goldsmith. Still, all these shared features between Armin and Autolycus, make him the most successful alter-ego of the actor: we could almost say that Autolycus *is* Robert Armin.

The other work that Armin published in 1609, the play *Two Maids of More-Clacke*, might also be useful to interpret the character of Autolycus. Wiles states that:

> There is no reason in terms of plot why Autolycus should once have been a servant of Florizel and worn three-pile velvet, since Florizel never recognizes Autolycus, nor listens to him – as Autolycus reports – when he broaches the matter of the clown's farthell [...]. The point of informing the audience that Autolycus is an ex-courtier is to remind them that the *actor* is a celebrated player of court fools. Since fools are regularly whipped, Autolycus was "certainly whipped out of court".[138]

I believe Wiles has certainly got a point here as, in fact, Shakespeare chose to keep this trait of Capnio, the partially corresponding character in his source, *Pandosto*, but did not justify its presence in the development of the play. However, Shakespeare probably knew the recently published *Two Maids*, where we find a couple of analogies with Autolycus. In Armin's play, indeed, Toures, the suitor to Sir William's daughter, disguises as a tinker in a "tawny coate" who mends utensils but also sings and performs for the wives who come up to him.[139] Besides that, though, the theme of the dismissal of the jester-servant from court is to be found in *Two Maids* as well. When Tutch as Blue John, at the end of the play, reveals his real identity to Sir William he says:

> TUTCH I plaid but "Iohn come kisse me now" saies she,
> I am Tutch your quondam seruant sir, thrust out to
> thrust them in, a lawfull marriage is no mockery
> sir, I counterfeited welch, to ioyne this constring
> English. (Scene XXII, 261-265)

Sir William discharges Tutch when he finds out that he is the go-between of her daughter Tabitha and her lover Filbon. A deeper analysis of Armin's play, then, reveals how Tutch's role resembles Autolycus' in more ways than one, as indeed they are both dismissed servants who bring about the final happiness of the couples. Just as Autolycus directs the Clown and

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[138] Wiles, p. 156.
[139] Scene XI. See the stage direction at the beginning of the scene.

the Shepherd onto Florizel and Perdita's ship leaving for Sicily, thus causing the final agnition, Tutch‘s idea of having Filbon dress up as a nurse fulfills Sir William's condition that he should become a woman before being granted Tabitha's hand in marriage. Thus they have a central importance in their respective texts: the only difference is that while anything Tutch does is deliberate, the fact that Autolycus brings about the happy ending for the characters is just a secondary effect of his own mischievous plans. In a sense, though, Autolycus' unintended loyalty to Florizel recalls Tutch's willed support of Filbon.

1.5.4 *The Tempest*

Felver suggests, without giving many details, that in Shakespeare's last romance Armin played the part of Trinculo[140] – and this is one of the reasons why he considers the actor's last fools barely interesting. Baldwin is of the same opinion, and bases his theory on the suggestion that Trinculo has "lesser legs" than Caliban (II.ii.102), that he is "made like a goose" (II.ii.130-131) and is a "jesting monkey" (III.ii.46). Trinculo is indeed the jester at Alonso's court, and that is why Caliban calls him a "pied ninny"[141] (III.ii.64). However, as a court jester, Trinculo does not possess any of the qualities that endowed Armin's wise fools, except the point where he states

> TRINCULO They say there's but five upon this isle: we are three of them; if the other two be brain'd like us, the state totters. (III.ii.4-7)

which is probably a bit out of character; in general he lacks the wit of his predecessors and is portrayed more like a foolish servant. Besides, I do not believe that the textual indications related to Trinculo point unequivocally to Armin. The "lesser legs" could actually point to a small-sized actor, but when Stephano says to Trinculo "Though thou canst swim like a duck,

[140] Felver, p. 62.
[141] "Pied" means parti-coloured (*OED*) and it refers to the traditonal motley costume of the fool. See Baldwin, pp. 245-246.

thou art made like a goose" (II.ii.130-131), he might indicate instead that he is not such a small light creature. Therefore I agree with Wiles and Grote, who state that the part that would logically be given to Armin is that of the monster Caliban[142] who, among the comic characters is the one who speaks most lines (170) and, unlike Trinculo, sings but does not dance. Similarly to what happened with Cloten in *Cymbeline* Armin would probably prefer to play a less usual type of stage fool who had a major part in the play instead of a more orthodox one like Trinculo or Stephano, even if the latter has some sung lines. At the same time, he utters most of his lines in poetry, though he occasionally switches to prose. In this way Armin shows his skills at using different varieties of speech, as he did in earlier texts. When speaking in verse, Caliban, despite his folly, touches peaks of poeticality that Stephano and Trinculo can never even dream of matching, as in

> CALIBAN Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,
> Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
> Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
> Will hum about mine ears (III.ii.139-141)

Such complexity of speech and character certainly called for an experienced and versatile actor like Armin, rather than for a low-comedy one in the manner of Kemp. Caliban's prose and verse are accompanied also by some lines which, according to the stage directions, he *"sings drunkenly"* (II.ii.176) after Stephano and Trinculo make him drink. Certainly Caliban in this particular play is not endowed with the same musical abilities as Stephano's; on the contrary he is not expected to sing well, as indeed Trinculo immediately comments that he is "a howling monster, a drunken monster" (II.ii.178). Yet, he is able to judge if a melody is good or not: when Stephano sings to celebrate the approval of the plot against Prospero, Caliban says that "that's not the tune" (III.ii.126). Also, the fact that a character conceived of as a "natural" entertains others singing recalls the tradition of the mentally deranged

[142] See Wiles, pp. 155-156 and Grote, p. 192.

individuals used as source for the nobles' entertainment, thus reminds us of Blue John in Armin's *Two Maids,* where the fool is asked by the other characters on stage to sing for them,[143] and of the household fool Jack Miller of *Foole Upon Foole*, who is also derided after his performances. On top of Armin's knowledge of natural fools and his expertise in performing them, his own "deformed" appearance was also perfect to play Caliban, whom Prospero defines "as disproportioned in his manners as in his shape" (V.i.291-292) and a "misshapen knave" (V.i.268). The first time Trinculo sees Caliban he says that he is "legged like a man and his fins like arms" (II.ii.33-34) so that, like Autolycus as a pixie, he is perceived mainly as a human being, yet with something otherworldly in him.

Two of the many definitions that are given to Caliban are "freckled whelp, hag born" (I.ii.284) and "puppy-headed monster" (II.ii.153-154) and they are both expressions that indicate dog-like features connected with Armin. Similarly, later on, Caliban *howls* (II.ii. 178) and kneels to lick Stephano's shoe (III.ii.23). However, all this does not prove that Caliban looks actually like a dog on the stage, but it only suggests an abnormal appearance and a deranged mind, as I am also going to show in chapter 3. In fact, as was shown in the analyses of the previous romances, and of Shakespeare's earlier texts, Armin's dog-like qualities do not indicate an actual bodily appearance as such but they are only symbolical and serve to point at a peculiar personality and a specific psychology of the characters. The same happens in *The Tempest*, which has led sometimes to the theatrical representation of Caliban as a dog-like creature with floppy ears: it does not seem necessary to get that far, though this play poses a problem that the previous ones did not have, that is the actual monstrosity of a character. It is not just Caliban's epithets and actions that link him with dog-like features. Vaughan, indeed, mentions that one of the possible sources for Caliban's name was the

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[143] *Two* Maids*,* Scene X, 39.

Arabic word *kalebôn*, which meant indeed "vile-dog". It is possible that Shakespeare's monster was given such an exotic name because he was the son of Sycorax, an Algerian witch, therefore connected with the African/Arabic world. Unfortunately, though, this source for Caliban's name, like others, is unproven.[144]

Also the relationship between Caliban and the other characters on stage suggests a strong parallel with similar dynamics in other plays casting Armin. Indeed in *The Tempest* he becomes soon part of a trio of foolish characters, and in this group he finds a foil, Trinculo, whom he calls "pied ninny", "scurvy patch" (III.ii.64) and straightforwardly "fool" (V.i.223, 229). In this case the concept of "foil" is not the same that we find in the plays starring chiefly Armin's court fools, who resort to their best array of quips to show how the other is a fool: on the contrary Caliban, as we will see, never really gets the upper hand with Trinculo, yet there is still a basic relationship of antagonism. In the romances the structure of the trio of clowns is repeated in *The Winter's Tale*, where Autolycus, the Clown and the Shepherd form a group – with the Clown as Autolycus' target – but also in *Pericles,* with the three Bawds who constitutes a "family" that acts together. After a detailed discussion of each of Armin's roles, more space will be devoted to the nature of these groups of clowns in the final chapter.

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[144] The supporters of this theory were some nineteenth-century critics, among whom J.S. Phillpots. See Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 33 and 51.

2. The Underworld Fool: *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*

In the first chapter I outlined Armin's presence in Shakespeare's romances, thus also highlighting the four characters – Boult, Cloten, Autolycus and Caliban – who have, or at least *should* have, the leading comic part in their respective plays, given that these roles were written specifically for the clown of the King's Men. This and the next chapter, then, will be devoted to a deeper analysis of these characters and their comic power in the plays. However, rather than describing them in separate chapters, I have chosen instead to group them according to the type of *dramatis persona* they project, so that it will already be possible to note some of the analogies between them at an earlier stage of the present investigation. Examining the set of Armin's characters in the romances we may distinguish two main groups: the criminals – Boult and Autolycus – and the "naturals" – Cloten and Caliban. The first couple will be the object of this chapter, while the second one will be discussed in the next.

The bawds in *Pericles* and Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale* embody a type of stage clown that is not frequently to be seen in Shakespeare's previous plethora of comic characters, especially not in the comedies. I am referring to the stage fool coming from the underworld, that is, in the sense of organized crime. Shakespeare's previous stage clowns, no matter if they were created for Kemp, Armin, or possibly some other comedian, were country rustics (the Clowns in *Titus Andronicus* and *Anthony and Cleopatra*, Costard in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the Gravediggers in *Hamlet*), servants (Speed and Launce in *The Two Gentlemen of* Verona*,* Grumio in *The Taming of the Shrew*, the two Dromios in *The Comedy of Errors*, Peter and Gregory in *Romeo and Juliet*, Launcelot Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice*, the Clown in *Othello*, the Porter in *Macbeth*),

knights (Falstaff in 1 *Henry IV*, 2 *Henry IV*, *Henry V* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*), soldiers (Parolles in *All's Well That Ends Well*), foolish officers (Constable Dogberry and Verges in *Much Ado About Nothing*), professional court jesters (Lavatch, Touchstone, Lear's Fool, Thersites and Feste), or even nobler figures endowed with the wise-fool logic (Casca in *Julius Caesar*, Menenius in *Coriolanus*, and Apemantus in *Timon of Athens*),[1] but rarely professional criminals. Shakespeare depicts the underworld in several plays – *Hamlet, Othello, King Lear* and *Timon of Athens* – but in all these occurrences thieves, prostitutes or beggars are inserted in serious discourses and cannot be thought of as the "comic relief" which tragedies occasionally benefit from. On the contrary, their presence heightens the tragic force of the plays and, as Norman Berlin comments, in most cases they symbolize actual evil.[2] Though *Timon of Athens* actually includes the role of a brothel Fool who visits Timon's house, the part is so small that it does not offer an actual exploration of the themes connected with the underworld, and neither can it be identified with the major comic source of the play. Besides, the case of Tom O'Bedlam in *King Lear* is particular because it is an incidentally comic camouflage that only temporarily conceals the identity of Edgar who is not – strictly speaking – the clown of the play. The only real close precedent to the criminal clowns of Shakespeare's romances is represented by the brothel keepers in *Measure for Measure,* Mistress Overdone and Pompey, who, as was also hinted at in the previous chapter, can also be assumed to be the direct theatrical models for the bawds in *Pericles*. It is probably not casual that characters so similar should be found in these three plays, which can all be classified as tragicomedies – *Measure for Measure* is normally categorized as a "problem

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[1] For a discussion on this type of fool-like characters see Wiles, pp. 153-155. For a comprehensive study of the clown in Shakespeare's plays see Videbæk, *The Stage Clown in Shakespeare's Theatre*.

[2] He notes that this is a trait that associates the way the underworld is portrayed by Shakespeare in the plays between 1600 and 1607 with Thomas Dekker's (Normand Berlin, *The Base String: The Underworld in Elizabethan Drama*, Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1968, p. 210).

play" and indeed, as far as the tone is concerned, it is much closer to the late plays than to the romantic comedies.

The other important Shakespearean predecessor to the criminal fools of the later plays is certainly Falstaff with his gang in the Henry IV plays, but they are yet another story – and not only because they inhabit the particular dramatic world of the history play. Certainly they are comic characters of the clown type who enjoy a dissolute life made of eating, drinking, pranking and ambushing unwary road travellers, but the latter activity seems just a way to have fun rather than a serious business. Nevertheless, Falstaff and his cronies represent a fundamental stepping stone to the development of the professional criminal fool in Shakespeare's later plays. All the members of the gang are originally tavern customers, with the only exception of the small role of Gadshill who is actually a full-time highway robber, and Falstaff himself is addressed as "Sir" by the others, so that he is socially recognized as a knight, though he prefers to think of himself as a thief, as he shows in the scene of *1 Henry IV* where he introduces himself (I.ii).[3] In short, Falstaff is to be considered a very complex character – saying he is a only a rogue would be simply reductive; he is part clown, part noble character, part licensed fool, part Lord of Misrule and part Vice. Though he is habitually referred to as a rogue, a scoundrel or a knave, we actually see him committing thievery only once in *1 Henry IV*, when his supposed serious intentions are completely turned upside down by Hal and Poins' jest; which actually demonstrates how, rather than a criminal, he is a cowardly braggart. Hal's redemption coincides also with Falstaff and his company's achievement of a higher position in society – i.e. they form the most wretched troop in Prince Hal's army. Especially in *2 Henry IV* – but this is also perceivable in the second half of *1 Henry IV* – the supposed criminal actions of the fat knight are kept off stage and they remain

[3] When Hal remarks upon the fat knight's laid-back lifestyle Falstaff replies: "Indeed you come near me now, Hal, for we that take purses go by the moon and the seven stars" (I.ii.13-14).

only the object of conversation in tavern gatherings at Eastcheap. Furthermore, when Falstaff appears in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* his past as a highwayman becomes only part of the background to the action. While Falstaff's character changes quite soon across the plays where he is present, *Pericles*' bawds and Autolycus remain criminals throughout and their actions against the law are to be seen in every scene where they are present because they are professionals in that field and roguery is their main activity.

The observation of the complexity of Falstaff, however, is necessary to get a clear view of the context that gave rise to the purer type of criminal fools in the romances. It has by now become almost a cliché in criticism to state that the fools of early modern drama are nothing but an evolution of the Vice of medieval pageants and sixteenth-century interludes.[4] And this is very evident in the character of Falstaff, where the Vice component is present as much as that of the festive clown: he is indeed the main tempter of Hal.[5] However, he also connects these two already related concepts with the very concrete idea of criminality in the Elizabethan age, so that he visibly straddles three different figurations. In *Pericles'* bawds and Autolycus, though they belong to the same category of *dramatis personae* as Falstaff, these three elements appear more blurred into one another, so that for instance the clown of the *Winter's Tale* is less a tempter in the etymological sense of the word than a trickster and a festive clown, while Boult is more a Vice than a Lord of Misrule. In both cases, though, their criminal activity, which would be immediately recognized as familiar to the Jacobean playhouse, does indeed maximize their connection with their medieval stage predecessors – vices and devils of mysteries and morality plays. Autolycus' nature as trickster duping innocent passers-by, which makes him so close to a figure like Titivillus in *Mankind*, for example, is not merely a dramatic function that he shares with other Shakespearean

[4] See Peter Happé, *English Drama Before Shakespeare,* Longman: London and New York, 1999, pp. 15-16.
[5] Walter Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly: Erasmus, Rabelais, Shakespeare*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1964, p. 199.

characters like Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or Ariel in *The Tempest* but it is, as we have several times recalled, a *real*, and not an allegorical, job. The same can be said for Boult and his masters in *Pericles*. While for instance in Digby's *Mary Magdalen* the devils and vices tempt the female protagonist in order to be rewarded with an illustrious soul to increase the power of their hellish realm, in Shakespeare's play the brothel keepers work to get Marina involved in the very concrete sin of lechery and prostitution in order to earn money from it and possibly also to beat the competition of the other brothels in Mytilene. Therefore, if we bear in mind the medieval origins of the early modern stage fool, it is clear how, of all the social roles that this character has been made to cover – servant, court jester, rustic – that of the criminal is actually the most logical. Autolycus and Boult do exactly the same things their allegorical predecessors did on medieval scaffolds: the difference is that while the latter go only against the moral law, the former break the actual Jacobean law, and they win their bread doing it. We could wonder why, then, Shakespeare did not exploit more often this identity in his plays, but chose instead to assign the figure of the underworld fool to three late texts which, being tragicomedies, are very similar in tone and themes, and to a history play where anyway that same figure is ambiguous and poses a few more problems. I will be able to give an answer to this question at the end of this discussion.

2.1 Boult

Let us start off by saying immediately that the character of Boult as we know him is largely a creation of Shakespeare, who was almost certainly the author of the brothel scenes in *Pericles*. However, Shakespeare probably developed the role starting from a couple of similar characters in his close sources, the tale of Apollonius of Tyre in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (8, ii) and Lawrence Twine's prose novel *The Pattern of Painful Adventures* (1594, repr. 1607). Gower does not explicitly say that the male "bordeller" (l. 1415)[6] of Mytilene (Leonin) has a procurer, as he takes that responsibility directly upon himself: however the male bawd, seeing that Thaise[7] will not consent to becoming a prostitute, tells his "man" "that he with strengthe agein hire leve/ Tho scholde hir maidenhod bereve" (ll. 1439-1440). Vanquished by Thaise's honesty, Leonin's man cannot carry out the task and finally agrees to intercede for her with his master:

> And tho this man
> Hire tale hath herd, he goth agein,
> And tolde unto his maister plein
> That sche hath seid; and therupon,
> Whan than he sih beyete non
> At the bordel because of hire,
> He bad his man to gon and spire
> A place wher sche myhte abyde (ll. 1467-1473)

Leonin's "man", then, appears only at the last stage of Thaise's adventure in the brothel. In the case of Boult Shakespeare seems to have followed more closely the other source, Twine's novel, where the narrator alludes to "a certain villein which was governor over [the] maids" (p. 456)[8] and who serves the "vile male-bawd" (p. 455) in charge of the house. This

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[6] John Gower, *Confessio Amantis,* Russell A. Peck, ed., Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006.
[7] The name of the Marina-character in Gower's tale. Shakespeare gives this name to Marina's mother, instead.
[8] Laurence Twine, *The Patterne of Painefull Adventures,* London: Valentine Simmes, 1594, reprinted in Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic sources of Shakespeare. Vol.6, Other 'Classical' Plays: 'Titus Andronicus'; 'Troilus and Cressida'; 'Timon of Athens'; 'Pericles, Prince of Tyre'*, London: Routledge, 1966, pp. 423-482. MacDonald P. Jackson, comparing more broadly the brothel scenes of *Pericles* with the corresponding passages in the sources, commented that "it looks as though the playwright or playwrights first wrote a straightforward Gower version of the brothel scenes and then grated a Twine version onto that, artfully adapting Twine's prose narrative, but being less careful to integrate it with the sequence derived from Gower" (Jackson, p. 230). The brothel scenes in *Pericles* correspond to chapters 13 and 14 of Twine's novel.

villain, though, does not have such an important role as Boult in the brothel scenes: he is ordered by his master to attire Tharsia as suits a lady to be cried on the market, to violently convince her to comply with the keeper's requests but he is finally persuaded by the lady's innocence that her virginity should be preserved. So this character basically performs two actions, the first of which is partly taken up by the female Bawd in *Pericles*[9] – a character added again by Shakespeare, as there is no female brothel-keeper either in Gower or in Twine. So we can get a sense of how, while on the one hand the playwright fits three roles into the basic plot offered by his source, on the other he expands enough to make space both for Boult and the Bawd. The Pander is the only character whom Shakespeare took directly from his sources. However, it looks like the Pander's role was significantly shrunk, as many of the actions that are performed by the male bawd in Gower and Twine are given to Boult in the play, instead of his masters. In both sources, for instance, it is the male bawd himself who looks concretely after the prospective customers. Therefore in *Confessio Amantis* he cries Thaise on the market:

> And thus whan he hath crid it oute
> In syhte of al the poeple aboute,
> He ladde hire to the bordel tho. (Book 8, ll. 1421-1433)

In *The Pattern of Painful Adventures* this job is again performed by the male bawd but it is anticipated also by a longer passage describing how he manages to buy Tharsia off the pirates in the first place, outbidding Prince Athanagoras.[10] Keeping an eye on the market, both looking for "fresh creatures" and for customers, is a prerogative of Boult in *Pericles*, and it is actually his most important task. Indeed in Scene 16[11] his masters send him to "search the market narrowly" (Sc. 16, 3) and he later comes back with the pirates and Marina. Towards the end of the scene, then, the Bawd sends him to cry Marina in the city streets, while in

[9] The Bawd does not actually give Marina new clothes – her upper-class garments will attract higher bidders (see *Pericles*, Gossett, ed., p. 333) – but she nevertheless instructs her on how to behave.
[10] He is the governor of the city: his role in Shakespeare's play is taken by Lysimachus.
[11] Which corresponds to IV.ii in Gossett's edition.

Scene 19[12] he leads Lysimachus to the bawdy house. This gives Boult a greater freedom of movement and occasionally of speech, functioning actually as the link between all the characters that populate the two scenes: the brothel keepers, the pirates, Marina and Lysimachus. Not even the Bawd, who has the biggest role among the brothel-keepers, does interact with other characters as much as Boult does.

One reason why Shakespeare chose to enhance this character so much with respect to his direct sources was probably very practical, as was previously suggested: he had a Robert Armin willing to play and the audience would have been very disappointed if their favourite comedian had had less than a certain amount of lines or a totally neglectable role; even if the total number of lines at his disposal for the role was not comparable to Armin's previous parts, he could still create for him a character of some substance. To do this Shakespeare sacrificed the character of Pander who is only formally the direct heir of the male-bawd in Gower and Twine: in fact his original role becomes split between Boult, as we saw, and above all the female-bawd. Though the Pander does not have a vital impact on the scenes where he is present, he is nevertheless needed not only to form a trio posing a direct counterpart to the three fishermen welcoming Pericles to Pentapolis in Scene 5 but also, as Mario DiGangi suggested, to create the idea of an archetypal brothel family to be added to the list of disrupted families of the play.[13] If this is true, however, the traditional relations within the family are subverted: not just because the Bawd, rather than her husband – the Pander – is the head of the house, but because the servant enjoys a certain degree of liberty, as indeed he has the faculty to negotiate with Marina the terms of her preservation before his masters know about her will. This degree of freedom is one of the traits that links Boult with

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[12] Which corresponds to IV.v.
[13] Mario DiGangi, *Sexual Types: Embodiment, Agency and Dramatic Character from Shakespeare to Shirley,* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011, p. 189.

the tradition of the clownish servants in Shakespeare's previous plays, especially those created for Kemp. That Shakespeare did not conceive of Boult as a total subaltern in the brothel "family" is clear once we realise that he is the only one of its members to have a real name. This is not consistent for instance with what happens in *Measure for Measure*, where both the bawd (Mistress Overdone) and her servant (Pompey) have a name. Is that because Shakespeare, once again, did not want to give Armin an anonymous role? Indeed, with the exception of Lear's Fool – whose namelessness stands for his quintessential quality – and the small clown parts in *Othello* and *Anthony and Cleopatra*, Armin's parts usually had a stage name, also in plays other than Shakespeare's. Shakespeare might have chosen this name not only because it was particularly suitable for a man of the brothel, but also as a possible tribute to Twine's narration of Tharsia's first entrance in the brothel, which is not dramatised in the play:

> And when he came into his house, he brought her into a certain chapel where stood the idol of Priapus made of gold and garnished with pearls and precious stones. This idol was made after the shape of a man, with a mighty member unproportionable to the body always erected, whom bawds and lechers do adore, making him their god and worshiping him. Before this filthy idol he commanded Tharsia to fall down. (p. 456)

The name then results bawdily comic and allusive, but at the same time also harshly ironic on the actor bearing that stage name, an actor whose small body size I have already commented on. The description of golden Priapus in pearls and precious stones might have given Shakespeare the idea of somehow linking this particular representation of the god of fertility with the character he was creating for Armin, the goldsmith.

If, originally, the reason why Shakespeare decided to expand on Twine's "villain" was a practical one required by the Jacobean theatrical business, the actual way in which he staged the Mytilene underworld of prostitution, or rather, of brothel keeping, could not but be heavily shaped by his own Early Modern perception of the phenomenon both as a playwright/ playhouse entrepreneur/theatre goer and especially as a London citizen. In terms of literary

influences, for instance, Robert S. Miola sees the brothel in *Pericles* as a representation of one of the locations (together with the sea and the temple) made popular by the Latin New Comedy of Plautus and Terence and the bawds as references to that particular type of drama, which Shakespeare was probably acquainted with.[14] On the other hand, around the time Shakespeare wrote *Pericles,* brothels, pimps and bawds were being dramatized for instance in the Jacobean city comedies of Jonson, Marston, Dekker and Middleton, who were interested indeed in exploring on the stage in a satirical vein the social and economic phenomena defining the face of London in the early years of the Stuart reign.[15] For example, the fact that Shakespeare clashed with his close sources by placing the female Bawd at the head of the brothel may be due indeed to the will to adhere to the early modern dramatic tradition where it was usually a woman who corrupted morally the unfortunate young woman. The staging of male-bawdry, DiGangi notes, was much less frequent, and this reflects not only the actual reality of London where bawds definitely outnumbered panders, but also a general tendency to associate sexual depravity with women, rather than men.[16] At the same time, however, creating the roles of Boult and the Pander Shakespeare doubles the presence of male-bawdry in his play, thus at once accepting tradition and showing originality. In this sense he reasserts and completes the job he started with Mistress Overdone and Pompey in *Measure for Measure*.

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[14] Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Comedy: The Influence of Plautus and Terence*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, pp. 144-148.

[15] In the years between 1602-1608 female bawds are present in: Marston's *The Malcontent* (1604), Dekker and Middleton's *The Honest Whore* (1604), *Measure for Measure* (performed in 1604), Chapman, Jonson and Marston's *Eastward Ho* (1605), *The London Prodigal* (1605), Edward Sharpam's *Cupid's Whirligig* (1607), Dekker and Webster's *Northward Ho* (1607), Dekker and Webster's *Westward Ho* (1607), Middleton's *Your Five Gallants* (1608), Middleton's *The Dumb Knight* (1608); panders or pimps are staged in Marston's *The Malcontent* (1604), Middleton's *The Honest Whore* (1604), Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* (1605), *The London Prodigal* (1605), Middleton's *Michaelmas Term* (1606), Beaumont's *The Woman Hater* (1606), *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1607). To draw this list I consulted Thomas L. Berger, William C. Bradford and Sidney L. Sondergard, *An Index of Characters in Early Modern English Drama Printed Plays,* 1500-1660, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998. I have not included in this list the works where the role of the bawd or pimp is taken by a member of the family of the heroine or by a nurse. On this topic see DiGangi, pp. 163 ff.

[16] DiGangi, pp. 161-163. However, this can be partly conjectured also from the list of plays in note 27.

The underworld of London prostitution was particularly vivid in the mind of Shakespeare as well as contemporary playwrights, given that brothels – or "stews" – were just next door to the playhouses: in fact, the Southwark Bankside was host to the most notorious bawdy houses in Renaissance London.[17] At the time when Shakespeare staged *Pericles,* keeping a bawdy-house had been formally illegal for a while, since serious attempts to fight the trade started in the early sixteenth century.[18] The last public brothel, the Southwark Stews, was closed in 1546 by ordinance of Henry VIII, but in the meantime private houses thrived – in part because they operated undercover as taverns and alehouses[19] – and enjoyed quite a degree of tolerance on the part of institutions, except occasional activities of repression – the last major one, however, occurred in the winter between 1576 and 1577.[20] In 1603, to contrast the spreading of the plague, and maybe to show that he did not ignore the Puritans' attacks on stews and their role in spreading immorality,[21] King James ordered that the houses in the suburban areas, populated by an "excessive number of idle, indigent, dissolute and dangerous persons", should be pulled down, thus also including the Bankside brothels. However, during his reign, the trade of prostitution literally flourished and the king himself and his courtiers were apparently regular attenders of high-class brothels.[22] Even if it was somewhat tolerated, however, bawdry was still very clearly perceived as a form of criminality in Jacobean London. Though brothel keepers often managed to get away

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[17] Alan Haynes, *Sex in Elizabethan England*, Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 1997, p. 62.

[18] Haynes, p. 64. Also Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 284.

[19] See John L. McMullan, *The Canting Crew: London's Criminal Underworld 1550-1700*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1948, p. 127.

[20] See Paul Griffiths, "The Structure of Prostitution in Elizabethan London", *Continuity and Change: A Journal of Social Structure, Law and Demography in Past Society*, 8 (1993), p. 54 and E.J. Burford*, Bawds and Lodgings: A History of the London Bankside Brothels c. 100-1675*, London: Peter Owen, 1976, p. 146.

[21] See Catharine F. Seigel, "Hands Off The Hothouses: Shakespeare's Advice to the King", *Journal of Popular Culture*, 20 (1986), p. 86.

[22] The sixth satire of *Times' Whistle* (1614), "The Practice of the Bawds", for instance, alludes to the king and courtiers' habit of attending the stews. Burford, pp. 164-165.

with it by bribing judges, magistrates and constables,[23] the threat of being arrested was a constant worry: since 1553, when it was granted its charter, the Bridewell Hospital in the City had been very active;[24] though it initially opened to give shelter to the indigents, it soon became a tribunal, a prison and a place of terrible punishments for vagrants, pimps, bawds, prostitutes, and in general all those whose morals were perceived as loose. Its main aim was to strike at vice, so that keepers and occupants of brothels – the breeding places of vice – were more eagerly prosecuted than street prostitutes.[25] While in *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare explores and questions the contemporary issue of the legal prosecution of pimps and brothel keepers,[26] the same theme is not overtly presented in *Pericles.* But still, we can assume that the cultural implications of the staging of this particular sphere of society were vividly present both in the mind of the playwright as he wrote the scenes and especially in those of the Jacobean audience.

In this light, Boult is configured as no ordinary servant but as a more distinct type of character, very much like Pompey in *Measure for Measure*, that is a pimp. However, even if we considered him a simple servant, as he actually performs the orders of his "superiors", we would have to notice how unusual it is for a clownish servant in Shakespeare to work for someone who does not occupy a high or a respectable rank in society. Generally speaking witty servants, whether or not in the style of the *zanni* of the Italian Commedia dell'Arte,[27] formally work for and dupe noble men and women or at least serve someone that through money could buy themselves some kind of status, as in the case of Launcelot Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice.* There is only one precedent and that is, needless to say, Pompey again.

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[23] Griffiths, "The Structure of Prostitution", p. 55. See also Paul Griffiths, "Contesting London Bridewell, 1576-1580", *Journal of British Studies*, 42 (2003), pp. 283-315, p. 294.
[24] Haynes, p. 64.
[25] Griffiths, "The Structure of Prostitution", p. 53.
[26] Pompey gets arrested for his misconduct, though he eventually manages to have his penalty reduced by becoming the assistant of Abhorson, the executioner.
[27] e.g., Grumio in *The Taming of the Shrew* or the Dromios in *The Comedy of Errors.* See Videbæk, p. 9.

Because it is identified with a place of immorality and criminality, the internal hierarchy of the brothel is not recognized outside its boundaries – indeed this is also implied when Lysimachus defines Boult "damned door-keeper" (Sc. 19, 143) and the Bawd "herb-woman, she that sets seeds and roots of shame and iniquity" (Sc. 19, 86-87) in a similarly disdainful fashion – therefore, in a sense, Boult serves people who are not more respectable or socially elevated than he is. Comparing the comic scenes of *Pericles* to those of the previous texts, then, we realize that there is a degradation of the social importance of the comic servant, who is not placed on the lower ranks of a household any more, but instead on the lower ranks of the underworld, where we cannot even talk about different levels given that, to the eyes of the citizens and authorities, bawds, pimps, loose women, rogues and thieves were all equally condemnable and therefore ultimately alike.[28] Therefore we may note how already in *Pericles*, the first romance of the group, the condition of the clownish servant has undergone a significant change with respect to the tradition in Shakespeare. We will see how also other texts in the group present disruptions of the concept of servitude on the part of the clown.

If we read the role of Boult according to the structure of the London underworld of prostitution in the age of Shakespeare, however, he fits perfectly. While bawds were usually women, pimps were generally men; they were the agents of, as Griffiths calls it, the "shuttle service" of prostitutes in town: like Boult, they fetched "fresh meat" – sometimes from other brothels or materially carrying them from outside town – and customers as well.[29] They could collect the rent from the occupants of the brothel,[30] as Boult does with Marina. The pimp was generally a satellite of a bawd, who ran the bawdy house, but he was not necessarily tied only to one house: he could work for more than one at the same time. He was responsible, as we

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[28] See Berlin, p. 17 and, for example, Robert Greene's account of the "eight laws of villainy" in his pamphlet *A Notable Discovery of Cozenage* (1591), reprinted in A.V. Judges, ed., *The Elizabethan Underworld*, London: Routledge, 1965, pp. 135-136.
[29] Griffiths, "The Structure of Prostitution", pp. 44-45; 51.
[30] Haynes, p. 66.

may say today, for "public relations" within the trade: so he had to create strong links with customers and potential ones,[31] thus promoting loyalty for the brothel he worked in. Griffith comments that, to carry out this task, pimps needed to have a very extensive and up-to-date knowledge of the people and places involved in shady London.[32] This description of Boult's job, then, gives reason for his freedom to move and to speak within the brothel scenes – a trait he shares with Pompey. The Pander's first order to Boult to "search the market narrowly" (Sc. 16, 3) suggest that the brothel keepers trust their servant's technical skills and knowledge in doing a job that they could not do themselves. The entrance cue "But here comes Boult" (Sc. 16, 37) uttered by the Pander once Boult has come back from his "search" – thus interrupting his discussion with the Bawd on the seriousness of their economical situation – again implies a similar feeling, as if Boult's return gave them a sudden burst of hope. When Boult goes out on his missions he proves his expertise in trading with the right people: first, he quickly finds the pirates who, in a moment of such economic recession for the brothel, have the best "ware" he could hope for, a virgin who

> BOULT [...] has a good face, speaks well, and has excellent good clothes: there's no farther necessity of qualities can make her be refused. (Sc. 16, 45-47)

there is not even need for an auction to buy her in the play – strangely enough, in this case Shakespeare removes a central scene in Twine. On his missions to find potential customers for Marina, Boult gets in contact with very good ones too: first a Spaniard and then a French knight, who is already an acquaintance of the house:

> BOULT Do you know the French knight that cowers i' the hams?
> BAWD Who? Monsieur Veroles? [...]
> Well, well as for him, he brought his disease hither. Here he does but repair it. (Sc. 16, 100-107)

This offers the brothel keepers a juicy opportunity to satirize on the association between foreigners and venereal diseases, but it alludes also to the London pimps' traditional activity

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[31] Griffiths, "The Structure of Prostitution", p. 45.
[32] Griffiths, "The Structure of Prostitution", pp. 45, 54.

as guides for foreign travellers and merchants to the erotic life of the city.[33] The third time Boult comes back from his search coincides with the visit of Lysimachus, the most powerful figure in the city, who comes in disguised; again, we are given to understand that he is a habitual client, as well as an old acquaintance of Boult:

> BAWD Now the gods to-bless your honour.
> BOULT I am glad to see your honour in good health.
> LYSIMACHUS You may so. 'Tis better for you that your resorters stand upon sound legs. (Sc. 19, 29-32)

Boult does a pretty good job, then, also considering that, according to archival records, London brothels at the time thrived thanks to young men who played no part in the political life of the city, while customers belonging to the gentry accounted for a very small part of the clientele.[34] However, finding girls for members of the nobility was one of the key tasks of pimps,[35] as is indeed confirmed by the obscure links between Boult and Lysimachus.

We may also note how, though at the time the terms *pimp* and *pander* indicated basically the same profession,[36] only Boult does indeed give an exhaustive representation of the traditional stereotype. In this light, the Pander's part appears again limited in the functions that would be concretely required of the role, because they are all performed by Boult, instead. It is also curious that, once Lysimachus enters in Scene 19, the Pander virtually disappears and does not speak any more until, towards the end of the scene, he orders to "take her away" (Sc. 19, 166).[37] In this particular scene, he will exit only fifteen lines later, when Lysimachus orders to "call forth" (Sc. 19, 40) Marina. In other words, he is onstage when Lysimachus enters for the first time, but he does not join his wife in welcoming him to the brothel, as would be expected of him. On the contrary, Boult does it in his place, as we have

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[33] See Haynes, p. 66.
[34] Griffiths, "The Structure of Prostitution", p. 55.
[35] Griffiths, "The Structure of Prostitution", p. 45.
[36] See Gordon Williams, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature,* London: The Athlone Press, 1994, p. 1031.
[37] Gossett attributes this line to the Bawd so that, after the entrance of Lysimachus, the Pander does not have any more lines of dialogue, though he is still physically present in the scenes.

seen in the last quotation above. In this section of the scene we realize, then, how Boult's actions do not recall those of a servant, but rather of someone who does have some power in the management of the brothel, perhaps even more than the Pander. Sometimes he even has some power on the Bawd, as for example when he declares that Marina will keep her own clothes for a while:

> BAWD Come, young one, I like the manner of your garments well.
> BOULT Ay, by my faith they shall not be changed yet. (Sc. 16, 129-131)

or when he decides that the lady is to be educated to the customs of the place:

> BOULT O, take her home, mistress, take her home. These blushes of hers must be quenched with some present practice.
> BAWD Thou sayst true i'faith, so they must [...] (Sc. 16, 119-121)

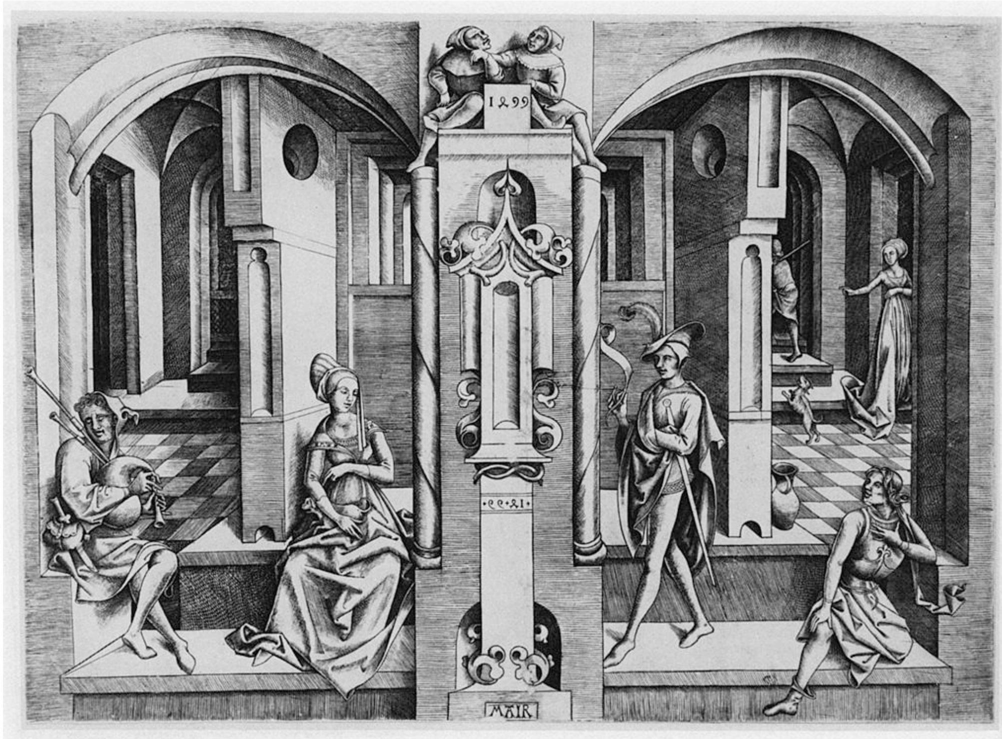
Though we can get a clear idea of what Boult is by comparing his figure with the professions gravitating in the environment of the houses of ill-repute in Jacobean London, we find out quite disappointingly that in the text he is never given a clear definition. This clashes with Pompey's case, where we get plenty of epithets that indicate his job: for instance, "tapster" (I.ii.100),[38] "tedious fool" (II.i.112), "varlet" (II.i.160), "parcel-bawd" (II.i.60).[39] Boult on the contrary is called twice in the same unclear way: "damned door-keeper", once by Lysimachus (Sc. 19, 144) and later by Marina (Sc. 19, 190). Gossett here draws attention to the idea of vice and damnation, and compares the expression to "You! Mistress!/ That have the voice opposite to Saint Peter/ and keep the gates of hell" in *Othello* (IV.ii.92-94),[40] thus interpreting the epithet in a purely symbolical way. However, I think we should read it first in a very concrete way. In fact, one of the tasks of pimps, which they shared with keepers, was that of checking access[41] to the bawdy house so that they had complete control over

[38] Pompey is called "tapster" as a reference to the fact that in Shakespeare's times many ale-houses and taverns were actually clandestine brothels (see above). So the pimp conceals his real activity under a false identity. On this topic see for instance Burford, p. 146 and Jonson's *Epigram on the New Hot Houses* (1616).
[39] I.e., part-time bawd.
[40] See *Pericles*, Gossett, ed., p. 357, n. 123.
[41] Griffiths, "The Structure of Prostitution", p. 46.

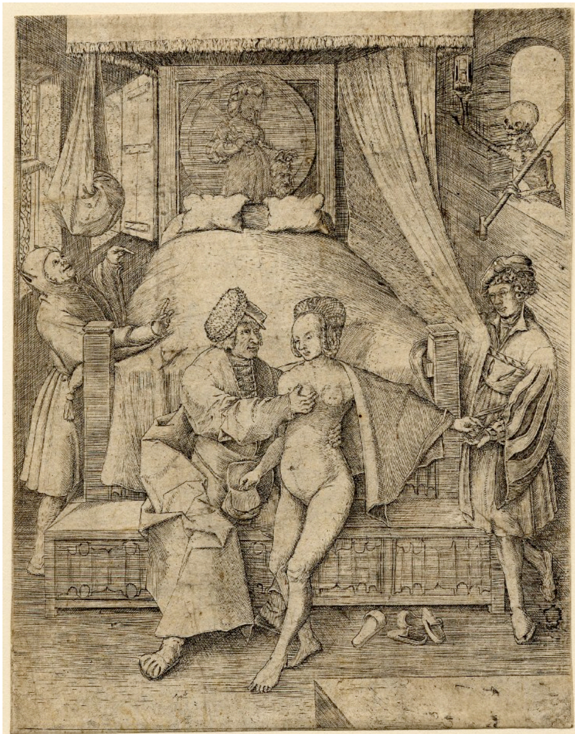
customers as well as occupants. In this sense, they could be considered a peculiar type of porters or "doorkeepers". However, more strictly, "door-keeping" refers also to the keeper's task of making sure that the lovers are not disturbed by controlling the door of their room from outside. The "door", then, can have both a literal and a bawdy meaning as for instance in Marston's *The Malcontent*: "O beauties, looke to your busk-pointes, if not chastely, yet charily: be sure the dore be bolted" (IV.i.22-24).[42] In this light we can add one more possible meaning for Boult's name, which becomes then particularly suitable for a door-keeper.

However, I think Boult's role does not admit only of one definition; he should be compared with his precursor, Pompey. As I have mentioned, the two characters have basically the same role in their underworld environment, but Pompey is additionally called by Escalus "tedious fool" (II.i.112). The reason why he is called so is certainly because of his use of witty language and playful logic to dupe the authorities of Vienna, but also maybe because he could be, after all, a fool as well as a pimp and a tapster. In *Timon of Athens* for instance there is the tiny part of the brothel Fool although, like Pompey and unlike Boult, we do not see him acting in his own environment; in *Anthony and Cleopatra*, then, there is an allusion to Anthony as Cleopatra's "strumpet's fool" (I.i.13), that is the fool of a prostitute. Moreover, late medieval and early modern European prints depicting brothel scenes often include a domestic jester, whose function was probably to entertain customers. This can be seen for instance in Mair Von Landshut's engraving *The Brothel, La Banderole Présentée* (fig. 1), where a fool in a cap with ass' ears playing a bagpipe entertains the customers of what looks like a high-class brothel. Then, Lucas Van Leyden's engraving *The Old Man and the Courtesan* (fig. 2) portrays a prostitute with a customer in the centre of the scene and on the left side, behind the bed curtain, a fool in a cap with ass' ears points at the couple. Or, again,

[42] See Williams, pp. 405-406. John Marston, *The Malcontent,* George K. Hunter, ed., Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.



1. Mair Von Landshut, *The Brothel, La Banderole Présentée* (Vienna, private collection, 1485-1510)



2. Lucas Van Leyden, *The Old Man and the Courtesan* (London, British Museum, 1520-1550)

3. Heinrich Vogtherr, *The Procuress* (London, British Museum, 1537)

the German woodcut by Heinrich Vogtherr *The Procuress* (fig. 3) depicts a table where a prostitute, a rich customer and a bawd are eating and drinking while a fool in cap and bells holding a bauble sneers and points at the scene from outside the window. That the role of the fool in a brothel could be superimposed to that of the pimp is suggested not only by the character of Pompey in *Measure for Measure* but also by Apemantus' remark "Do it then, that we may account thee a whoremaster and a knave" (II.ii.102-103) upon the Fool in *Timon of Athens*. Or in the mock encomium *A Bawd* (1635), John Taylor, the water poet, remarks that "the most of our great bawds are diligently waited on by scurrilious oylie sonneting, practicall, poeticall, panegyricall panders" (sigg. B4r-B4v).[43] Pimping and entertaining or fooling, then, were not perceived as totally discrete activities in a brothel, after all. This may give us a clue as to why initially the part of Boult in *Pericles* might have been given to the leading comedian of the King's Men; the part may have been originally conceived of as a fool's part, though in the end it developed into something quite different. But we can still spot a common ground between him and Armin's previous roles. However, let us now proceed in order.

Boult, together with his masters, makes his first appearance in the play in the second scene of Act 4, immediately after the pirates kidnap Marina – thus saving her from murder – so that the audience is left at the peak of suspense wondering what the heroine's destiny will be. Shakespeare then at once debunks and subverts the deeply emotional outcome of that scene by forcedly diverting the spectator's mind with cynic talk about filthy trades. Comic relief in this case is somehow unwelcome, given that one of the moments of greatest intensity in the play is counterbalanced by the entrance of lowly characters. Yet, it cannot be resisted. The comedy of the brothel scenes lies indeed in the contrast between what the audience

[43] John Taylor, *A Bawd. A Vertuous Bawd, a Modest Bawd: As Shee Deserves, Reproove, or Else Applaud*, London: 1635.

perceives as a deeply immoral and marginalizing activity and the way the people involved in it talk about it, that is in merely economic terms, as if it was a business like any other, a very decent one even. This is common to the portrayal of this type of underworld in any play of the time, and in this sense *Pericles* makes no exception. Boult is a vital part of the three-people brothel family, so I believe he cannot be analysed effectively if we detach him from his context. On his first appearance, Boult is inserted in a scene where the comic tone has already been established by his masters' cynic business talk interspersed with grotesque imagery and remarks harshly clashing with our sense of morality:

> PANDER Search the market narrowly. Mytilene is full of gallants. We lost too much money this mart by being too wenchless.
> BAWD We were never so much out of creatures. We have but poor three, and they can do no more than they can do, and with continual action *they are even as good as rotten.*
> PANDER Therefore let's have fresh ones, whate'er we pay for them. If there be not a *conscience* to be used in every trade, we shall never prosper. (Sc. 16, 3-12)[44]

However, I think that the comic tone of the scene is set also at a less superficial level. While Mistress Overdone in *Measure for Measure* complains about the (real) decision of the government to pull down the stews, which is also the reason why her business is having financial problems, here the Mytilene bawds express preoccupation with something that is not only totally absent from Gower's or Twine's versions of the tale, but is also very far away from the actual conditions in which London brothels were being run at the time. If there was something bawds and panders could not complain about in the years between 1550 and 1650 was actually the lack of "creatures". Burford reports indeed how in that period the city of London saw a population explosion, which determined the rising of prices and a constant inflation, therefore a dramatic increase in poverty. This resulted in a soaring of the number of "kept women" in brothels, as well as those operating in the streets. Though, as Burford continues, the demand remained very high, often exceeding the supply,[45] I still find it quite

[44] Italics are mine.
[45] Burford, p. 145.

hilarious that such a “reputable” brothel as that staged in *Pericles* should have barely three “rotten” creatures. Such a suggestion could have struck a comic chord with Shakespeare’s original audience at the Globe, then: three foolish bawds on the stage ranting about financial impasse while dozens of prostitutes were looking for potential customers within the “wooden O”? Quite an absurd clash, if seen with the eyes of a Jacobean playgoer. Therefore, when Boult first speaks, he is already part of a farce made up of multiple layers of comedy. In such a context we would have to expect that, if this was indeed the role taken by Armin, he should add something to the comedy already brought to the play by the two other bawds. He should be, if possible, more comic or at least more witty than the Bawd and the Pander. It is quite an unusual situation where the clownish servant should have to be wittier than his master, but his master is not a regular, tragic or melancholic character, but a clown himself/herself. Certainly we cannot state that with Boult Shakespeare and Armin showed off their best wit and humour, and surely the role cannot be put on the same level as the Erasmian fools. But still we can perceive some of the jocularity permeating the dialogues (or duologues) between fool and master/mistress in earlier plays. One significant example is:

> BAWD ‘Tis not our bringing up of poor bastards – as I think I have *brought up* some eleven –
> BOULT Ay, to eleven, and *brought them down* again [...] (Sc. 16, 13-15)[46]

where Boult borrows and reverses the Bawd’s expression to mean “corrupt” as opposed to “raise”. In this sense Boult comments on the action and also satirizes the Bawd’s methods, as if he was occasionally aware, unlike his masters, of the immorality of their business and represented on the stage a projection of the spectator’s attitude. In such confrontations Boult systematically exceeds his masters’ remarks both in cynicism and vulgarity, as when the Pander remembers the foreign client who got a venereal disease from a worthless woman:

> PANDER The poor Transylvanian is dead that lay with the little baggage.

[46] Italics are mine.

BOULT Ay, she quickly pooped him, she made him roast meat for worms. (Sc. 16, 20-23)

The kind of comedy Boult creates is much more uneasy than that put forward by the Pander and the Bawd, who rely in particular on expressions drawn from the language of trade. Boult's language, instead, is darkly physical as well as more crudely obscene. So, for instance, he boasts that he has "cried [Marina] almost to the number of her hairs, I have drawn her picture with my voice" (Sc. 16, 90-91) and that "a Spaniard's mouth watered an he went to bed to her very description." (Sc. 16, 95-97), where multiple interpretations are possible.

He is the one who starts off the very harsh satire on the foreign gentlemen who visit the brothel and then are foolishly infected by venereal diseases:

BOULT [...] do you know the French knight that cowers i' the hams? (Sc. 16, 100-101)
BOULT Well, if we had of every nation a traveller we should lodge them with this sign. (Sc. 16, 109-110)

where the verb "to lodge" can also signify "to throw down on the ground" (*OED*)[47] therefore in a sense "to corrupt", and the "sign" may point to Marina, as well as the actual sign of the brothel.[48] Once again, Boult's remarks can have several meanings at once. Though Boult, unlike Shakespeare's Erasmian fools, does not explicitly resort to the idea of folly as opposed to – or perhaps equal to – wisdom, he nevertheless uneasily implies the stupidity of so many high-class men who become trapped in sin. In this sense he seems not so far away from the sneering fools pointing with an air of superiority at the customers of prostitutes in early modern depictions of brothels and lechery. Boult's definition of the French knight as the one who "cowers i' the hams", together with his following report that the knight attempted "to cut a caper" (Sc. 16, 103) but then he just "made a groan" (Sc. 16, 104) at the perspective of meeting Marina would probably arise laughter also because it left space for mimicry in

[47] See also *Pericles*, Gossett, ed., p. 332, n. 106.
[48] See *Pericles*, Gossett, ed., p. 332, n. 106.

performance, where the actor could imitate his way of walking – and we know that Armin was quite good in this field. This might have recalled again the actual practices in London brothels: for instance, Nicholas Goodman in his pamphlet on one of the most popular brothels in town, *Holland's Leaguer* (1632), tells how its owner was helped by a whole series of professional figures, among whom "petulant painted and half guilte *Mimicks*, to giue entertainment" (sig. D2r).[49]

Boult's cynicism, then, links this character with the other cynical character played by Armin in *Timon of Athens*, the philosopher Apemantus. One of the ways in which he conveys this attitude is through his conception of people as sets of mechanical components: Marina for him has "a good face, speaks well and has excellent good clothes", for "flesh and blood" (Sc. 19, 41) she as white and red as a rose, he cries her "picture" "to the number of her hairs" and he has "bargained for the joint" (Sc. 16, 126), which could point at Marina herself or it might be a bawdy word for "penis", thus referring to Boult.[50] This is of course consistent with his nature as a trader of young women, but when Marina has him reflect on the immorality of his job he snaps that if he were to be a soldier, instead, he would worry about losing "a leg and hav[ing] not money enough in the end to buy [...] a wooden one" (Sc. 19, 197-198). Boult also manages to raise laughter by disturbingly juxtaposing the sacred with the sinful, as when he acts horrified at the thought that Marina has "spoken holy words" (Sc. 19, 157-158) to Lysimachus and that "she makes our profession as it were to stink afore the face of the gods" (Sc. 19, 160-161), or when he claims that men "listened to [him] as they would have hearkened to their father's testament" (Sc. 16, 94-95).

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[49] Nicholas Goodman, *Hollands Leaguer: or, An Historical Discourse of the Life and Actions of Dona Britanica Hollandia the Arch-Mistris of the Wicked Women of Eutopia Wherein is Detected the Notorious Sinne of Panderisme, and the Execrable Life of the Luxurious Impudent*, London: Augustine Mathewes, 1632.

[50] See Williams, p. 745 and Martin Orkin, *Local Shakespeare: Proximations and Power*, London: Routledge, 2005, pp. 71-72.

Across the two scenes where Boult appears, however, the character and the type of comedy it brings to the play slightly change. In the first part of Scene 16, as we have seen, he confronts his masters with ironic remarks on the effects of their business, but when he later reenters after he has cried Marina on the market his humour acquires a more intensely obscene taint and his language becomes more disturbingly unpoetical, as in:

> BOULT Thunder shall not so awake the beds of eels as my giving out her beauty stirs up the lewdly inclined. (Sc. 16, 138-140)

As the play progresses, in Scene 19 the character becomes darker and less overtly comic. This is to prepare the audience for Boult's later task, which is that of violating Marina. Becoming less clownish, the threat he poses to Marina's well-being becomes more serious, so that more suspense is created. At the same time, however, early in the scene a singular occurrence anticipates Boult's final conversion. As Colman notes, when Boult says to Lysimachus

> BOULT [...] you shall see a rose indeed, if she had but –
> LYSIMACHUS What, prithee?
> BOULT O sir, I can be modest. (Sc. 19, 41-44)

he bowdlerizes what would become a obscene expression by suppressing perhaps the word "thorn".[51] This reticence on Boult's part is unprecedented in the previous scene – where he had very few problems in making bawdy allusions – and it already indicates at this early stage that he is capable of a sensitivity quite unlike his masters. It has been observed that Boult "barks more than bite", and that his mischievous intentions cannot be trusted wholly.[52] I think that depends a lot on the way the character is acted and however, the bare fact is that Boult and the brothel-keepers are the only real villains we find in the last two acts of the play, when the uncertainty about Marina's destiny is still far from being allayed, and they are also those whose inimical action lasts longer on the stage: Antiochus, the initial cause of Pericles'

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[51] E.A.M. Colman, *The Dramatic Use of Bawdy in Shakespeare,* London: Longman, 1974, p. 19.
[52] See Videbæk, p. 28.

misfortunes, is to be seen only in one scene, while Marina's step-parents become antagonists only in Scene 15, after Gower as chorus has already narrated Cleon and Dionyza's secret plots against her. Boult's repeated allusions to what he means to do (Scene 19, 153-155, 169-170, 180), reinforced by the Bawd's commands, do actually link the character to the Vice of medieval pageants and early modern interludes, where usually threats of that kind are to be believed. At this point the clownishness of Boult has almost disappeared, and even his thoughts about the destiny of those who serve in the army do actually look serious, were it not for the fact that, as Videbæk comments, the idea that someone can be only a bawd or a warrior in life is "typical clown thinking".[53] This rendering the character more sober is what is needed to get Boult to a level where Marina's pious words can somehow reach him and stir him. This would not be possible if Boult was an orthodox clown character or a licensed court fool, who at all points satirize the action that is taking place but are never really touched by it – which is also the reason why they invariably outwit their foils. Bergson would probably explain this occurrence in *Pericles* as a fixed rule of laughter:

> It seems as though the comic could not produce its disturbing effect unless it fell, so to say, on the surface of a soul that is thoroughly calm and unruffled. Indifference is its natural environment, for laughter has no greater foe than emotion.[54]

Boult simply cannot keep bantering and jesting – as he used to do in Scene 16 – when he confronts Marina. Her situation of distress strikes a powerful emotional chord with the audience, who tends then to identify with her. The result, then, is that we are not "indifferent" enough towards her to be able to enjoy Boult's potential attempts at derision, which would be

[53] Videbæk, p. 28. John F. Danby thinks instead that, for its tone, it is just "out of place" in a late play (John Francis Danby, *Poets on Fortune's Hill: Studies in Sydney, Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher*, London: Faber and Faber, 1952, p. 101), and would probably suit more an earlier history play (see William Shakespeare, *Romances*, Sylvan Barnet, ed., London: David Campbell Publishers, 1996, p. xlix). Gossett observes that these lines might allude to contemporary London employment opportunities (*Pericles*, Gossett, ed., p. 123). Like the fishermen in *Pericles*, Boult is a character who is conscious of reality around him.

[54] Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, Cloudesely Brereton and Fred Rothwell, transl., Rockville: Arc Manor, 2008, p. 10.

completely out of place.[55] Bergson's thinking was anticipated also by classic and early modern discourses on rhetoric. Authors like Cicero in *De Oratore* or Thomas Wilson in *The Art of Rhetoric* (1560) did not recommend jesting against, among others, the wretched or the well beloved, while women, according to Simon Robson in *Courte of Civill Courtesies* (1582), should not be mocked beyond "boundes of curtesie": the jest would inevitably fail because the audience pities the target of mockery, rather than thinking of him/her as laughable.[56] The whole adventure in Mytilene is conceived in the play as a test for the virtue of Marina, who then can become the "saint in the brothel".[57] She just cannot be laughed at and Boult, in a sense, *must* step back.

The first of the romance clowns originally created for Armin, then, is already a character that presents ambiguities and a multiplicity of facets which do not equally apply to the Bawd and the Pander, whose function and attitude within the brothel scenes remain quite static until, from IV.v.60 onwards, they totally disappear to leave space, once again, to Boult. He is a hybrid character because it straddles the characteristics of the jesting clown or the fool and those of the villain or comic villain, to perform a function in the play that is normally not the one required of the purely comic character.

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[55] Richman proposes an opposite example: in *Twelfth Night* Malvolio locked in the dark-room as a madman does not stir our emotions enough to prevent us from laughing at Feste/Topas' jests against him (see David Richman, *Laughter, Pain and Wonder: Shakespeare's Comedies and the Audience in the Theater*, Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990, pp. 28-34).
[56] Cicero, *De Oratore*, E.W. Sutton, transl., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942, II.58.237. Thomas Wilson, *The Art of Rhetoric*, Peter E. Medine, ed., University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 1994, pp. 166-167. Simon Robson, *The Courte of Ciuill Courtesie*, London: Richard Iohnes, 1582, sig. C1v. See Chris Holcomb, *Mirth Making: The Rhetorical Discourse on Jesting in Early Modern England*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001, pp. 117-118, 120. This does not mean, however, that in the early modern period jests on those who suffered were completely avoided; see Holcomb, p. 121.
[57] The character of Marina might have been developed from the story of St Agnes. See Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011, p. 98.

2.2 Autolycus

Autolycus is one of Shakespeare's most significant additions to *Pandosto*, his close source for *The Winter's Tale.* The character, in fact, can only minimally be superimposed to Capnio, who is introduced in the novel as "an old servant" of Dorastus'[58] "who had served him from his childhood" (p. 42)[59] and literally loads the Shepherd onto the ship bound to Bohemia,[60] thus enabling the comic ending. Perhaps a closer predecessor for Autolycus and his role may be Babulo, Griselda and Janiculo's clown servant in Dekker, Chettle and Haughton's play *The Pleasant Comodie of Patient Grissill* (1603), which has been sometimes proposed as a possible side source for *The Winter's Tale,* given the similarity of some significant themes and types of characters.[61] Baldwin observes that "Dekker gives Grissill a father, a brother and a jocular servant, who resemble Perdita's entourage of shepherd, clown and Autolycus in more ways than one".[62] Thanks to his witty jesting and singing, Babulo is in fact one of the most interesting examples of stage fools outside Shakespeare: though he is technically a country servant, his function resembles that of a jester for Janiculo, who indeed calls him "foole" and accuses him of "vaine talke" (l. 99)[63]; besides, there are references to his being dressed in motley.[64] In the first part of the play he offers cutting remarks on notions like poverty and wealth, birth and death, knowledge and folly. Some of these concepts are interesting because, as I will show shortly, they are closely associated with the character of Autolycus. Shakespeare might have kept some of the motifs regarding the character of

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[58] The Florizel figure in the novel.
[59] Robert Greene, *Pandosto*, New Rochelle: Elston Press, 1902.
[60] In *Pandosto* the kingdoms of Sicilia and Bohemia are swapped.
[61] See Anna Baldwin, "From the *Clerk's Tale* to *The Winter's Tale*", in Ruth Morse and Barry Windeatt, ed., *Chaucer Traditions. Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 199-212.
[62] Baldwin, p. 208. See also Enid Welsford, *The Fool: His Social and Literary History*, London: Faber & Faber, 1968, p. 243.
[63] Henry Chettle, Thomas Dekker and William Haughton, *The Pleasant Comodie of Patient Grissill*, Gottlieb Hübsch, ed., Erlangen: Fr. Jungen, 1893.
[64] See l. 388.

Babulo. For instance, when Gwalter marries Grissill, he invites her father Janiculo and brother Laureo to live at court, and he hires Babulo as a fool. Consequently he becomes a courtier, a concept on which he also jests with his boy.[65] However, as part of Gwalter's test of Grissill's patience, Babulo, together with Janiculo and Laureo, is soon banished from court and sent back to the country. Autolycus maintains both these aspects of the character: he used to be a courtier but is then ousted from court, and the courtier is also his last disguise.

Besides, both Babulo and Autolycus' jocularity diminishes at a certain point of the plays. In *Patient Grissill* Babulo's loss of satirizing clownishness coincides with the beginning of Grissill's trials, while for Autolycus it occurs in concomitance with the final agnition, as will be illustrated more in depth later on in this chapter. Also, when he is banished from Gwalter's palace, Babulo remarks:

> BABULO I was a foole (for I was born an Innocent), then I was a traueller, and then a Basket-maker, and then a Courtier, and now I must turne basket-maker and foole againe [...] (ll.1054-1056)

which does somehow remind us of the way Autolycus tells the Clown about the story of his own life

> AUTOLYCUS He hath been since an ape-bearer, then a process-server [...] then he compassed a motion of the Prodigal Son, and married a tinker's wife [...] and, having flown over many knavish professions, he settled only in rogue" (IV.iii.93-97)

but also anticipates the Bohemian rogue's identities: the traveller has become a vagabond, the basket-maker a pack-carrying peddler and the courtier has been degraded to a feigned one. There are even some possible verbal echoes associated with the two characters, such as Babulo's reference to himself as a "knauish burden" (l. 391) and Autolycus' "knavish professions" (IV.iii.98) and "knavery" (IV.iv.682), or Gwalter's definition of the clown as a merry "fellow" (l. 419), a word that is uttered numberless times in connection with the Bohemian rogue in *The Winter's Tale*.[66] Yet, the most compelling verbal echo regards the way

[65] See ll. 944-955.
[66] See IV.iii.84, 85; IV.iv.202, 204, 629, 631, 639; V.ii.155, 162, 164, 166, 168, 170.

Autolycus and Babulo manifest their fear of authority. When he first meets Grissill's clown, the Marquis of Saluzzo says to him:

> MARQUESSE Why dost thou tremble so? We are al thy friends. (l. 387)

which looks very close to what Camillo says to Autolycus in the clothes-changing scene:

> CAMILLO Why shakest thou so? Fear not, man. Here's no harm intended to thee. (IV.iv. 629-630)

In the first chapter I pointed out how Autolycus, more than any other role played by Armin, refuses any fixed identifications, but showcases his protean self by switching from a disguise to another, thus offering a metatheatrical reflection on the idea of acting. However, if the spectator is confused about which disguise or past experience best represents the inner identity of Autolycus – a vagabond, a beggar, a peddler or a feigned gentleman – there is a common ground to all of them: any image he projects of himself, analysing it through a Jacobean perspective, is that of an outlaw. Unlike *Pericles*, where the idea of the criminal clown was somehow derived from Twine and Gower, *The Winter's Tale* does not originate its clown's roguery from *Pandosto*, where Capnio can at most be classified as a loyal servant, and still in service, and neither from Dekker's Griselda play. The name *Autolycus* bears long-established classical resonances and is very apt indeed for a singing pickpocket: in the *Odyssey* a character of that name is the leader of thieves and deceivers, son of Mercury and a mortal woman, while in Ovid he is the thieving half-twin of the musician Philammon, son of Apollo.[67] However, similarly to what Shakespeare did with the bawds in *Pericles*, the several ways in which his roguery is staged in the play is exquisitely early modern and had a series of concrete significances for the original audience. Therefore, as I did with Boult, before beginning a discussion of the ways in which Autolycus brings laughter into *The Winter' Tale*,

[67] Classical sources for Autolycus are overviewed and called into question by John Pitcher, "Some Call Him Autolycus", in Ann Thompson and Gordon McMullan, eds., *In Arden: Editing Shakespeare. Essays in Honour of Richard Proudfoot*, London: Arden Shakespeare, 2003, pp. 252-268.

I believe it is necessary to examine the character through the several implications deriving from his identity as a rogue.

On his entrance in IV.iii the first thing Autolycus says about himself once he has stopped singing is that in the past he served Prince Florizel but now he is "out of service" (IV.iii.14). This statement would immediately give the original audience a great deal of information about the character: Autolycus establishes himself first of all as a masterless man, a condition which had been perceived as a very serious issue in England since the Tudor era, as it was indeed the primary cause of poverty, vagrancy and consequently crime. The origins of this social phenomenon has been attributed to the massive implementation of the system of enclosures for sheep-farming in first half of the sixteenth century, when England was competing against Flanders on the market of wool. Wealthy landlords fenced portions of open land previously used for tillage, thus evicting tenants and replacing the great number of plowmen and reapers who worked there with just the few shepherds needed to look after the livestock. As a result, thousands of dispossessed people and peasants, unable to compete with the economical power of the capitalistic class, were forced to leave their houses and start begging and/or stealing to make a living.[68] It is very fitting then – and ironic too – that the "poor" masterless Autolycus should be wandering around pastoral Bohemia, whose economy is specifically sustained by shepherding and sheep-shearing. In the same period, the ranks of English vagabonds were being filled not only by unemployed peasants but also by former retainers, who had served as part of a lord's feudal army in the late fifteenth century but were gradually dismissed in later times of peace.[69] Thus, in a sense, Autolycus' dismissal from the royal palace hints also at this historical phenomenon. In Renaissance England vagrancy was a tragic condition both for those who experienced it and for the rest of the citizens: the former,

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[68] Frank Aydelotte, *Elizabethan Rogues and Vagabonds*, London: Frank Cass, 1967, pp. 5-7

[69] Aydelotte, pp. 14-15.

besides being broke, also felt a deep resentment against society and against those whom they considered responsible for their situation, while the latter saw the masterless as a very serious threat to social order.[70] Whether they became "sturdy" beggars – the able-bodied, who were fit to work but did not want to – or "impotent" ones – those who had objective physical problems, so were granted a special license to beg[71] – their mutability menaced the rulers' dominance and aspiration for stability.[72] In many cases, as the story of Autolycus confirms, being masterless generally meant becoming a criminal. As a consequence, in order to contrast the phenomenon, Elizabeth reinforced her father's previous legislation and produced a series of statutes (1572, 1575, 1597, 1601) – which remained prescriptive also in the early years of James' reign – persecuting, among others, strolling players and minstrels without a patron as well as unlicensed peddlers and tinkers.[73] Vagrants could be whipped or put in the stocks for public display; if caught a second time they were condemned to execution unless somebody turned up hiring the culprit as a servant for two years; other punishments could include branding with a hot iron, hair polling, the ducking-stool or ear cropping; in case of a third offence the transgressor was sentenced to death without the chance of being forgiven his sins with a last confession.[74] However, with the establishment of "houses of correction" like Bridewell Hospital in London, the need for hanging diminished, partially replaced by forced labour and corporeal punishments, namely whipping.[75] Some of these measures against vagrancy are mentioned by Autolycus himself who, like Falstaff, fears hanging the most. In his introductory monologue he says that "gallows and knock are too powerful on the

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[70] A.L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560-1640,* London and New York: Methuen, 1985, p. xix.
[71] See Aydelotte, p. 56.
[72] Beier, *Masterless Men*, p. 9.
[73] Aydelotte, pp. 68-71.
[74] Beier, *Masterless Men*, pp. 159-160 and Aydelotte, p. 69.
[75] See Gãmini Salgãdo, *The Elizabethan Underworld*, Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 1977, p. 192 and William C. Carroll, *Fat King, Lean Beggar: Representations of Poverty in the Age of Shakespeare*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996, p. 110.

highway. Beating and hangings are terrors to me" (IV.iii.27-28). After his soliloquy where he confesses to the audience how he has cut the purses of the attenders to the festival he is afraid Camillo, Florizel and Perdita have heard him: "If they have overheard me now – why, hanging!" (IV.iv.627-628); hanging is also one of the possible punishments he would impose on the Shepherd, the Clown and their family for keeping from Polixenes the secret that his son was going to marry a peasant,[76] while a public execution offers at the same time a very good chance for him to exercise his pickpocketing "profession":

> AUTOLYCUS Every lane's end, every shop, church, session, hanging, yields a careful man work. (IV.iv.684-686)

Thus, as we noted, the simple statement that Autolycus is masterless bore a whole series of implications. In particular this definition reveals the character's function within the text even before he plainly tells the audience that he lives on petty theft.[77] Just as in Tudor and Stuart London the hoards of masterless vagrants scared the upper classes for their rootlessness and for the danger they posed to the established order and the quietness of the better-off part of the city, so Autolycus' first words are enough to reveal that he is going to stand as a subversive element for peace and order in pastoral Bohemia, thus embodying a turning point which anticipates that something is going to change.

The particularity of Autolycus as a vagrant is that he does not specialize only in one type of illegal activity but gives a broad overview of the possible outcomes of vagabond life in sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century London, as if he embodied many different identities at once. His key features, in all his transformations, are merriness and festivity. We do not perceive him, at least superficially, as a shady character. However, merry beggars like the ones swarming in London during Henry VIII's reign before the advent of the laws against vagrancy of the middle of the century, did not exist during Elizabeth's and James' rule, when

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[76] See IV.iv. 774-776 and IV.iv.816-817: "Hang him, he'll be made an example".
[77] "my revenue is the silly cheat" (IV.iii.27).

they were instead harshly persecuted and tortured, so that they did not lead such a joyful and easy life. In fact Shakespeare probably created the character exploiting the contemporary rogue pamphlets by authors like Greene, Dekker and Middleton, which enjoyed a great success in the 1590s. These were based on reality, though occasionally tweaking it in order to make the narrations more appealing and sell more copies. In particular, the spirit of the rogues described in this literature is derived more from earlier pamphlets, such as Thomas Harman's *A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors, Vulgarly Called Vagabonds* (1566), John Awdeley's *The Fraternity of Vagabonds* (1561) or Gilbert Walker's *A Manifest Detection of the Most Vile and Detestable Use of Diceplay* (1552), than from contemporary facts, which on the contrary had almost totally deprived the vagabond life of its merriness and witticism.[78] Therefore in the view of an early Jacobean playgoer the character of Autolycus on the stage sends two different and contrasting projections: on the one hand he is the merry carefree rogue, so much appreciated in this popular literature, which appeals to the readers' ideal of estrangement and freedom from the tense circumstances of contemporary economic society[79] and perhaps epitomizes their unexpressed desire of transgression. On the other, he also recalls the tragic life of distress that real vagabonds led in contemporary England. This is, however, only the first of a series of coexisting dichotomies offered by Autolycus' identity – or identities.

Another ambivalence is in fact present in the same introductory lines spoken by Autolycus:

> AUTOLYCUS I have served Prince Florizel, and in my time wore three-pile, but now I am out of service. (IV.iii.13-14)

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[78] Aydelotte, pp. 75-78.

[79] See the explanation given by Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz (*Rogues and Early Modern English Culture*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004, p. 8) or also by Arthur F. Kinney (*Rogues, Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars: A New Gallery of Tudor and Early Stuart Rogue Literature Exposing the Lives, Times, and Cozening Tricks of the Elizabethan Underworld*, Amherst: University of Massachussets Press, 1973, p. 56).

where "three-pile" stands both for the thick textile of which expensive liveries were made of, in reference to Autolycus's tasks within the royal palace, but it is also the kind of velvet commonly worn by whores and, more interestingly, by rich pimps.[80] This vicious activity of Autolycus', however, has not stopped with his banishment from court, but he admits that "my traffic is sheets" (IV.ii.23), which alludes both to the selling of ballads and to pimping, and that "with die and drab I purchased this caparison" (IV.iii.27-28), where reference is made to gaming and whoring.[81] To the Globe audience, Autolycus' association with brothels and prostitutes would be quite normal. Thomas Platter, a Swiss visitor in England, condemned brothels because

> a great nomber of dissolute, loose and insolent people harboured and maintained in such and like noysom and disorderly jawses, as namely poor cottages and habitacions of beggars and people without trade, stables, ins, alehowses, tavernes, garden howses converted to dwellings, ordinaries, dicyng howses, bowling allies and brothell howses. The most part of which pestering those parts of the citty with disorder and uncleannes are either apt to breed contagion and sicknes, or otherwize serve for the resort and refuge of masterles men and other idle and evill dispozed persons, and are the cause of cozenages, thefts, and other dishonest conversacion and may also be used to cover dangerous practizes"[82]

Basically, the trade of prostitution and crime of various types interacted very closely;[83] brothels in the Bankside could be gathering places for pickpockets and cheats, and some of them even functioned as cheap lodging houses for thieves.[84]

In a sense, through his links with prostitution, Autolycus brings together some of the features of Boult, of whom he may be considered a sort of evolution, and of the merry fooling tapster-pimp Pompey in *Measure for Measure.* The allusion to *three-pile* points at the double life Autolycus possibly lived while serving Florizel, which might also be the "vice" for which

[80] Three-pile was also associated with pox; see Williams, *A Dictionary*, pp. 1103, 1469-1470, and William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, The Arden Shakespeare, John Pitcher, ed., London: Methuen, 2010, p. 251 n. 13-14. Pitcher interprets Autolycus' being "out of service" as a declaration that he does not do such things as pimping and whoring any more. As I argued earlier, in my opinion the idea that he is temporarily masterless is much more cogent for the development of the character in the play, not to mention the fact that Autolycus still continues meddling with prostitutes.

[81] See Pitcher, p. 252, n. 23, 26-27.

[82] Thomas Platter, *Travels in England* (1596), quoted in Berlin, p. 17.

[83] See J.A. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England, 1550-1750,* London and New York: Longman, 1984, p. 115 and McMullan, *The Canting Crew*, pp. 129-131.

[84] McMullan, *The Canting Crew*, p. 109. Circumstances of the type are documented for instance by Greene, *The Second Part of Cony-Catching* (1591), in Judges, p. 165.

he was “whipped out of the court”.[85] Besides, whipping was not only the typical punishment for pimps and rogues in and out of bridewells, but also the emblematic constant threat for unruly licensed fools in other Shakespearean texts.[86] This makes me wonder what Autolycus' actual task at Polixenes' court was: could he have been whipped out like a dismissed court fool? In *All's Well That Ends Well* Lavatch, the fool of the Countess of Roussillon, thinks of his jesting activity as “service”: he says indeed that “service is no heritage” (I.iii.23-24). Later, he jests with Lafeu on the same concept:

LAFEU	Whether dost thou profess thyself, a knave or a fool?
LAVATCH	A fool, sir, at a woman's service, and a knave at a man's.
LAFEU	Your distinction?
LAVATCH	I would cozen the man of his wife and do his service
LAFEU	So you were a knave at his service indeed.
LAVATCH	And I would give his wife my bauble, sir, to do her service.
LAFEU	I will subscribe for thee, thou art both knave and fool.
LAVATCH	At your service.
LAFEU	No, no, no.
LAVATCH	Why, sir, if I cannot serve you I can serve as great a prince as you are. (IV.v.22-37).

Similarly, in *Timon of Athens* the brothel Fool, alluding to his mistress-bawd as a money-lender says “I think no usurer but has a fool to his servant. My mistress is one, and I am her fool” (II.ii.96-97), and in *Troilus and Cressida* Thersites alludes to the idea of service several times: “Achilles is a fool to be commanded of Agamemnon;/ Thersites is a fool to serve such a fool” (II.iii.62-63); to Ajax he says “I serve thee not/ [...] I serve here voluntarily” (II.i. 94-96). In Marston's tragicomedy *The Malcontent* (1604) Passarello refers to himself as a

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[85] Richard Studing argues that Florizel himself might have chased him away for of his wrongdoings. Plus, he sees a correlation between Autolycus, Florizel, Perdita, Camillo and Polixenes, who all leave the court at some point, and make of Bohemia “a haven for exiles and outcasts” (Richard Studing, “Shakespeare's Bohemia Rivisited: A Caveat”, in Harold Bloom, ed., *William Shakespeare's 'The Winter's Tale': Modern Critical Interpretations*, New York: Chelsea House, 1987, p. 144). In *Measure for Measure* Escalus threatens Pompey of whipping him if he finds him again guilty of some offence. The clown comments, in an aside, “Whip me? No no; let carman whip his jade/ the valiant heart's not whipped out of his trade” (II.i.244-245). Autolycus' sentence recalls this second line of Pompey's.

[86] Famously, Lear threatens his Fool: “Take heed, sirrah – the whip” (Quarto, I.iv.106; Folio, I.iv.109) and “An you lie, sirrah, we'll have you whipped” (Folio, I.iv.162; Quarto, I.iv.174: “An you lie, we'll have you whipped”). Or in *All's Well that Ends Well* the Countess of Roussillon reminds Lavatch: “You were lately whipped, sir, as I think” (II.ii.47); in *As You Like It* Celia says to Touchstone “you'll be whipped for taxation one of these days” (I.ii.80-81).

"serving-man" (IV.iii.149) to Bilioso though he is actually a fool of the most classic type, a licensed jester created on purpose for Armin after the style of Touchstone or Feste.[87]

I wonder, then, if Autolycus too could be referring to the art of court fooling and entertaining as "service". After all, of the comic characters of Shakespeare's romances, Autolycus is the closest to the more "orthodox" fools of the previous texts, thanks also to his use of song and poetry, and the one who has attracted most attention from criticism – leaving aside Caliban, who was often discussed for reasons other than comedy, but much less in studies of the stage clown in Shakespeare. If Autolycus had been a former licensed fool, with his reappearance in the comic part of *The Winter's Tale* after the tragic events occurred in Leontes' Sicily he would stand as a perfect counterpart of the Fool in *King Lear*, who leaves at the highest peak of tragedy and whose destiny we do not know, though it is generally taken for granted that he dies. Complementarily, Autolycus arrives from nowhere when the peak of tragedy has shortly passed, thus standing almost as a comic answer to an open question in *Lear*. Shakespeare shows us what a talented court entertainer does when he becomes masterless. In this light, I think, we may say that the real parabola of Armin's court fool ends not with *Lear* but with Autolycus. Reading the two plays together, the fool does not leave at noon; on the contrary, he has the chance to bring his story to a proper end.

After defining himself a masterless vagrant and a pimp, Autolycus performs first of all as a "rogue", which is also the activity he says he has "settled" on, after "having flown over many knavish" ones (IV.iii.97-98). "Rogue", according to Thomas Harman's classification in his pamphlet *A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors, Vulgarly Called Vagabonds* (1566), is no general identification of a delinquent, as it is often superficially assumed, but

[87] It is interesting that in Marston's play Passarello wears a livery with velvet guarding and he jests that "footmen and bawds wear velvet" (I.viii.9). Later Bilioso promises he will dress his fool in velvet. See also Wiles, pp. 188-189.

indicates a very specific role among a range of specialistic underworld "professions". The rogue is not "so stout or hardy" (p. 74)[88] as other sorts of criminals – which makes Armin physically suitable for such a role – and falsely feigns to "go faintly and look piteously" (p. 74) or tells gross tear-jerking stories when he sees someone to beg from or to dupe. The way Autolycus attracts the Clown's attention on the highway, feigning he has been beaten and robbed, is conventional. Carroll suggests that in this scene, where Autolycus grovels on the ground (IV.iii.49) as if seized by convulsions, Shakespeare may be recalling the ways of Nicholas Jennings.[89] Nicholas Blunt, alias Jennings, was an example of what Harman classifies as a "counterfeit crank", that is, one who "deeply dissemble[s] the falling sickness"[90] – that is epilepsy – in order to move the passers-by and get money from them. To convince people that he truly keeps falling accidentally, he smears his face with blood, "which he carrie[s] about him in a bladder, and daube[s] fresh dirt upon his jerkin, hat and hosen".[91] When the Clown asks Autolycus if he lacks money the rogue replies:

> AUTOLYCUS No, good sweet sir [...] I have a kinsman not past three-quarters of a mile hence, unto whom I was going. I shall there have money, or anything I want. (IV.iii.79-82)

This excuse is standard. Harman indeed explains:

> Others there be that walk sturdily about the country, and feigneth to seek a brother or kinsman of his, dwelling within some part of the shire. (p. 74)

Strictly speaking, however, Autolycus does not beg from the Clown but he pickpockets him. In this he conforms to Greene's description of the "foist", that is, one who picks pockets only with his hands (as opposed to the "nip", who cuts purses with a knife) and who usually jostles his victim to distract them and meanwhile draws their purse. In particular, Autolycus' trick

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[88] Thomas Harman, *A Caveat for Common Cursitors, Vulgarly Called Vagabonds, Set Forth by Thomas Harman, Esquire, for the Utility and Profit of His Natural Country* (1566), in Judges, pp. 61-118.
[89] Carroll, p. 173.
[90] Harman, *A Caveat*, in Judges, p. 85. The story of Nicholas Jennings is told in pp. 87-90 and 117-118.
[91] Harman, *A Caveat*, p. 87.

lies in picking the Clown's pocket while helping him up on his feet, something which requires close physical contact. Greene narrates "a kind conceit" at St Paul's where a foist

> cried, "Alas, honest man, help me. I am not well"; and with that sunk down suddenly in a swoon. The poor farmer, seeing a proper young gentleman [...] fall dead afore him, stepped to him, held him in his arms, rubbed him and chafed him. At this, there gathered a great multitude of people about him, and the whilst the foist drew the farmer's purse and away".[92]

The supposed gentlemanliness, the feigned falling-sickness, and the victim's solidarity are all motifs the two episodes have in common.

However, rogues too "pick and steal" when needed and they have meetings in specific places with "their women",[93] who in the beggars' cant are called "doxies" – Autolycus indeed remarks on such encounters in his entrance song.[94] Harman reports on how some of these rogues, while usually wearing short cloaks, "will change their apparel as occasion serveth" (p. 74). Autolycus has a fake beard that he puts on to conceal his real appearance: he dons it before turning into a peddler and takes it off to act as a gentleman. The motif of the changing of clothes is very strong in *The Winter's Tale* and it involves the major characters – Florizel, Perdita, Polixenes – as well as some of the lower ones – the Clown, the Shepherd and Camillo. Clothes changes define the mutating social status of the character (Perdita and the countrymen) or are a key device to get to a higher end (Florizel's courtship to Perdita or Camillo and Polixenes' search for truth). Mikhail Bakhtin saw "travesty, that is the renewal of clothes and of the social image" as "one of the indispensable elements of the folk festival". In this light the changes of clothes in *The Winter's Tale* are not only a key feature for the development of the plot, but may also be linked with the nature of the country feast, which stands as a symbol of the changing of seasons and the idea of rebirth.[95] Autolycus not only

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[92] Greene, *Second Part of Conny-Catching,* in Judges, p. 168.
[93] Harman, *A Caveat*, p. 74.
[94] See IV.iii.1-12. Autolycus refers to his many girlfriends as doxies (IV.iii.2) or also "my aunts" (IV.iii.11). Later on, he calls them "troll-madams" (IV.iii.86) and confesses he has married a "tinker's wife" (IV.iii.96), which indicates the same type of woman of loose morals.
[95] See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Cambridge (MA) and London: The M.I.T. Press, 1968, p. 81.

puts on different disguises, thus conforming to the custom and significance of the feast all-round, but also when he turns into a peddler, his pack mostly contains textiles for clothing, garments and accessories:[96] this makes him physically and symbolically the agent of renewal, rebirth and social change. In addition, his last change into the clothes of a gentleman represents a version of the carnivalesque reversal of hierarchy typical of folk festivals, where the fool becomes king.

From a more concrete perspective, however, his new courtly attire improves neither his status nor his morality, but only works to make him a more convincing "rogue" than he currently is. In fact, in this new transformation, rather than an actual courtier, he resembles more one of Greene's cony-catchers, drawing also on some of the characteristics of the "upright man" described by Harman. Greene describes cony-catchers as "apparelled like honest civil gentlemen or good fellows, with a smooth face", who go round the City of London in search of "plain country fellow[s], well and cleanly apparelled, either in a coat of homespun russet, or of frieze". Then he tells us how the decent-looking cony-catcher feigns to have already met the gull and, if the latter says he does not know him, the deceiver swears it cannot be and says "I pray you, if without offence, let me crave your name and the place of your abode".[97] He later apologizes for having mistaken him for some other person and offers to buy him a drink at the ale-house, where he and his accomplices eventually cheat him at cards. Though in the scene Autolycus is moved by the apparently nobler objective of doing something good for his master (and consequently for himself), he still acts in the only way he knows, offering the audience an additional set piece of professional underworld knavery. Dressed up like a gentleman, he asks the country gulls questions that recall those of Greene's cony-catcher:

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[96] See below.
[97] Greene, *A Notable Discovery of Cozenage*, in Judges, pp. 123-124.

AUTOLYCUS Your affairs there [in the palace]? What? With whom? The condition of that fardel? *The place of your dwelling? Your names?* Your ages? Of what having, breeding, and anything that is fitting to be known, discover. (IV.iv.717-720)[98]

His bossy and terrifying attitude, however, is perhaps more indebted to the upright man, the stoutest of all beggars, who went asking for alms in households saying that "he hath served in the wars",[99] so it is perhaps not by chance that in IV.iv.728 Autolycus refers to himself as a soldier;[100] but above all he had authority on all the rest of the vagrants, beggars and doxies: he checked that beggars had been initiated to the business, he could take their money and he had a right to deflower female vagrants. Everyone had to obey him "for fear of beating".[101] However, the idea of combining the disguises of a gentleman with the rags of a beggar within the same character might come again from Nicholas Jennings' example: indeed a woodcut from *The Groundworke of Conny-Catching* (1592; fig. 4)[102] shows him in the clothes of a gentleman and in those of a beggar or counterfeit crank, suggesting that he changed garments according to situations.

4. *Nicholas Jennings*, from *The Groundworke of Conny-Catching*
(San Marino, CA, Huntigton Library, 1592, sig. D1v)

[98] Italics are mine.
[99] Harman, *A Caveat*, in Judges, p. 69.
[100] In a sense Autolycus as an upright man projects the reverse image of characters like Pistol and Bardolph in the Henriad, who turn from base rogues to soldiers.
[101] See Harman, *A Caveat*, in Judges, pp. 70-72.
[102] *The Groundworke of Conny-Catching*, London: John Danter, 1592. The work is attributed to Harman.

After playing the conny-catching rogue, Autolycus turns into a peddler, that is, a travelling seller of various types of wares: clothes, bric-a-brac and cheap print. The tinker and the peddler were part of the vagrants' population and were considered little better than rogues in Shakespeare's age. In fact, both the "drunken tinker" and the "swadder or pedlar" have an entry in Harman's *A Caveat*[103] and, as mentioned earlier, itinerant merchants and tradesmen were included in Elizabeth's 1572 Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds. Chances were, indeed, that they turned up deceitful. They were actually excluded from the Vagrancy Act of 1604, but this did not prevent citizens and a authorities from disliking them.[104] The peddler, in particular, was a figure who since the fifteenth century had haunted English fairs, where people could get wholesale provisions for their households. These events took place according to a fixed calendar: the first one of the year was held on the 14th of February in King's Lynn, Norfolk.[105] This last detail seems very interesting. As the reader will remember, Armin's own family lived and worked precisely in that city, whose local fair was one of the most important in the country because it inaugurated the new year. Armin himself, as a child, might have been very well acquainted with such an event and this could account for his appreciation of the image of the itinerant tradesman, in particular the tinker, a vagrant whose activity did not differ much from the peddler's; this is also confirmed by the fact that Autolycus considers himself a tinker, though he later becomes a peddler:

AUTOLYCUS If tinkers may have leave to live,
and bear the sow-skin budget,
Then my account I well may give,
And in the stocks avouch it. (IV.iii.19-22)

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[103] See Judges, pp. 92-93.
[104] Beier, *Masterless Men*, p. 90.
[105] Linda Woodbridge, "The Peddler and the Pawn: Why Did Tudor England Consider Peddlers to Be Rogues?", in Craig Dionne and Steve Mentz, ed., *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004, pp. 143-170, (144-145).

Indeed, as I mentioned in chapter 1, in Armin's play *Two Maids of More-Clacke* Toures disguises himself as one; but also, in *The Italian Taylor and His Boy*, Armin dubs the Taylor as

> ``One that trots about the land,
> ``His Budget at his backe,
> ``As Tinkers, hammering in their hand
> ``A Kettle with a cracke. (sig E4v)

Perhaps Armin's own experience might have given Shakespeare the idea of staging this particular disguise for him as Autolycus. The turning up of Autolycus as peddler at the sheep-shearing festival is absolutely perfect, because that is exactly the figure that people, in a real context, would expect to see at a country fair. Indeed, the clown's reaction to the description of a rogue named Autolycus is:

> CLOWN Out upon him! Prig, for my life, prig! He haunts wakes, fairs and bear-baitings. (IV.iii.100-101)

The word "prig" belongs to the beggars' cant, also called "Pedlars' French", and it means "to steal".[106] However, the word can be connected with specific types of vagabonds: John Awdeley defines "a prigman" one

> who goeth with a stick in his hand like and idle person. His property is to steal clothes of the hedge, which they call storing of the rogueman; or else filch poultry, carrying them to the ale-house, which they call the bousing inn, and there sit playing at cards and dice, till that is spent which they have so filched.[107]

References to this activity in Autolycus' lines show how he can be additionally mapped out onto the role of the prigman: in his first song he celebrates the sweet view of "the white sheet bleaching on the hedge" (IV.iii.5); then he confesses that his "traffic is sheets" (IV.iii.23) and that he squandered everything he had gaming and gambling at "die" (IV.iii.26) – that is dice playing in taverns. But the art of "prigging" was connected also with tinkers who, according

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[106] Harman, *A Caveat*, in Judges, p. 79. He explains the term in his definition of the *prigger of prancers* "A prigger of prancers be horse-stealers; for to prig signifieth in their language to steal, and a prancer is a horse". That is why in his final glossary of Pedlars' French he defines "*to prig*, to ride" (p. 115).
[107] John Awdeley, *The Fraternity of Vagabonds* (1561), in Judges, p. 53.

to Harman, were often called “priggs”.[108] These, in fact, not only sold out anything valuable their doxies carried with them to buy drinks but also

> if he see any old kettle, chafer, or pewter dish abroad in the yard where he worketh, he quickly snappeth the same up, and into the budget goeth round. [109]

Autolycus uses a similar language when he says that his “father [...] was likewise a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles”(IV.iii.24-26),[110] thus defining himself once again a tinker. Chances are, then, that the Clown, calling Autolycus a “prig” who haunts fairs and wakes,[111] conflates his two distinct activities as tinker and peddler, which were indeed very similar figures, as they were both potentially dishonest itinerant tradesmen carrying a pack on their back.

Peddlers, like vagrants, represented maximum mobility in the sixteenth century: neither did they have a stable home nor did they visit towns on a regular basis. The peddling business all over Europe originated from the mountains; the economical wellness and the development of towns and cities which started in the twelfth century increased the demand of luxury goods and materials which were not immediately available locally, as for instance wood, leather, wool and meat. These could be provided by the communities of the Alps, the Pyrenees and Scotland, which consequently started to send their people to cities and valleys to make their economy profit. Initially itinerant vendors followed shepherds in their seasonal transhumance from the highlands to the lowlands, but gradually an age of great migration from the mountains began, so that peddlers, merchants and craftsmen started carving out their commercial routes across Europe. The British Isles were served by itinerant tradesmen coming from Scotland, who then continued eastward circulating throughout North Europe, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and above all Poland, which became a major settlement for

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[108] Harman, *A Caveat*, in Judges, p. 92.
[109] Harman, *A Caveat,* in Judges, p. 93.
[110] See also Carroll, p. 161.
[111] Annual festivals in English parishes, especially in rural places (see *OED*). The sheep-shearing feast is one of these.

Scottish migrants especially in the years between 1580 and 1620. Poland was reached either through the Baltic Sea or following the main continental commercial routes along the rivers of Germany and, more interestingly for us, Bohemia.[112]

Therefore the history of peddling in late medieval and early modern Europe is compelling for our understanding of Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale* for several reasons: first, the character's meddling with shepherds and not with other sorts of rustics may not be totally casual. Second, Shakespeare's staging of a peddler in Bohemia is not merely a way to make the most of the actor's skills or to amuse the audience but it could be also a calculated choice based on the dramatist's thorough knowledge of social phenomena taking place in his time. Shakespeare might not have known the geography of Bohemia, as Ben Jonson implied,[113] but in this specific case he shows he was historically conscious: the peddler's visit comes at the perfect time – the country fair – and in the perfect place, Bohemia. Third, if Shakespeare's contemporaries stigmatized the peddlers as Scottish I wonder, then, whether Autolycus' mimicry as a travelling tradesman might have included also an exquisite display of a Northern accent. After all, that of imitating accents was one of Armin's assets, as confirmed by the fact that he performed at least twice the part of Welsh characters: Sir Morion in *A Valiant Welshman* and Tutch as Welsh knight in *Two Maids of More-Clacke*.[114] It seems to me that the text presents us with a couple of allusions to the fact that Autolycus may not come

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[112] Laurence Fontaine, *Histoire du Colportage en Europe XVe-XIXe Siècle*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1993, pp. 19-22.

[113] In *Conversations with Drummond* (first published in 1711; Ben Jonson, *Ben Jonson*, Ian Donaldson, ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 599.)

[114] See 1.4 and 1.5.3. The variability of the early modern English spelling makes it very hard to tell with certainty whether actors were using a particular accent or not, unless it is explicitly remarked upon in the text (e.g. in *As You Like It* Orlando says to Rosalind: "Your accent is something finer than you could purchase in so remov'd a dwelling" [III.ii.331-332], or in *King John* Queen Eleanor says of the Bastard that "the accent of his tongue affecteth him" [I.i.86]). Andrew Gurr, however, admits of the possibility that actors in *Macbeth* were using a Scots accent, in a period when the London area was home to many Scottish migrants – in particular the King's lords and retinue – and the ridiculing of northern accents was taking place on stage, for example in Jonson, Chapman and Marston's *Eastward Ho!* and John Day's *The Isle of Gulls*, performed respectively in 1605 and 1606 (Gurr, pp. 42-45 and Christopher Highley, "The Place of Scots in the Scottish Play: *Macbeth* and the Politics of Language", in Willy Maley and Andrew Murphy, eds., *Shakespeare and Scotland*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004, pp. 53-66 (56-57).

from Bohemia. While he is illustrating for his customers the ballads he has in his pack, he says that "there's scarce a maid *westward* but she sings [...] Two Maids Wooing a Man" (IV.iv.287-288). Autolycus could have been trying to play the role in an even more persuasive way by passing himself off as a foreigner from the west of Europe. Woodbridge claims indeed that usually "peddlers were othered as foreigners rather than local people"[115] and Autolycus' rhetorical question to the skeptical customers "why should I carry lies abroad?" (IV.iv.269) may indeed allude to that. Alternatively, even if Autolycus was referring to the west of the country, as if Bohemia was actually a representation of England – as Snyder argues[116] – Armin could still have showed off his skill in mimicry, imitating perhaps an accent of the western counties: in fact there is evidence that some chapmen's routes from the midlands and the south-west of England reached London in Shakespeare's times.[117] If any of these hypotheses could actually be confirmed, then Autolycus' power of duping the simple-minded country clowns was maximised on the Globe stage.

In Tudor and Stuart England peddlers were despised not only because some of them, as authors like Harman recorded, were cheaters or thieves, but especially because with the mobility of their trade they threatened the new concept of commerce emerging in that age thanks to the establishment of weekly local markets and "shopping centres": the Pawn was one of these. It was founded in the late 1560s, at the Royal Exchange in London, and there shop leases lasted twelve years. All this encouraged the formation of a more specialized and permanent type of trade, which clashed with that offered by peddlers who, on top of that, undercut the shopkeepers' prices.[118] They were basically seen as unfair and unpredictable competitors, as well as "sweat usurpers" because they sold without producing anything

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[115] Woodbridge, p. 164.
[116] Snyder, p. 189 n. 276.
[117] Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety 1550-1640*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 27.
[118] Woodbridge, pp. 147-150.

themselves, and authorities were convinced they were in league with prostitutes.[119] Moreover, they could act as moneylenders on a small scale, thus endangering bigger lending businesses.[120] This suggests another paradox in the characterization of Autolycus: on the one hand he is so broke that he enters the stage in tatters – and that is consistent with his identity as roguish beggar – while on the other, when he is disguised as a peddler he projects the image of a marginalized individual, certainly, but not that of a destitute, as is also confirmed by his rich pack, where customers can get a vast choice of items: "the prettiest love songs for maids" (IV.iv.194), "ribbons of all the colours i'th'rainbow; points [...] inkles, caddises, cambrics, lawns [...] smock[s]" (IV.iv.205-210), "cypress", "gloves", "masks", "bugle-bracelet, necklace-amber, perfume", "golden coifs and stomachers", "pins and poking-sticks of steel" (IV.iv.219-227). In the end, just as real peddlers' business was particularly profitable, Autolycus' sale is so successful that customers buy everything he has in his pack. Perhaps the only trait of Autolycus' that is not historically accurate is that he works on his own: real peddlers did not move alone but in groups along specific mercantile networks.[121] The fact that Shakespeare makes of Autolycus a "lone wolf"[122] was perhaps influenced by previous literary stereotypes concerning peddling.[123]

The items Bohemian customers show themselves most interested in are Autolycus' ballads. Already when he first enters he says that his "traffic is sheets" which, apart from the

[119] Woodbridge, p. 156.
[120] Woodbridge, p. 155 and Fontaine, p. 46
[121] See Woodbridge, p. 151.
[122] The term "lone wolf" refers both to somebody solitary and, more specifically, to "a criminal who operates alone" (*OED*). The name "Autolycus" does indeed mean "lone wolf". See William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, Stephen Orgel, ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 50. Knapp argues that "Autolycus's singleness might suggest that Shakespeare wanted to distance himself from the rogue nationalism that his histories had helped generate" (Jeffrey Knapp, *Shakespeare's Tribe: Church, Nation and Theater in Renaissance England*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002, p. 181).
[123] For example in the second part of Thomas Heywood's *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody* (1605) John Goodfellow, the peddler in tawny coat, is also a solitary traveller. Itinerant tradesmen before 1610 are staged in: Heywood's *The Four P's* (1520), Peele's *Edward I* (1591), *The Pedlar's Prophecy* (1561), Chettle and Munday's *The Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntingdon* (1598), Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* (1605), Heywood's *If you Know not Me you know Nobody* (1605), Marston's *Histriomatrix* (1599), Heywood's *The Golden Age* (1610).

bawdy meaning I discussed earlier, can also be connected with the sale of broadsides.[124] Apart from specialized ballad sellers or balladmongers, it was not unusual for peddlers to distribute and perform this type of ephemeral literature, especially in the countryside and in concurrence with market gatherings, festivities, fairs or any event that might attract a crowd.[125] Broadside ballads, indeed, may include useful metaliterary references to the conditions of performance, so that information of this type can sometimes be deduced directly from the texts. Spufford also notes how the association of peddling with ballad sale had been familiar at least since the 1560s, when a song with the title *Pedlar and His Pack* was entered in the Stationers' register.[126] However, whether or not the ballad seller was a peddler or a professional balladmonger, having Autolycus perform as one additionally embodies a couple of metatheatrical allusions: it has been observed that the character's delight in telling stories points at the fantasy of the playwright, for whom he becomes a "stand-in".[127] Besides that, just as the seller of ephemerals had to count on his performance for successful sales,[128] also the actor and in particular the stage clown's artistic career and income depended totally on the quality of their acting skills. Moreover, the connection of the stage clown specifically with the performing of ballads and popular songs stresses even more powerfully the similitude of the character to the Vice of the interludes, who often employed this poetic and musical genre in their performances.[129] Autolycus gives quite an accurate picture of the concrete dynamics and implications of ballad selling in the age of Shakespeare.

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[124] "Sheets" indicates cheap print. Broadsides were street ballads printed on one side only and were usually 80 to 120 lines long, arranged in rhyming couplets or alternate rhyme pattern, generally accompanied by a woodcut. See Würzbach, p. 1.

[125] See Würzbach, pp. 13-14, 250.

[126] Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 116. See also Hyder E. Rollins, "An Analytical Index to the Ballad-Entries (1557-1709) in the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London", *Studies in Philology*, 21 (1924), p. 178.

[127] See for example William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, Ernest Shanzer, ed., London: Penguin, 2005, p. lv and Robert Martin Adams, *Shakespeare: The Four Romances*, New York: Norton, 1989, p. 102.

[128] See Würzbach, pp. 13-14, 22.

[129] See Watt, pp. 30-32.

This includes the balladmonger's descriptive overview of the ballads in print he carries, as well as his repeated assurances that his stories are true.[130]

AUTOLYCUS	Here's one to a very doleful tune, how a usurer's wife was brought to bed of twenty money-bags at a burden, and how she longed to eat adders' heads and toads carbonadoed.
MOPSA	Is it true, think you?
AUTOLYCUS	Very true, and but a month old. (IV.iv.260-265)

Based on the quality of the presentation, customers could choose which ballad to buy in print and to see performed. Eventually listeners would even have the chance to take part in the singing of dialogic ballads, as in fact Dorcas and Mopsa do.[131] To be even more persuasive, in performance Armin-Autolycus might have stepped on some prop to make himself more visible while selling and singing – thus imitating real ballad singers who had to find ways to attract the attention of the crowd[132] – and would have held a bunch of black-letter or white-letter broadsides possibly showcasing captivating woodcuts.

In the sale process, claims of truth connected to ballads were fundamental, and indeed many of those texts included such declarations in their initial lines. Customers needed to know that what they were about to hear had actually occurred or that the balladmonger himself was witness to the facts: that would generate expectancy on the part of the buyers and would increase sales.[133] In this sense ballads were sold as if they were pieces of news.[134] Autolycus is very concerned with this aspect of the sale, so he gives plenty of acknowledgment that his broadsides are true: he cites as reliable sources "Mistress Tale-Porter, and five or six honest wives' that were present" (IV.iv.267-268) plus "five justices [...]

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[130] See also IV.iv.281.
[131] See IV.iv.295-306.
[132] George Puttenham, for instance, wrote about "these *Cantabanqui* upon benches and barrels heads where they have none other audience than boyes or countrey fellowes that passe by them in the streete" (George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, London: Richard Field, 1590, sig. M1). See Watt, p. 13 and Würzbach, p. 13.
[133] Würzbach, pp. 47-53.
[134] Indeed the word "news" was often contained in the title of ballads. In this sense, Autolycus' function as one who brings news to the country simpleton stresses once more his connection to Mercury – the patron of thieves but also the messenger of the gods – under whose ascendant he confesses he was "littered" (IV.iii.25). See also *The Winter's Tale*, Orgel, ed., p. 52.

and witnesses more than my pack will hold" (IV.iv.281-282). It is paradoxically funny that Autolycus should be citing "justices", the people whom an early modern vagrant feared most and trusted least, as evidence for truth. Stephen Orgel comments that the claim that the ballads are true voices the play's repeated allusions to the need of suspension of disbelief.[135] Basically, just as Autolycus' tales are true, also the Winter's Tale and the "old tale" that Leontes' wife and daughter are back are to be believed.[136] However, irony strikes effectively in this scene where Autolycus, who is no real peddler but a disguised criminal for whom mystification is a vital tool, figures as an authority of truth in the comic part of the play. It has been significantly observed how Autolycus's mischiefs stand as a faint parallel of the evil caused by Leontes' jealousy in the first three acts.[137] Perhaps the two characters are comparable specifically because they are two opposites, insofar as they stand on the two extremities of the social ladder: at the top the king, at the bottom the beggar.[138] However, Autolycus stands as a counterpart of Leontes in yet another subversive way: the King of Sicily has the power to decide what truth is in the first part of the play, while the rogue does it in the second. This role of supreme guarantor of truth is a feature Autolycus keeps when he turns into a courtier:

> CLOWN We are but plain fellows, sir.
> AUTOLYCUS A lie, you are rough and hairy. Let me have no lying. it becomes none but tradesmen, and they often give us soldiers the lie, but we pay them for it with stamped coin, not stabbing steel, therefore they do not *give* us the lie. (IV.iv.721-726)

Every time Autolycus switches disguises he pretends to condemn his previous transformation, and this is one of the tricks he uses most effectively to dupe his victims. In

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[135] See *The Winter's Tale*, Orgel, ed., p. 52. On this topic see also Lee Sheridan Cox, "The Role of Autolycus in the Winter's Tale", *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 9 (1969), pp. 284-285.

[136] About the final discovery, Rogero, one of Leontes' courtiers, says: "This news which is called true is so like an old tale that the verity of it is in strong suspicion" (V.ii.27-29).

[137] See Hartwig, "Cloten, Autolycus and Caliban", pp. 98-101.

[138] Wye Saltonstall in 1631 wrote that the world "may bee likened to a Scale or Praedicament of Relation, wherin the King is *summum genus*, under whom are many subordinate degrees of men, till at last wee descend to the Begger the *Infima Species* of mankind, whose misery cannot be subdivided into any lesser fortune" (Wye Saltonstall, *Picturae Loquentes or Pictures Drawn forth in Characters. With a Poem of a Maid*, London: T. Cotes, 1631, sig. B5r-B5v; Carroll p. 9).

this case he offers a satirizing judgment on his own morals as a peddler. When he arrives at the festival as a tradesman he warns the Clown that "there are cozeners abroad, therefore it behoves men to be wary" (IV.iv.252-253). While in the conny-catching scene with the Clown he even gives away the real story of his life and his real name or perhaps nickname[139] – "some call him Autolycus" (IV.iii.99) – before disdainfully confirming that "that's the rogue that put me into this apparel" (IV.iii.102-103). Autolycus has an ambiguous relationship with truth: on the one hand all his tricks are successful only in proportion to how big his lies to the other characters on stage are. On the other, however, being a direct development of the medieval Vice, he cannot keep secrets from the audience but is forced by literary convention to be totally honest. In the scene with the Clown this ambivalence is staged best, because he dupes the foolish victim while technically saying nothing more than the truth, so that true and false coincide. In a play like *The Winter's Tale*, whose first part is centred on the implications of a major truth – real or believed, regarding Hermione's alleged betrayal and Leontes' paternity of Perdita – Autolycus pushes the concept to its extreme, and actually generates his comedy from it. This feature is sensibly different from the way the artificial fools treat the concept, that is to utter the stark truth under the pretence of folly, thus covering it with a layer of satire which ensures that no one takes serious offense.

Playing the role of the ballad-monger, Autolycus finally gives a historical account of how this activity was often linked with pick-pocketing. In the *Third Part of Conny-Catching* (1592) Robert Greene narrates the story of how

> A roguing mate, and such another with him, were there got upon a stall singing of ballads, which belike was some pretty toy, for very many gathered about to hear it, and divers buying, as their affections served, drew to their purses and paid the singers for them. The sly mate and his fellows, who were dispersed among them that stood to bear the songs, well noted where every man that bought put up his purse again, and to such as would not buy, counterfeit warning was sundry times given by

[139] Professional criminals were known to use aliases (see Beier, *Masterless Men*, p. 128). Happé also notes how in pre-Shakespearean drama the Vice frequently employed aliases to hide his sin (p. 16, but see also further on in this chapter). If "Autolycus" was actually an alias, then the character would share one more feature with his predecessors.

> the rogue and his associate, to beware of the cutpurse, and look to their purses, which made them often feel where their purses were, either in sleeve, hose, or at girdle, to know whether they were safe or no.
>
> Thus the crafty copesmates were acquainted with what they most desired, and as they were scattered, by shouldering, thrusting, feigning to let fall something, and other wily tricks fit for their purposes, here one lost his purse, there another had his pocked picked, and, to say all in brief, at one instant, upon the complaint of one or two that saw their purses were gone eight more in the same company found themselves in like predicament.[140]

Like his fellow rogues in the conny-catching pamphlets, Autolycus takes advantage of the attention of the people at his performance and his wares to pick their pockets. However, while usually ballad-mongers worked in cooperation with one or more thieves,[141] Autolycus, as a perfect lone-wolf, does it all himself, suggesting once more the character's skills in performing different roles at once. The rogue pamphlets suggest that the underworld was made of a plethora of specialized roles, which are very often indicated with different names according to their ways and purposes – as John Awdeley's or Thomas Harman's taxonomies suggest.[142] Autolycus brings many of these roles together so that Shakespeare makes of one character a representative of an infinitely larger and differentiated part of society. Autolycus is one and many at the same time and he alone is enough to subvert the order of the whole country – meddling with everyone: royals, courtiers and peasants – because in a sense he embodies the entire underworld of Bohemia.

That the character of Autolycus is largely intended to bring entertainment to the play is immediately clear once he enters in IV.iii singing. Autolycus's first song, but more in general the way the character is staged bring comedy to the play insofar as they celebrate the apparent freedom, mobility and lack of moral principles in the life of a rogue. Like the vagrants of the rogue pamphlets, Autolycus raises laughter because he offers the audience a way of escaping: he can do what the spectator would like to do but cannot. However, the

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[140] In Judges, p. 190.

[141] For example, in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) the cutpurse Ezechiel Edgworth works with Nightingale, the ballad singer. To pick pockets they use a system analogous to that described by Greene. See Ben Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, Susan Gossett, ed., Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, II.iv.43-46.

[142] See John Awdeley, *The Fraternity of Vagabonds* (1561), in Judges, pp. 51-60 and Harman, *A Caveat*, in Judges, pp. 61-118.

merriness of the tone conceals an oxymoronic quality that becomes more and more evident as Autolycus' lines progress in the play. The lyrics deal with Autolycus' having fun with his doxies, the theft of laundry, the desire for pimping, whoring and drinking and the possibility of going everywhere he wants; yet they start setting a series of uneasy contrasts. The most compelling, perhaps, lies in the ambiguity of the word "heigh", which Autolycus repeats four times in ten lines.[143] Pitcher notes how literally it is a joyful exclamation but at the same it puns with "hay", which on the one hand is the place where Autolycus "lie[s] tumbling" with his "aunts" (IV.iii.11-12) but on the other it indicates "a net used for catching wild animals" or a fence, thus referring to the character's worries.[144] The word, then, expresses joy and potential personal tragedy at the same time, as Autolycus could be caught by authorities any time. And we know what consequences that would imply in early modern London. After recalling his past experience at court he sings that he will not "*mourn* for that" (IV.iii.15), a strong word to indicate sorrow but which is usually associated with the idea of death, so that Autolycus' merry tone is unexpectedly made graver by this fugacious allusion. He continues giving us an image of the night where "the moon shines" but its light is "pale" (IV.iii.16) and then he ends his first solo scene onstage with five references to the terrible tortures he might go through both if he stays free and if he is caught, the last four of which are arranged in a chiasmus – "stocks" (IV.ii.22) "gallows and knock [...] beating and hanging are terrors to me" (IV.iii.28-29) – suggesting perhaps also visually and rhetorically the very concrete risk of getting ensnared. The idea of terrible physical pain feared by Autolycus is what later sustains the conny-catching scene with the Clown:

> AUTOLYCUS (*grovelling on the ground*) O, that ever I was born! [...] O help me, help me! Pluck but off these rags, and then death, death! [...] O sir, the loathsomeness of them offend me more than the stripes I have received, which are mighty ones and millions. (IV.iii.49-58)

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[143] IV.iii.2, 6, 10.
[144] *The Winter's Tale*, Pitcher, ed., p. 250, n. 2. Also *OED*.

Again, strictly speaking, Autolycus is not totally dishonest here. The "stripes" he says he has received have more to do with whippings than knocks by some highwayman on foot since whipping was the ordinary punishment for vagrants in early modern London, so that he might even be recalling something he truly went through. The passage above gives an emblematic example of how Autolycus construes his trick on a melodramatic staging of his state. His screams, as well as his cringing, sound so exaggeratedly excruciating that, if on the one hand they imitate the typical solemn tone of certain passages in tragedies, on the other they simultaneously subvert it. The trick of the rogue, both in the play and in real-life contexts, would work because it appeals to the victim's sense of compassion for a most wretched and hopeless being. Thus the character, by cunningly parodying the style of tragedy, manages to combine laughter and pain together.

He concludes his apparition in IV.iii with an aside and finally a four-line song where again he contrasts happiness with unhappiness, or merriness with sadness: "a merry heart goes all the day/ your sad tires in a mile-a" (IV.iv.125-126). But the juxtaposition of contrasting suggestions associated with Autolycus continues and is intensified in the later scenes. The Clown expects from him a ballad of "doleful matter merrily set down, or a very pleasant thing indeed and sung lamentably" (IV.iv.190-192), while when he enters as a peddler he cries his wares out:

> AUTOLYCUS Lawn as white as driven snow,
> Cypress black as e'er was crow [...]
> Masks for faces, and for noses; (IV.iv.219-223)

Autolycus sells valuable textiles or, more presumably, they are "counterfeit" like his jewels. It is curious, however, that he should be juxtaposing the positive idea of whiteness with the idea of blackness and, more interestingly, death: indeed black cypress was "much used for habiliments of mourning" (*OED*). For its own part the crow was praised in medieval

bestiaries for its long life but also, besides being proverbially associated with the colour black,[145] in Shakespeare's age it could symbolize death,[146] along with plagiarism, imitation and stealing.[147] Thus the crow can cunningly allude to Autolycus' art as a thief and dealer of counterfeit objects, as well as someone who performs someone else's ballads without producing anything original himself. As I already pointed out in the first chapter, this might be a jocular tease directed to Armin on the part of Shakespeare. The third line of the quotation above disturbingly juxtaposes two different types of masks: those which are needed to protect the ladies' face or as a fashionable accessory and those for the nose to hide the signs of some venereal disease,[148] so that the contrasting ideas of beauty and ugliness or grotesque are closely linked. When Autolycus is asked to display some of his ballads he initially goes against his nature of a merry rogue to propose instead a "doleful tune" (IV.iv.260) of a usurer's wife who craves for adders and toads and subsequently a "very pitiful" (IV.iv.279) ballad of a frigid woman who turned into a fish. Only on his third attempt, after the customers' explicit requests, does he provide a "merry ballad, but a very pretty one" (IV.iv. 284) which is anyway about a man forsaking his two lovers.

The way Autolycus manages to raise laughter is unmatched in previous clown roles. With Armin's major fool roles he shares the fact that he ridicules his foils and victims so that

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[145] See R.W. Dent, *Shakespeare's Proverbial Language: an Index*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1981, p. 81 and *OED*.

[146] In Shakespeare the crow, being a carrion bird, is also associated – like the raven – with death. In *The Winter's Tale* itself, for instance, Paulina accuses Leontes of "casting forth to crows thy baby-daughter" (III.ii.188). In *Julius Caesar* Cassius thinks of the crow as an ill omen foreshadowing his defeat: "ravens, crows and kites,/ Fly o'er our heads and downward look on us,/ As we were sickly prey: their shadows seem/ A canopy most fatal, under which/ Our army lies, ready to give up the ghost" (V.i.84-88), while Macbeth uses "the crow [that] makes wing to the rooky wood" (*Macbeth*, III.ii.51-52) as a metaphor for his murderous plan to kill Banquo. In *The Phoenix and Turtle* the crow is the bird of mourning: "And thou treble-dated crow,/ That thy sable gender makest/ With the breath thou givest and takest,/ 'Mongst our mourners shalt thou go" (ll. 17-20).

[147] Probably the most popular use of this meaning of the word in the early modern age is the accusation to Shakespeare, by someone using Robert Greene's persona, of being an "upstart crow, beautified with our feathers" (*Greene's Groats-worth of Wit*, 1592) one who made success by picking on others' literary works. In fact in the classics the crow was seen as a mimic (see Peter Berek, "The 'Upstart Crow', Aesop's Crow, and Shakespeare as a Reviser", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35 (1984), pp. 205-207). There is a reference to the motif in *Romeo and Juliet* when Juliet, having learnt of Tybalt's death by hand of Romeo he says "O serpent heart hid with a flow'ring face![...] Dove-feathered raven" (III.ii.73-76).

[148] *The Winter's Tale*, Pitcher, ed., p. 274, n. 223.

the audience laughs with him at them. However, he does not do it with quips, chop logic, witty speeches or with a display of brilliant popular wisdom, but chiefly through opportunistic feigning and mimicry. For example, noting how Autolycus' ballads deal with fantastic transformations, Hartwig comments that "the audience in the theater is delighted" with the "comic absurdity" "that [the] pastoral figures could believe in the 'truth' of these monstrous exaggerations".[149] Also, when Autolycus dupes the other characters on stage he is so out of their depth that they do not in the least realize that they are being fooled: to put it in Bergson's words, he makes them laughable insofar as he highlights their unconsciousness and ignorance of themselves, and possibly awakens the audience's sense of superiority.[150] This can be noted when Autolycus calls his victim "good-faced sir" (IV.iii.114) which the Clown does not take note of but may mean also "stupid-looking"[151] or when he thanks him for having done him "a charitable office" (IV.iii.76) which the Clown takes to refer to his help, but actually points to the fact that he has just given up to Autolycus all the money he carried. Therefore the entire structure of jesting remains an affair the rogue shares only with the audience, who laughs at the foolishness of his unwary victims. This privileged relationship with the spectators, which Autolycus shares with the Vice of medieval pageants and Tudor interludes, is marked by the performance of fourteen between monologues and asides where he tells about himself and reveals his intentions: a number that earns him the first place among all Armin's roles for amount of speeches addressed to the audience.[152]

Besides irresponsible mischief and roguery, however, Autolycus occasionally shows his relatedness to the satirizing clowns who precede him by explicitly commenting on the

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[149] Hartwig, "Cloten, Autolycus and Caliban", p. 100.

[150] See Bergson, pp. 16-17. On the laughter of superiority generated by the Vice see also D.H. Monro, *Argument of Laughter*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1951, p. 59.

[151] *The Winter's Tale*, Pitcher, ed., p. 258, n. 113.

[152] Precisely they are seven monologues and seven asides. The character that comes second in this ranking is Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida*, with nine monologues but no asides.

foolishness of those whom he comes across. This becomes more substantial especially during Autolycus' transition from peddler to "gentleman", and it goes beyond the mere consideration of the Clown as a foolish "cock" to catch (IV.iii.34). In IV.iv he exits the stage singing again about his wares, but the song ends with

> AUTOLYCUS Come to the pedlar,
> Money's a meddler,
> That doth utter all men's ware-a. (IV.iv.319-321)

In a similar way as the fool satirizes others' folly, here the destitute vagrant satirizes money, a troublemaker that can buy anything – even respectability and women's love – and at the same time makes men sell anything they have for want of wealth.[153] This sounds like a general bitter remark on the foolishness of those who want or have money to spend but also, as Pitcher suggests, it can be directed at the Clown, who does not realize that Dorcas and Mopsa stay with him only because he will buy them what they want.[154] For once Autolycus seems capable of wisdom, but later on in the scene, after he has pick-pocketed the attenders to the festival, he re-enters saying:

> AUTOLYCUS Ha, ha! What a fool honesty is, and trust – his sworn brother – a very simple gentleman! (IV.iv.596-597)

where he ironically subverts the link between folly and vice to associate it instead with virtue.

From this point onwards there seems to be a slight turn in the way Autolycus brings comedy into the play. It almost looks like the more the stage clown is involved into the plot and the more power he has on its developing, the less he sticks to the type of the merry or comic rogue. In the scene where he exchanges clothes with Florizel – which signals Autolycus' transition from a mere element of entertainment and subversion to a key figure in the workings of that providence which will enable the comic ending of the romance – he acts as a servile subject who shakes for fear of hanging and defends himself repeating he is "a

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[153] See "meddler" and "utter" on *OED* .
[154] See *The Winter's Tale*, Pitcher, ed., p. 279, n. 327-8.

poor fellow" (IV.iv.631, 639), thus appearing more pathetic than comic and bearing out the Clown's previous statement that there is

> CLOWN Not a more cowardly rogue in all Bohemia. If you had but looked big and spit at him, he'd have run. (IV.iii.104-105)

The following scene, where he dupes the Shepherd and the Clown who are looking for Polixenes, to a certain extent recalls the situation of Touchstone confronting Corin in the pastoral setting of the Forest of Arden, were it not for the fact that Autolycus' foils are not as wise as the old shepherd in *As You Like It.* Laughter, however, is not necessarily raised by the witticism of Autolycus' words, but by the range of possible reactions on the part of the peasants to the courtier's threatening attitude

> AUTOLYCUS I am courtier cap-à-pie, and one that will either push on or pluck back thy business there. (IV.iv.736-738)

and by his fake upper-class ironic remark when they resoundingly misunderstand the meaning of the word *advocate*

> AUTOLYCUS (*aside*) How blessed are we that are not simple men!
> Yet Nature might have made me as these are,
> Therefore I will not disdain. (IV.iv.745-751)

Autolycus' mimicry is so convincing that for the Clown it provides immediate evidence that "this cannot be but a great courtier" (IV.iv.748). His performance, however, is rendered utterly obscure and terrifying when he starts listing in detail the tortures the Shepherd and his son will receive for attempting to cheat the king. Other than hanging, he proposes extra agonies:

> AUTOLYCUS Some say he [the Shepherd] shall be stoned; but that death is too soft for him, say I. Draw our throne into a sheepcote? All deaths are too few, the sharpest too easy. [...] He has a son, who shall be flayed alive, then 'nointed over with honey, set on the head of a wasps' nest, then stand till he be three-quarters-and-a-dram dead, then recovered again with aqua vitae, or some other hot infusion, then, raw as he is, and in the hottest day prognostication proclaims, shall he be set against a brick wall, the sun looking with southward eye upon him, where he is to behold him with flies blown to death. (IV.iv.778-792)

It is uncertain whether Autolycus is acquainted, as a rogue, with such types of tortures or rather if he is making them up – they do not seem to have been the typical punishments for

rogues in Bridewell.[155] It actually looks as if Autolycus was rejoicing in the macabre; he takes pleasure not only in planning disfiguring types of deaths but also in the sadistic lingering in the details of infernal sorts of punishments in an atmosphere which, what with the torrid heat, burning sun and aggressive insects, does indeed recall hell rather than an environment typical of pastoral Bohemia. However, while on the one hand his description conveys the deepest physical pain, on the other he insists on the fact that the Clown should not be killed outright but should be revived just at the moment when he is almost dead. Not by chance does he suggest reviving him with "aqua vitae" – a subtly apt name, as it is supposed to give back life to a "three-quarters-and-a-dram dead". Wilson Knight observed that in this passage Autolycus is "unnecessarily cruel".[156] I agree on the cruelty but not on the unnecessariness. As I have shown so far, in many of his songs and lines Autolycus juxtaposes contrasting ideas, thus putting forward dichotomies and ambiguities dealing with good and evil, vice and virtue, happiness and pain, as well as life and death. This speech comes towards the end of Autolycus' presence on stage and, I hold, encapsulates his function in the play. These are probably the most significant lines he has in the entire text. The ideas of life and death are no longer only juxtaposed, as in the previous scenes, but they are superimposed and intertwined: death becomes life again and then life becomes death. At the same time the main source of comedy in the play, the leading comedian, offers almost an out-of-character reflection on death, guilt and damnation. The result is that laughter spurts from terror, that of the two peasants trembling at his words and finding ways to bribe him and get away, such as

[155] Pitcher (*The Winter's Tale*, Pitcher, ed., p. 307 n. 788-796) suggests that the part where the guilty is covered in honey and set at the mercy of wasps is taken from Boccaccio's *Decameron* II.9, a story Shakespeare might have used as a source also for *Cymbeline* (see Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare. Vol.8, Romances: 'Cymbeline'; 'The Winter's Tale'; 'The Tempest'*, London: Routledge, 1975, p. 62).
[156] George Wilson Knight, *The Crown of Life: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare's Final Plays,* London: Methuen, 1965, p. 112.

thinking about offering him a "pheasant, cock [or] hen" (IV.iv.744) or even gold.[157] After describing his "vision" Autolycus says:

> AUTOLYCUS But what talk we of these traitorly rascals, whose miseries are to be smiled at, their offences being so capital? (IV.iv.792-794)

thus mixing even more explicitly laughter with pain, giving an interpretation of how something apparently tragic can actually be laughable and viceversa. The artful blend of laughter and pain is specifically the aim the genres of tragicomedy or romance seek to attain: in this sense Autolycus is the tool that materially performs that mixture on the stage.

Up to this point we have seen how Autolycus in the later part of IV.iv provides an ambivalent, dark type of comedy, occasionally acting the coward when he gets involved with the heroes of the play. However, while this is consistent in the scenes where he interacts with other characters on stage, we must acknowledge also that he retains much of his merry humour in the monologues. This does not indicate, however, that he leaves off his taste for paradoxical implications. As Camillo, Perdita and Florizel exit, indeed, he wittingly praises the skills of the cutpurse – "an open ear, a quick eye [...] a nimble hand [...] a good nose" (IV.iv.672-673)[158] and later "a hot brain" (IV.iv.684) – thus inducing the audience into believing his is a commendable profession with high requirements, but then he foresees that "this is the time that the unjust man doth thrive" (IV.iv.675) and he later confesses that he is "not naturally honest" (IV.iv.712), thus subverting his previous implication by giving a definition of himself that is consistent with Jacobean moral and legal values, which he mocks again when he says that that "sure the gods this year connive at us" (IV.iv.677-678). Indeed, in a historical period where vagrancy and roguery were stigmatized as vice and association

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[157] See IV.iv.806-812.

[158] These terms were part of the language of rogue pamphlets. For instance a "nimble hand" is one of the qualities attributed to a foist (i.e. a pickpocket) in Greene (*Second Part of Conny Catching,* in Judges, p. 168), while "a quick eye, a sharp wit and a reaching head" are those of a cozener (Greene, *A Notable Discovery of Cozenage*, in Judges, p. 128).

with the Devil, this statement resulted comic almost in a blasphemous way.[159] Further comedy in the same monologue comes from two possible metatheatrical allusions: "we may do anything extempore" (IV.iv.678) – which could easily be something the actor Armin might say about himself,[160] as well as an embodiment of the rogue's idea of total freedom and carelessness – and "the prince himself is about a piece of iniquity" (IV.iv.679), which puns on the idea of "Iniquity" as Vice in the morality plays.[161] Just as Autolycus the mystifier paradoxically becomes guarantor of truth in the play, here Autolycus the Iniquity can afford to judge what iniquity is, and labels Florizel as a theatrical figure analogous to himself.

The points where his wit peaks, however, are his tirades on the ideas of honesty and knavery, such as the often quoted

> AUTOLYCUS If I though it were a piece of honesty to acquaint the king withal, I would not do't. I hold it the more knavery to conceal it, and therein am I constant to my profession. (IV.iv.680-683)

or also

> AUTOLYCUS If I had a mind to be honest, I see Fortune would not suffer me – she drops booties in my mouth [...] If [the king] think it fit to shore them again, and that the complaint they have to the king concerns him nothing, let him call me rogue for being so far officious; for I am proof against that title, and what shame else belongs to't. (IV.iv.832-842)

This type of distorted reasoning somehow reminds us of the chop logic displayed chiefly by Shakespeare's fools. Just as he does with the idea of life and death, Autolycus also mingles definitions of honesty and dishonesty, ultimately calling into question the very difference between the two concepts. If on the one hand, as he did previously, he describes himself as dishonest, thus confirming the audience's moral judgment, on the other he says that his being

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[159] The connection between underworld, vice and the Devil is pushed to its extreme in the rogue pamphlet by Thomas Dekker's *Lantern and Candle Light* (1608), which begins with an infernal conclave where Lucifer decides to send one of his intelligencers to the human world to make sure that no one harms the community of the devil-worshipping criminals.

[160] Brown, p. 114.

[161] In Shakespeare's canon there are some straightforward references to "Iniquity" as Vice. In *Richard III* the Duke of Gloucester says "like the formal Vice, Iniquity,/ I moralize two meanings in one word" (III.i.82-83), while in *1 Henry IV* Prince Hal, imitating his father, calls Falstaff "that reverent Vice, that grey Iniquity" (II.v. 458). A case where the idea of "iniquity" is more liminal is offered by *Measure for Measure*. When Angelo is summoned to hear the case of constable Elbow against the clown Pompey, the appointed duke asks "Which is the wiser here, justice or iniquity?" (II.i.165).

so at once is and is not dependent on his will. Indeed, in the first quotation he tells the audience that he can freely decide whether to commit to honesty or knavery, but he thinks it is better to be constant to his profession and go for knavery. In the second, though, he says that it is a supernatural force, Fortune, that will not let him do anything honest. Finally, more confusion is added when he says that somebody too officious is a rogue, thus giving a definition of dishonesty that once again shuns the common view and is consistent only with the outlook of the members of the underworld. Autolycus is a protean figure not only insofar as he changes appearance, but also because of his nonchalant ability to combine multiple antithetical implications while at the same time giving an impression of inner consistency.

The asides and monologue Autolycus performs respectively before and after the scene where he plays the courtier, however, signal a progressive increase in the character's involvement in the key dynamics of the play – insofar as he shapes his plan to help his master – but simultaneously also an increase in his malice, which gets him to call the clowns "puppies" (IV.iv.706) and "these two moles, these blind ones" (IV.iv.837).

After this point, when he directs the clowns onto the ship to Sicily, Autolycus' humour starts sensibly to diminish, and this is partly due to the fact that he repents of his former misdeeds and doing so, as Draper has argued, he recalls, at a lower level, Leontes' penitence.[162] He anticipates the ultimate evolution of his role in his last monologue, where we can actually believe him:

> AUTOLYCUS Now, had I not the dash of my former life in me, would preferment drop on my head [...] Had I been the finder-out of this secret it would not have relished among my other discredits. (V.ii.112-122)

Starting from the scene where he does not do much but listen obsequiously to the gentlemen's report to the moment when he is finally converted to a better life with the gentlemen-clowns,

[162] R.P. Draper, *'The Winter's Tale'. Text and Performance*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985, p. 40.

Autolycus' comic power drops and it is replaced instead by the same cowardly deferential attitude he showed earlier with Camillo, Florizel and Perdita, who were all superior in rank. This attitude with the clowns is marked by such servile expressions as "I humbly beseech you, sir" (V.ii.147) "your worship" (V.ii.148).[163] This not only flattens the character considerably, but also hinders the possibility of establishing with certainty his trustworthiness – or lack thereof –when he promises that he will be a tall fellow of his hands, which the Clown seems to doubt. This vagueness along with the consequent duplicity of meaning of the repeated expression "tall fellow of thy hands" (V.ii.162, 164, 165-166, 168) – which may indeed conceal an allusion to stealing – associated with him, but materially uttered by the Clown, offers a faintly ludicrous turn and makes Autolycus' exit a bit less disappointing.

Once Leontes has repented and does not constitute a danger anymore, Autolycus, with his beast-like name and his demon-like ragged garb, stands as the only real antagonist, the only potential threat in the comic acts of the play, which are otherwise at the mercy of Fortune. He is the only character whose fate does not lie in the expectation of a vague "triumph of time" but is driven precisely by a personal intention of being a subversive element in peaceful Bohemia. He seems to have more in common with the medieval Vice than with other examples of Shakespearean tricksters – who are also descendants of the iniquity or Vice – or with the *dolosus servus* of the Roman tradition:[164] he is a liminal character insofar as he acts only for his own sake, not heeding the orders of any master or superior. The egoistic nature of his subterfuges recalls more the plots of the Duke of Gloucester in *Richard III*, who is also a protean figure,[165] or those of Don Juan in *Much Ado*

[163] See also V.ii.153 and V.ii.167.
[164] For a discussion of the significance of these types for early modern comedy see Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, London: Penguin Books, 1957, pp. 173-174 and Leo Salingar, *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974, pp. 107-128.
[165] On Richard and comedy see Marie-Hélène Besnault, "Richard III et le Rire" in, *Tudor Theatre: For Laughs Pour Rire,* Vol. 6, Bern and Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002, pp. 177-195 or Philip Mallet, "Shakespeare's Trickster-Kings" in Paul V.A. Williams, ed., *The Fool and the Trickster. Studies in Honour of Enid Welsford*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1979, pp. 64-82.

About Nothing than the devoted service of Puck or Ariel. Even when he helps his master, he does not do it in response to a received command or an explicit request for help, but because *he* wants to have the chance to win Florizel's gratitude and consequently reconquer his position at court.

From a less strictly literary point of view his final desire to get a master to serve can be historicised as one of the few possible ways in which an early modern vagrant could hope to get out of destitution, though only temporarily. Wage-work implied either being hired as a craftsman or, more cogently for the play, living in a household as a servant or some other type of dependent worker, which was a very popular occupation in the early seventeenth century.[166] Though in the end Autolycus does not succeed in his original intent, he still finds in the Shepherd and his son two "good masters" (V.ii.173). All this is the opposite of what happens in *The Tempest* to the trickster Ariel, who not only plans his schemes in execution of Prospero's orders, but mainly longs to be freed from "court" thanks to his zeal. More specifically, the staging of Autolycus might owe something to some hybrid plays[167] like *The Life and Repentance of Mary Magdalene* (1566-1567) or *Cambises* (1589) where the Vice works as an *agent provocateur* who dupes his victims by quickly switching from tears to laughter, or the stage romance *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes* (1599), where the clown/iniquity Subtle Shift disguises as Knowledge and directs his efforts first at winning a master and then in betraying and abandoning one after another.[168]

Certainly Autolycus' merriness is fundamental for easing the tragic tone of the first three acts (and the beginning of the fourth, where the clowns remember the storm and

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[166] See Beier, *Masterless Men*, pp. 22-28.

[167] These were part moralities and part Elizabethan plays.

[168] See Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to His Major Villains,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1958, pp. 160-161, 291-302. Walter Kaiser observes that the fact that, among his many knavish professions, Autolycus "compassed a motion of the Prodigal Son" (IV.iii. 94-95) signals his debt to the literature of moralities and interludes, which were indeed variations of that motif (Kaiser, p. 199).

Polixenes recalls Leontes' penance) and turning it into comedy, so that he materially makes of the text a tragicomedy. However, I claim that it is precisely his nature as a criminal, vagrant and also peddler that structurally links and guarantees continuity between the first part, which portrays the corrupted emotions of the city and court, and the second, which celebrates the idyllic life of the country. Autolycus as vagrant *is* that physical link. Social phenomena caused by destitution – beggary, cheating, prostitution, stealing – became very serious problems primarily in the cities, and in London in particular:[169] the soaring number of the poor forced the authorities of the city, in the first place, to find legal solutions to restrict this growing community, which endangered the rest of the population. Shakespeare himself was certainly acquainted with the city side of the underworld, as well as with that of the country, especially because he worked in an area, Southwark, which was ranked among the most notorious in terms of such phenomena and diversity of criminals, so that many of Autolycus' characteristics could have been drawn from direct observation of the London lower life. Additionally, many of the anecdotes contained in the rogue pamphlets are set in specific areas of the city and were written by London-based authors, such as Greene, Dekker and Middleton, the last of whom even acquired police enforcement powers by becoming Lord Mayor in 1613. However, while the phenomenon was massive and ever-growing in London – due to immigration from the rest of England – it affected also rural areas, where highwaymen lurked in country roads. Thomas Harman indeed wrote his rogue pamphlet while spending a convalescence period in a Kent country house and questioned the vagrants that called at his place. All this to say that Autolycus is, for a Jacobean playgoer, as much an urban figure as a rural one therefore he embodies, from a historical point of view, the perfect character to bridge the gap between the city part and the country part in *The Winter's Tale*

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[169] See A.L. Beier, "Social Problems in Elizabethan London", *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 9 (1978), pp. 203-221.

which, among Shakespeare's romances, is the text that seeks most evidently to display the clash between tragedy and comedy, by isolating the first three acts and the last two geographically, temporally, and also socially. Autolycus, being a vagrant, adds to the play the necessary mobility and flexibility to bring together those two separate worlds. In addition, the peddler stocked his pack at the town fair, often without paying, and he travelled around the country to supply those who did not have access to shops or to the products available in bigger centres.[170] The peddler, then, for his own nature, is a concrete link between city or towns and country, so that it is specifically through Autolycus' identity as an itinerant tradesman that the dramatic and textual function of the character comes to full view.

2.3 Boult, Autolycus, criminality and folly in Shakespeare's Age

Of the four Shakespearean romances, *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale* are the most similar: they share motifs like the death of the hero's wife, her recovery through magic, and the final unexpected union with the husband after many years, the loss of the young female child, the passing of time, the penance of the desperate father, the intervention of a chorus, as well as the sea voyage and the deadly storm. Can it be casual, then, that the star clown is a felon in both plays or, more in general, that laughter is generated by criminals? The fantastic adventures, incredible happenings, supernatural interventions and surreal atmospheres in the two texts need to be balanced somehow by something that stands as an opposite, something the audience recognizes as realistic. That is where the underworld comes into play: not only to subvert the established order of the higher world in the texts – and this is the reason why Boult and Autolycus interact with major and minor characters from high and low classes

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[170] The role of the peddler as a cultural mediator for the rural areas is discussed in Margaret Spufford, "The Pedlar, the Historian and the Folklorist: Seventeenth-Century Communications", *Folklore*, 105 (1994), pp. 13-24; also Gãmini Salgãdo, p. 139.

alike – but especially to decrease its unreality and consequently to persuade the audience that the story that is being told *is* linked to everyday life and can be believed. This is also why the comedy coming from the underworld is effective in a genre like the history play, which aims at achieving realism. But in the romances, the most unearthly texts in the Shakespearean canon, Autolycus and Boult represent the basest and therefore most concrete part of society, and they clash even more effectively with the literariness of the characters and situations surrounding them because, both crying at some point their wares on the street, they epitomize the materiality of economics.

In the previous sections I have also discussed how employing a criminal as a stage clown implies a series of inner contrasts and ambivalences: in particular, the character manages to bring laughter but at the same time his nature within the early modern society makes him virtually both condemnable and pitiable. Autolycus, for example, does not fear corrective whipping like Lear's Fool, but actual death through terrible torture for his felonies. Of course the joking – and often bawdy – tone of the characters ensures that their dark side does not take over, and lies at the root of why some critics considers their threats and torments not to be taken "seriously".[171] Still, however, the duality of the tragic and the comic is intrinsic to their nature and is often displayed in their lines. This makes of them the perfect candidates for the fool role in so elusive and problematic a genre as the Shakespearean romance or tragicomedy.

The fact that Autolycus and Boult belong to the literary category of the "fool" – even if of the unorthodox type – in their plays should not be overlooked at this point. Barbara Swain gives a clear and comprehensive definition of what a fool is, whether he is actually dim-witted or not:

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[171] See for instance Videbæk, p. 28 or Anne Barton, "Leontes and the Spider: Language and Speaker in Shakespeare's Last Plays", in Ryan, pp. 22-42, p. 40.

> The fool, in life and in literature, is a perennial figure. He appears in many forms and under many names. He may be called clown, rustic, zany, boor, or plain fool. [...]But whatever his special attributes, the creature behind the mask and the name when he is genuinely one species of the great genus fool has one inevitable characteristic: he appears from some point of view erring and irresponsible. He transgresses or ignores the code of reasoned self-restraint under which society attempts to exist, is unmeasured in his hilarity or in his melancholy, disregards the logic of cause and effect and conducts himself in ways which seem rash and shocking to normal mortals.[172]

Thus "fool", as far as literature is concerned, should not be considered merely an interchangeable label for the clown or comic character in an early modern dramatic text: on the contrary it embodies a constant reminder that the role represents in some way the idea of folly. Therefore we should ask ourselves if and to what extent the early modern idea of folly shapes the characters of Autolycus and Boult (as well as the other brothel keepers in *Pericles*). Certainly they are no naturals but at the same time they are no Erasmian licensed fools either. However, the fact that they are members of the underworld does indeed tap on late medieval and early modern discourses on folly. Other than Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*, which was analysed in the previous chapter,[173] another influential humanistic and satirical work on folly was Sebastian Brant's *The Ship of Fools* (1494) which in many ways anticipates Erasmus' book. Indeed, as we go through the text, we realize that the follies Brant catalogues are nothing but a list of common sins, vices and law offences. The idea of the fool as sinner or moral offender had a long tradition: it is present for instance in the Bible, chiefly in the Book of Proverbs, in the classics and in Saint Augustine, but it became more frequently employed in moral writings produced in the fifteenth century. [174]As opposed to the virtuous or wise man, the sinner or vicious man lacked the necessary intellectual capability to pursue the knowledge of God or the social code – which would have otherwise prevented him from committing any wickedness – therefore he deserved to be called "fool". Sometimes in the early modern age this particular type of folly could be called "knavery", so that the "fool"

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[172] Barbara Swain, *Fools and Folly During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1932, p. 1.
[173] See 1.2.
[174] See Swain pp. 10-26.

and "knave" were often paired with slightly different connotations: the first was of the innocent type, while the second, as Welsford observes, was "simply a fool regarded 'sub specie aeternitatis' for he was neglecting his true, ultimate self-interest and what could be more ridiculous than that?".[175] Erasmus' Stultitia herself claims that there are two types of folly:

> One kind is sent from hell by the vengeful furies whenever they let loose their snakes and assail the hearts of men with lust for war, insatiable thirst for gold, the disgrace of forbidden love, parricide, incest, sacrilege or some other sort of evil, or when they pursue the guilty, conscience-stricken soul with their avenging spirits and flaming brands of terror. The other is quite different, desirable above everything, and is known to come from me. It occurs whenever some happy mental aberration frees the soul from its anxious cares and at the same time restores it by the addition of manifold delights.[176]

Therfore the "knavish" Autolycus and Boult should be listed in the category of those following this deadly kind of folly, as indeed they not only neglect morality and law but they also scorn them, thus eschewing the knowledge of Good. Boult and the Bawds' mocking of religious values in Pericles are mirrored in *The Winter's Tale* by Autolycus' contempt for virtue

> AUTOLYCUS If I make not this cheat bring out another, and the shearers prove sheep, let me be unrolled and my name put in the book of virtue. (IV.iii.119-122)[177]

and also in his subversion of the parable of the Good Samaritan, turned into a sly cozening performance.[178]

But there is more to it. In 1509 Alexander Barclay produced a free translation into English of Brant's work where, given that he had a vast knowledge of fools and folly himself,

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[175] Welsford, p. 237. In Shakespeare the discourse on the duality of folly is ludicrously brought up by some of the clowns or fools or in connection to them (at times, however, the difference between "fool" and "knave" is blurred). For instance Lafeu asks Lavatch: "Whether dost thou profess thyself, a knave or a fool?", to which he proclaims to be "a fool [...] at a woman's service, and a knave at a man's" (*All's Well*, IV.v. 22-25), while Lafeu later echoes: "Thou art both knave and fool" (*All's Well*, IV.v. 31-32); Lear's Fool sings that "a knave turns fool that runs away;/ The fool no knave, pardie" (*Lear*, Quarto, II.ii.250-251; Folio, II.ii.257-258); Apemantus announces that he will go to Timon's feast to "see meat fill knaves and wine heat fools" (*Timon*, I.i.264); Launce says: "I am but a fool [...] yet I have the wit to think my master is a kind of a knave" (*The Two Gentlemen*, III.i. 260-261).

[176] Erasmus, pp. 58-59. Also Mullini, *Corruttore*, p. 43.

[177] See also the conny-catching scene with the Clown, where Autolycus fools his foil by saying that it was for his "virtues" that he was "whipped out of the court" (IV.iii.87-89).

[178] George Wilson Knight notes that "Autolycus' account of his beating, robbery, and loss of clothes" recalls that episode of the New Testament ("Great Creating Nature", in Kenneth Muir, ed., *Shakespeare 'The Winter's Tale': A Casebook*, London: Macmillan, 1968, pp. 136-150, p. 138).

he inserted major additions, which contributed to give a realistic picture of late medieval England.[179] The last of the "fools" of society that he lists are the beggars, in the final section of the work, titled "Of folysshe beggers and of theyr vanytees".[180] Barclay's work testifies to the changing attitude towards the idea of poverty. While the figure of the poor had been indeed praised and sacralized chiefly by the Franciscan outlook, after 1300 and with the advent of humanism, destitution started to be seen more realistically as the cause of social problems – such as vagrancy and consequently crime – rather than a pathway to salvation.[181] However, what is more compelling for this analysis is that Barclay sees the underworld as one of the numerous facets of folly: specifically, beggars are fools because

> [...] yonge ynoughe to labour for theyr fode
> Gyuyth theyr bodyes fully to slewthfulnes
> The beggers craft thynkynge to them moost good
> Some ray theyr legges and armys ouer with blood
> With leuys and plasters though they be hole and sounde
> Some halt as crypyls, theyr legge falsely vp bounde (p. 303)

In this description we may easily see Autolycus' prank to the Clown. Further on, however, Barclay sums up his point on the underworld of beggars, and he concludes that he cannot take them all onto the ship, while he prefers to just advise them against the folly of vice and sin:

> But if that I sholde gather in my barge
> All folysshe beggers, and labour or intende
> To note all theyr vyces, to sore sholde be the charge
> And as I suppose I neuer sholde make an ende.
> Wherfore I counsell them shortly to amende
> Or els theyr lewdnes, synne, and enormyte
> Shall cause men withdrawe theyr almes of charyte (p. 305)

Erasmus, on the other hand, could owe something to Barclay's exposition of beggary as folly, but he satirizes especially the feigning of monks and friars who wander around asking for alms when they actually do not need them, "to the great loss of all the other beggars".[182] The association of vagrancy and folly is present also in art. For example a British Museum

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[179] The work was first published in German with the title *Daß Narrenschyff ad Narragoniam* (1494). Barclay's translation was actually based on Jacob Locher's – Brant's disciple – rhyme royal version in Latin.
[180] Sebastian Brant, *The Ship of Fools*, Alexander Barclay, transl., Thomas Hill Jamieson, ed., Edinburgh: William Patterson, 1874, p. 301.
[181] Beier, *Masterless Men*, pp. 4-7 and Gãmini Salgãdo, p. 183.
[182] Erasmus, p. 96.

broadside print titled *While Maskinge in Their Folleis All Doe Passe, Though All Say Nay Yet All Doe Ride the Asse* (1607; fig. 5) and attributed to Renold Elstrack satirically portrays the follies of the world: in the centre a group of men compete to get onto the back of an ass, while a beggar leads the animal at the front and a motley fool holds its tail.[183]

On the other hand in the section on *Pericles* we have seen how the ideas of folly and lechery were often associated in medieval and early modern iconography by, for instance, inserting in the visual representation of brothels a jester pointing or sneering at the close-up scene, suggesting that the man who frequents prostitutes is a vicious fool. The same idea is present in written texts also. In Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, the allegorical character of Folly lists, among his gang of roguish companions, "*Tryphe*, Sensuality" or Wantonness, "this plump one with the well-fed look".[184] Or Armin, for instance, in *A Nest of Ninnies* conceives of the allegorical figure of the World as a wanton woman who is pregnant with six fools. Shakespeare himself has Othello say of Desdemona: "She turned to folly, and she was a whore" (*Othello*, V.ii.141). In Greene's *Second Part of Cony-Catching* the narrator says that "commonly there is some old bawd or snout-fair strumpet who inveigleth either some ignorant man, or some young fool to folly".[185] *The Ship of Fools*, as well as blaming sins connected with immoral sexual behaviour, also explicitly mentions the crime of the exploitation of prostitution. In the prologue the author laments indeed how fools are increasing in number and "encomber" the world, and he lists, among others, "bawdes and pollers with comon extorcioners" who "ar taken nowe adayes in the worlde moste glorious" (p. 12). Further on, in a section devoted to adultery, the author calls "fools" those

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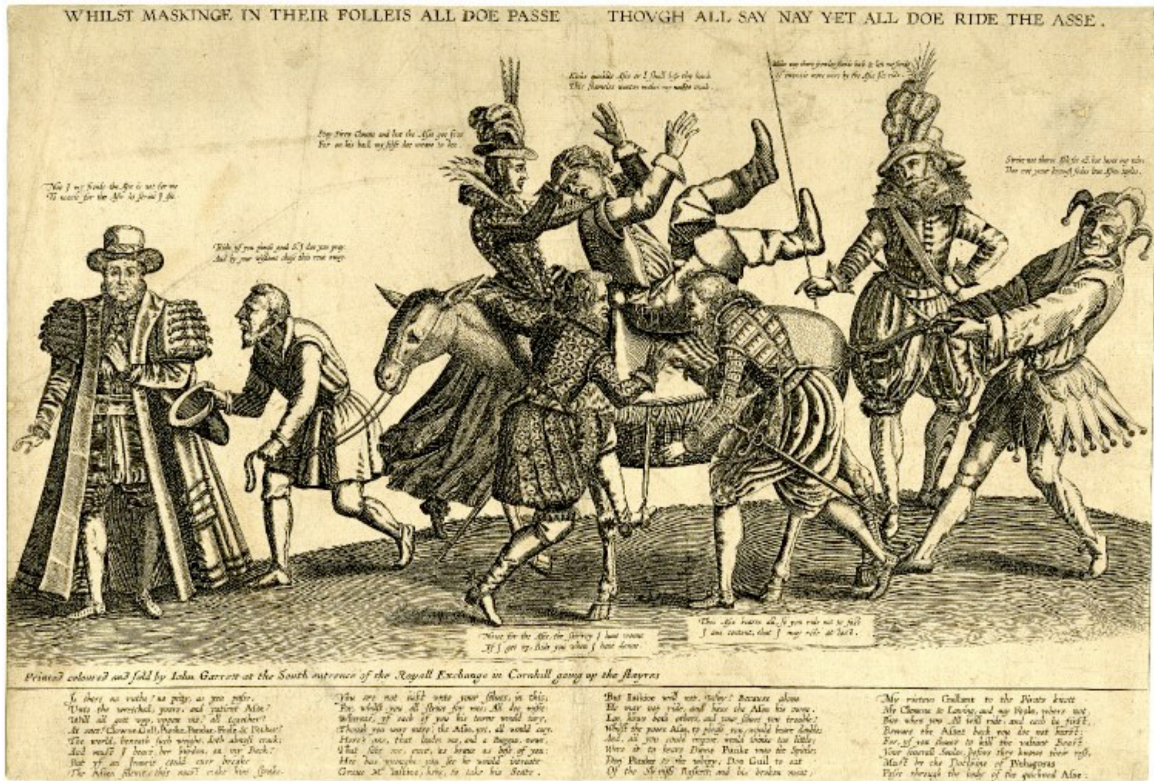
[183] It is perhaps not a chance, also, that in the group of playing-cards depicting the conditions of man in the deck called *The Tarots of Mantegna* (possibly engraved by an Italian miniaturist working at the court of Ferrara, c. 1465) the beggar or *misero* (fig. 6) – as the caption on the card says – replaces the function and the attitude of the fool of regular tarots. The card depicts a half-naked elderly beggar leaning on his stick while two skinny dogs bite at his ankles; in the background, a wall with falling-off bricks and two bare trees.
[184] Erasmus, p. 18.
[185] In Judges, p. 165.



5. Renold Elstrack, *While Maskinge in Their Folleis All Doe Passe, Though All Say Nay Yet All Doe Ride the Asse*, (London, British Museum, 1607)

6. *Misero ('The beggar')*, *The Tarots of Mantegna* (print made by Hans Ladenspelder, London, British Museum, 1530-1561)

husbands who, “lyuynge as bawdes”, accept the sin of their wives only for the sake of “cursyd money” (p. 172). Even the obscene significance included in Boult’s name hints at the association between the pimp and the fool: Erasmus’ Folly infers that her seat in the body is the male sexual organ, which propagates the human race,[186] and in late medieval and early modern representations the fool could carry a phallic-shaped sceptre (the *bauble* or *marotte*), which stood as a symbol of instinct as opposed to reason.[187]

Therefore, considering the broad variety of meanings the term “fool” had in Shakespeare’s age, we cannot define Autolycus and Boult “fools” just because they are the result of the evolution of a folkloric and theatrical type. To this basic, literary label we need to add another one: they are fools also because they project the image of morally depraved individuals. In other words, they are both stage fools and criminals but, to a Jacobean audience, they are also inherently foolish precisely because they are criminals. Though in the texts they are primarily comic characters, their shady activities imply vice and prospective damnation so that their folly belongs paradoxically to a most tragic kind.

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[186] Erasmus, p. 20.

[187] See William Willeford, *The Fool and His Sceptre: A Study in Clowns and Their Audience*, London: Edward Arnold, 1969, pp. 11, 15.

3. The Natural Fool: *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*

So far I have considered characters that fit the category of the clown in their plays relatively unproblematically, those who are designed to bring laughter in the texts, those who make fools of everyone else onstage and occasionally offer satirical commentaries not only on what is going on in the texts but also on social phenomena affecting contemporary everyday life. Consequently, those parts were rightfully given to the leading comedian of the company. In *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest* things get more complicated. Strictly speaking, the standard "clowns" of the two plays are not those I introduced in Chapter 1 but a group of more marginal ones. In *Cymbeline* we have the First Jailor, who entertains Posthumus with macabre jokes that remind us of the First Gravedigger in *Hamlet*. His presence, however, is confined to one scene very late into the play. In *The Tempest*, as is known, the laughter-makers are Stephano and Trinculo, two simpletons more in the Kemp style who cannot match the wit of Armin's previous roles nor the slyness of an Autolycus, but are funny for being clumsy drunkards. In chapter 1 I have highlighted textual clues pointing at the fact that Armin might instead have been playing respectively Cloten and Caliban in the two plays. Towards the end of Shakespeare's and Armin's careers it would not have been the first time that the leading comedian did not play the straightforward clown role. As Wiles suggested, this had already happened in *Julius Caesar* with Casca and possibly in *Coriolanus* with Menenius, as well as in *Timon*, where Armin plays the philosopher Apemantus instead of the more obvious, but perhaps insignificant, Fool role.[1] My theory is that the reason why Armin took the parts of Cloten and Caliban rather than any of the other ordinary comic characters is that they gave him the chance to play, for the first time in Shakespeare's plays, characters who were

[1] See Wiles pp. 151-152.

perceived as intellectually inferior because of actual or presumptive cognitive disabilities. In other words, after numerous performances of artificial folly, which systematically concealed a cutting wisdom, Armin could now turn to representations natural folly, a condition which he had always been interested in. Let us not forget that the natural fool Blue John was his greatest success in the time of *The Two Maids of More-Clacke* and that with *Foole Upon Foole* and *A Nest of Ninnies* Armin gave us two of the most useful descriptions of the implications of real intellectual disability in the early modern period, for once shunning our biased assumption that "folly" in that age always pointed at the wise side of it, a result of the cultural influence of such works as Erasmus' and Sebastian Brant's.

The previous chapter has led us to a discussion of the early modern idea of folly in relation to sin, depravation and illegality. This chapter will investigate instead the roles of Cloten and Caliban insofar as they are shaped by early modern medical and social notions of intellectual disability. At the same time, I will also analyse how they conform to the cultural and iconographic features of the fool in the period. A little caveat is necessary before starting, though. While critical and historical discourses of fools and folly often border into discussions about madness or similar mental disorders,[2] in this section I will try as much as possible not to focus on those: in fact neither Cloten nor Caliban are lunatics. None of Shakespeare's fools and clowns are mad, unlike some of his tragic heroes, but they display a different perception of reality because of their real or feigned, more or less serious, mental deficiency. Early modern legislation and archive records in England actually sought to distinguish between these two very different states: while madness (or lunacy) was a

[2] As for instance the seminal work by Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Richard Howard, transl., New York: Vintage Books, 1988 (originally published in French in 1961 with the title *Folie et Déraison: Histoire de la Folie à l'Âge Classique*), especially chapter 1. See also Jonathan Andrews, "Identifying and Providing for the Mentally Disabled in Early Modern London", in Anne Digby and David Wright, eds., *From Idiocy to Mental Deficiency: Historical Perspectives on People with Learning Disabilities*, London: Routledge, 1997, pp. 65-92 (65-66).

temporary condition due to an accident or a trauma at some point in the life of an individual, idiocy was a permanent state.[3] A natural fool was such from birth and, unlike that of a madman, his condition was not reversible. Shakespeare himself separated the two categories of people. In *Twelfth Night* Feste brings up the point twice, saying about drunken Sir Toby that "he is but mad yet [...] and the fool shall look to the madman" (I.v.132-133) and then, when Malvolio the presumptive madman writes a letter to Olivia there is this short exchange:

> FESTE Look then to be well edified when the fool delivers the madman. (*Reads*) 'By the Lord, madam,'—
> OLIVIA How now, art thou mad?
> FESTE No, madam, I do but read madness. An your ladyship will have it as it ought to be, you must allow *vox*. (V.i.288-293)

Similarly, in *Cymbeline* itself Imogen says to Cloten that "fools cure not mad folks" (II.iii. 98), which Nosworthy, following the Folio more closely, reads as "fools are not mad folks" (II.iii.99), so that in this case the point is stressed even more clearly. While the analysis of the interaction between medical and philosophical theories of madness with early modern cultural expressions has been quite a favourite in criticism, the same cannot be said of the construction of intellectual disability. This is a consequence of the fact that very few attempts have been made at discussing and bringing together historical notions of the issue: the most detailed work in the field has lately been produced in particular by C. F. Goodey, to whose comprehensive studies I am mostly indebted in the sections that follow.

[3] See Richard Neugebauer, "Mental Handicap in Medieval and Early Modern England: Criteria, Measurement and Care", in Anne Digby and David Wright, eds., *From Idiocy to Mental Deficiency: Historical Perspectives on People with Learning Disabilities*, London: Routledge, 1997, pp. 22-43, and Andrews, "Identifying and Providing for the Mentally Disabled", pp. 68-70.

3.1 Cloten

Cloten, the stepson of King Cymbeline and son of his second wife (the Queen in the play), does not have a proper predecessor. Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577), the source for the historical matter of *Cymbeline*, does not give the king of Britain a foolish stepson, but it does provide Shakespeare with the character's name. In fact, as Boswell-Stone notes, Cloton or Clotenus was a king of Cornwall, father of Mulmucius Dunwallon,[4] but not much else is told about him and certainly he does not have anything to do with the historical character of Cymbeline who, if we are to believe Holinshed, lived some four hundred years after him. Other than Boccaccio's *Decameron* (and possibly the Dutch pamphlet entitled *Frederyke of Jennen*, first translated in 1520), from which Shakespeare drew the wager story involving Iachimo, Posthumus and Imogen, another possible source for *Cymbeline* has been found in the anonymous romantic play *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune* (1582). This is the story of a princess, Fidelia (a name which could have inspired Imogen's nickname when she disguises herself as a boy, Fidele), who falls in love with an orphan, Hermione, brought up at court. Their relationship is opposed by her brother, Armenio, who has both his sister and her lover banished. Later, when Fidelia and Hermione arrange to meet at a secret place, Armenio secretly follows her sister, who in the meantime finds hospitality in the cave of a hermit, Bomelio, who used to be a courtier but was banished. The subject of the play, then, could inform the part of the *Cymbeline* plot dealing with the love between the princess Imogen with the orphan Posthumus, her later search for him in Milford-Haven, and the final anagnorisis involving Cymbeline's previous courtier Belarius, who has been living in a cave for twenty years.[5] More important for us, however, are the resemblances between Cloten and Armenio:

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[4] Raphael Holinshed, *Shakespeare's Holinshed: the Chronicle and the Historical Plays Compared*, W.G. Boswell-Stone, ed., New York: B. Blom, 1966, p. 17.

[5] See Nosworthy's introduction in the Arden edition of Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*, pp. xxv-xxvii.

the latter is an actual brother and not a suitor for the heroine, while the former is a step-brother and wants to marry Imogen; moreover, while the latter finally repents of his mischiefs and asks forgiveness, Cloten dies as a villain without making amends. In both cases, however, they stand as impediments for the happiness of the lovers and they follow the heroine in the search for her beloved. In the first scene of *The Rare Triumphs* where Armenio appears, he starts a brawl with Hermione and is eventually wounded by his opponent's knife, just before the fight is appeased by the intervention of the king and lords. Similarly, in I.i and I.ii of Shakespeare's play reference is made to a duel between Cloten and Posthumus, which has just taken place offstage and was started by the Queen's son who, as the servant Pisanio reports, "drew on my master" (I.i.161) but the two were soon "parted/ by gentlemen at hand" (I.i.164-165). We could even go so far as stating that the two characters share something in the way they speak, as they both show a particular appreciation for the word "villain", which they use contemptuously against their rivals.[6]

However, what is totally missing in the portrayal of Armenio in *The Rare Triumphs*, is the feature of foolishness, which conversely is the main characteristic of Cloten, that which nobody can help mentioning when they speak of him. That Cloten is conceived of as such is quite evident since he is the non-jester character that is most times dubbed "fool" in the whole shakespearean canon. This term, as the investigation which has been carried out so far has partially shown, had several different – but often linked – meanings in the period, therefore I will analyse Cloten distinguishing the multiple connotations of folly that he

[6] Armenio says to Hermione, referring to Fidelia: "What shall she, villaine?" (*The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*, J.P. Collier, ed., London: W. Nicol, 1851, act 2, p. 96) and then "unpitied might he dye,/ that to his soveraigne meanes such villanye", "the venome of thy villany withstood" (Act II, p. 98). A simple concordance search shows how Cloten is second only to Timon in the whole Shakespearean canon for occurrences of the word "villain" in his lines (Timon has 12, Cloten 11). The significance of the use of this word in relation to Cloten will be discussed further on.

displays. Let us start by the notion of natural fool, which is the one that most applies to the character.

In the play Cloten is spoken of a few scenes before the audience actually sees him. In a typically Shakespearean introductory scene, the dialogue between two gentlemen of the court pictures the background to the subject matter of the play. They explain that Imogen, the king's daughter, has chosen to marry the virtuous Posthumus Leonatus over Cloten, "a thing too bad for bad report" (I.i.16-17), and for this reason she stirred Cymbeline's wrath. In the following scene Imogen herself explains how she "chose an eagle/ and did avoid a puttock" (I.i.140-141). So, in one of the many references to birds in the play, Imogen associates Cloten with the puttock, that is the kite, a baser creature than an eagle, but also a symbol of deceit and stealing of others' property, thus anticipating the character's desire to violate Posthumus' wife and his later robbery of his rival's clothes.[7]

If up to this point we perceive Cloten just as a man whose qualities are by far exceeded by those of Posthumus, from the last part of I.i onwards the character starts being discriminated for his downright stupidity. Pisanio enters and tells the Queen that a duel has taken place between Cloten and Posthumus, an occurrence which might be derived from *Love and Fortune*, as was noted above. The greatest difference between *Cymbeline* and the supposed source is that while in the latter the hero hits the antagonist with his knife, thus implying that a real physical fight has taken place between the two, in the former particular importance is given to the fact that nobody was wounded:

> QUEEN No harm I trust is done?
> PISANIO There might have been,
> But that my master [Posthumus] rather played than fought,
> And had no help of anger (I.i.163-164)

[7] Peggy Muñoz Simonds, *Myth, Emblem and Music in Shakespeare's 'Cymbeline': An Iconographic Reconstruction*, Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992, p. 203.

The Queen's question perhaps gives away her lack of confidence in her son's worth and skills in sword-fighting, which is immediately confirmed by Pisanio's report that Posthumus did not put much effort in the skirmish, believing he was no fair match. As the asides of the two lords attending on Cloten indicate in the following scene, his foolishness prevented Posthumus from considering him a worthy opponent. This is already enough to give the audience an exhaustive idea of the place Cloten occupies at court: though technically he is a prince (so he should have some authority) in fact he is treated as if his actions and words did not have any real importance for the other members of the community. This can be easily inferred from the first scene where Cloten appears sharing his distorted view of the duel with his two courtiers, and is plainly voiced for example in the final aside by the Second Lord:

> CLOTEN Would there had been some hurt done.
> SECOND LORD (*aside*) I wish not so, unless it had been the fall of an ass, which is no great hurt. (I.ii.33-36)

Or also later on, when the Second Lord in an aside says: "You are a fool granted, therefore your issues being foolish do not derogate" (II.i.46-47), while Guiderius, like Posthumus, does not think it is fit to fight against him – "Thou art some fool./ I am loath to beat thee" (IV.ii. 86-87). This attitude of superiority that the other characters assume in every scene where Cloten appears is what conditions the audience's perception of his role. On some occasions, however, Cloten's lack of authority is made explicit, as for instance in II.i:

> CLOTEN When a gentleman is disposed to swear it is not for any standers-by to curtail his oaths, ha?
> SECOND LORD No, my lord; (*aside*) nor crop the ears of them. (II.i.10-13)

where the prince's ostentation of lineage and power is immediately dismissed or, even more tellingly, in III.i, where the British court refuses to pay tribute to the Romans, represented here by Lucius, a delegate of Caesar. On Cloten's second attempt to speak up and explain the reasons of his people – after unexpectedly displaying a burst of acceptable wit that has been

sometimes considered "out of character"[8] – he is cut off by an uncerimonious remark on the part of the king:

> CLOTEN Come, there's no more tribute to be paid. Our kingdom is stronger than it was at that time, and, as I said, there is no more such Caesars. Other of them may have crooked noses, but to owe such straight arms, none.
> CYMBELINE Son, let your mother end. (III.i.34-39)

which confirms that Cloten's words are not seriously taken into consideration, in spite of his social and political position. The reason why the prince is looked down upon is that he is perceived by everyone as an intellectually inferior being. While on the one hand he is not witty enough to be classified as an artificial fool – who simulates folly to play a role at court – on the other we cannot define him a serious case of natural folly or congenital idiocy either – such as for instance Blue John – as he is indeed able to think and speak properly most of the time, without making any fool-like display of chop-logic. Still, it is interesting to note how many of his features draw him close to early modern conceptions of mentally retarded individuals.

A simple definition of what was regarded as "idiocy" or "natural folly" – two terms that gradually became synonyms – in Shakespeare's time is given by legislation, which needed to make sure that anyone's personal wealth was preserved to be passed down. Mentally disabled people lacked the basic intellectual ability to manage their property themselves, therefore they had to be backed up by the Crown, which took temporary possession of their property and received any income deriving from it. On their death, the idiot's heirs would inherit the whole patrimony. This made a clear definition of idiocy necessary:

> Idiot is he that is a fool natural from his birth and knows not how to account or number 20 pence nor cannot name his father or mother, nor of what age himself is, or such like easy and common matters; so that it appears he has no manner of understanding or reason, nor government of himself, what is for his profit or disprofit.[9]

[8] But this is not unfrequent among the clowns of the last plays (Barton, p. 30).
[9] From an early seventeenth-century legal dictionary, quoted in Neugebauer, p. 25. See also pp. 26-27.

Inquisitions were carried out by the Court of Wards or other governmental authorities to examine the mentally disabled, quantify their possessions and identify the possible heirs.[10] In particular, in order to make sure that the individual was actually an idiot and could not manage their wealth, a special commission would ask them select questions such their name, age, where they came from, details about their personal life and family, if they could read; they could also be asked to make simple calculations, to count to 20, or prove that they knew the value of money – an indispensable skill to manage a property. [11] If the person was judged actually handicapped their custody was given to a guardian, whereas daily care and physical supervision was often ensured by a servant or "keeper" who lived in with the disabled.[12] Considering Cloten's case, we may already note a few similarities. Especially in the first part of the play, the prince moves around followed by two lords, whose function does not seem so much that of *serving* him but that of *supervising* him and making sure he does not lose his temper and cause problems. In fact the first scene where Cloten appears begins with the First Lord saying to him:

> FIRST LORD Sir, I would advise you to shift a shirt. The violence of action hath made you reek as a sacrifice [...]
> CLOTEN If my shirt were bloody, then to shift it. Have I hurt him? (I.ii.1-6)

The prince's reputation is immediately given away. If on the one hand Cloten's idiocy is inferred by the fact that his lords have to give him advice on how to look after himself and take care of his public image, on the other, with his refusal to comply with the request of shifting his shirt, he proves to the audience that he does not have enough wit to know when he stinks thus, in a sense, he lacks basic skills. In fact, the inability to perform everyday tasks

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[10] Neugebauer, p. 28.
[11] Neugebauer, pp. 28-31.
[12] Neugebauer, p. 38 and Andrews, "Identifying and Providing for the Mentally Disabled", pp. 82-84. Foolishness in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance was not usually experienced as a condition to be treated medically. However, if a retarded individual was also violent he could be locked up: yet, such a measure was aimed more at containing unruly behaviour than at dealing with actual therapeutic needs (see Anton C. Zijderveld, *Reality in a Looking Glass: Rationality Through an Analysis of Traditional Folly*, London: Routledge, 1982, pp. 35-38).

such as clothing oneself properly was cited in records as incontrovertible evidence of mental deficiency. [13]

The rest of the scene is an alternation of the two lords' attempts to soothe Cloten by pretending to second his rantings and the asides where they fully express their real views. A couple of examples are enough to illustrate the point. Cloten asks if he has hurt Posthumus and the First Lord assures

> FIRST LORD Hurt him? His body's a passable carcass if he be not hurt. It is a thoroughfare for steel if it be not hurt. (I.ii.8-10)

The same happens when Cloten complains that Imogen has chosen Posthumus over himself:

> FIRST LORD Sir, as I told you always, her beauty and her brain go not together. She's a good sign, but I have seen small reflection of her wit. (I.ii.28-30)

The two lords build an entirely different world for the sake of Cloten, whom they do not consider intelligent enough to cope with the real one, and they do so by telling him lies or giving him the answers he expects. This corresponds to the way sane people normally interact with irrational beings who, being contradicted, might have unpredictable reactions. Cloten, in this sense, appears a serious case of psychosis, given that he is particularly inclined to violence (e.g. he starts the fights with Posthumus and with Cymbeline's twins). So, humouring the fool, the two lords act as to protect both him from a reality he would not accept and the court from his wrath. At the same time, they give him directions to make sure he behaves in a suitable way for a member of the court. This happens not only in the episode of the shirt but also in the following scene, where Cloten is unsure about how to behave with the Italian Iachimo, who has come to visit Cymbeline's court:

> CLOTEN Is it fit I went to look upon him? Is there no derogation in't?
> FIRST LORD You cannot derogate, my lord. (II.i.42-44)

Cloten can't even be sure about the time of the day, and needs confirmation by his lords:

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[13] See Peter Rushton, "Lunatics and Idiots: Mental Disorder, the Community, and the Poor Law in North-East England, 1600- 1800", *Medical History*, 32 (1988), pp. 34-50 (37).

CLOTEN It's almost morning, is't not?
FIRST LORD Day, my lord. (II.iii.8-10)

More interesting is Cloten's troubled relationship with numbers and money. As we have seen, early modern commissions for the examination of alleged fools attributed a great importance to the capability of doing simple reckonings and knowing the value of coins. In reality the examined individuals could be asked to count to 20 and back; in *Cymbeline*, as Patrick McDonagh has noted, the Second Lord despises Cloten because he "cannot take two from twenty [...] and leave eighteen" (II.i.54-55), and he apparently cannot manage money, as Guiderius seems to indicate when, holding Cloten's head towards the end of the play, he says:

GUIDERIUS This Cloten was a fool, an empty purse,
There was no money in't. (IV.ii.114-115)[14]

In fact, that Cloten squanders money and is not witty enough to appreciate its value is suggested elsewhere in the text. For example, reference is made multiple times to Cloten as an unlucky (or perhaps poor) and unfair gambler.

CLOTEN Was there ever man had such luck? When I kissed the jack upon an upcast to be hit away! I had a hundred pound on't, and then a whoreson jackanapes must take me up for swearing [...]
FIRST LORD What got he by that? You have broke his pate with your bowl. (II.i.1-7)

This is the beginning of II.i, the second scene where Cloten appears, and we learn that Cloten plays bowls (*to kiss the jack* means to lay one's bowl alongside the small bowl);[15] on this particular occasion he has bet one hundred pounds on his win: a considerable amount of money for the time, especially if it is lost in the blink of an eye. Another curious detail is that again, after I.ii., Cloten's entrance is accompanied by the narration of an episode of violence that has taken place offstage and was initiated by the quarrelsome prince. This to confirm the violent nature and lack of self-control of the fool. Cloten's third entrance, in II.iii, occurs again after a game has taken place:

[14] Patrick McDonagh, *Idiocy: A Cultural History*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008, p. 80.
[15] *Cymbeline*, Nosworthy, ed., p. 45, n. 1-2.

FIRST LORD	Your lordship is the most patient man in loss, the most coldest that ever turned up ace. (II.iii.1-2)

This time reference is made not to bowls, but to the game of tables or backgammon.[16] Though here no episode of violence is reported, the result is still the same: the fool has lost his money. So the text presents us with a series of examples of how Cloten spends (a lot of) money without finally getting anything in return. Another clear demonstration of this systematic failure in Cloten's business making is present later on in the scene. After uttering a tirade on the value of gold as a means of corruption and as a way to get out of any difficult situation, he decides to bribe Imogen's servant to earn admission to her chamber:

CLOTEN	There is gold for you. Sell me your good report.
LADY	How, my good name? – or to report of you What I shall think is good? The Princess. (*Exit Lady*) (*Enter Imogen*) (II.iii.80-83)

Cloten wastes his money to corrupt a servant who is not in the least intentioned to be bribed, only to find out seconds later that Imogen is coming towards him without the need for him to steal into her chamber to see her. Later on in the play Cloten's foolishness in relation to money is contrasted by the hermits' totally different attitude to it: this stands as a mark of true nobility. When Imogen offers them money in exchange of hospitality, they answer

GUIDERIUS	Money, youth?
ARVIRAGUS	All gold and silver rather turn to dirt, As 'tis no better reckoned but of those Who worship dirty gods. (III.vi.51-54)

Neugebauer also noted how sometimes the royal commissions that examined alleged fools tested the individual's literacy, and he reports the case of a woman who was asked which books she could read: as she answered the Bible, a series of prompts followed to look for specific books in the Scriptures, detect which passages she found, and read some lines out.[17] Cloten too occasionally shows he is not illiterate but, being a gentleman, got a good

[16] This is a dice game. In fact the word "ace", used by the First Lord, refers to "the side of a dice marked with a single spot or point, and counting as one" (*OED*).

[17] See Neugebauer, p. 30.

education. His appropriation of culture, however, seems non-standard and even puzzling. Indeed, after being explicitly rejected by Imogen, he engages in a soliloquy where he shows off his knowledge of Catullus:

> CLOTEN I love and hate her. For she's fair and royal,
> And that she hath all courtly parts more exquisite
> Than lady, ladies, woman – from every one
> The best she hath, and she, of all compounded,
> Outsells them all – I love her therefore; but
> Disdaining me, and throwing favours on
> The low Posthumus, slanders so her judgement
> That what's else rare is choked: and in that point
> I will conclude to hate her, nay, indeed,
> To be revenged upon her. For when fools
> Shall – (III.v.70-80)

While initially Cloten's attempt seems commendable as he intentionally begins with the famous line "odi et amo" (poem 85, l. 1)[18] and drawing also from poem 86, the poetry and logical consistency of the second part of the speech leave a lot to be desired. The conclusion to which Cloten gets, to just hate Imogen, spoils the Catullian paradox he has just deployed and *ipso facto* wreaks havoc on the aesthetic pleasure he has just offered the audience, even more so because it is based on the questionable assumption that Imogen's idea of him is wrong. The result is, again, that he shows himself a fool for not being able to live up to the feelings described in the literature he has studied. The last broken line, then, seems to indicate that Cloten is calling himself a fool. Therefore, if Cloten begins the speech solemnly, he ends it laughably, revealing nothing more than his deficiency. Besides, while he does have some notions of literature, he also demonstrates that that knowledge presents some gaps.

On another occasion Imogen makes fun of Cloten's learning skills in relation to the knowledge of courtly manners, which should be essential for a gentleman:

> IMOGEN One of your great knowing
> Should learn, being taught, forbearance. (II.iii.95-96)

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[18] Catullus, *The Poems of Catullus: A Bilingual Edition*, Peter Whigham, ed. and transl., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

As also the other characters do when speaking with Cloten, Imogen pretends to flatter him to ensure he does not take offence but at the same time she drives home the point that Cloten is so foolish that he needs tutoring for something that should be mere common sense.

A further complication I have touched on, but which now deserves more attention, is that in this play the fool coincides with one of the noble characters: he is no rustic, nor a jester, nor a criminal living outside hierarchies, but a prince, that is, someone who was technically born a gentleman. Yet, as we have seen, the people surrounding Cloten do not treat him as one of their rank, but on the contrary they scorn him and marginalize him for his witlessness. At one point, the Queen his mother even uses him as she would use a servant or a varlet, bidding him to go and "follow the king" (III.v.53) in search of Imogen. In the introduction to his cultural history of idiocy, Patrick McDonagh draws attention to the famous quotation in *Macbeth* where the hero considers life

> MACBETH [...] a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing. (V.v.25-27)

and he comments that "the image draws on two prominent and concurrent meanings of the term: a person of lesser wit but also one whose language signifies nothing because he is a private person and has no public authority".[19] McDonagh very aptly stresses the point that an idiot's words have no value in civil society, due to his mental disability – and Cloten is no exception to this rule, as we have seen. However, he also alludes to the idea that in Shakespeare's time the idiots or fools were also the uneducated or uneducable, those who had no formal knowledge or skills, those who lacked the so called "common ideas" regarding for instance religion, mathematics and the soul: in a nutshell, the peasants, as opposed to the honourable society.[20] So, if Cloten is fashioned as a marginalised fool but no peasant, how do

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[19] McDonagh, p. 19.

[20] On this point see C.F. Goodey, *A History of Intelligence and "Intellectual Disability": The Shaping of Psychology in Early Modern Europe*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2011, p. 125 ff.

we account for the interaction between idiocy and high status in the play or, in other words, between foolishness and honour? While on the one hand Cloten's lack of wit cannot be considered detached from reality – as it was indeed possible for an idiot to be born into the honourable society – on the other he represents an example of an odd eventuality, as well as liminality. In a sense, he at once does and does not possess a claim to honour, because he is one, as Goodey would state, "that was born in [the in-group] but [is] incapable of exhibiting signs of belonging to it". In the early modern age, however, no distiction was made between one who was born among the uneducated peasants and a member of the aristocracy who was found defective in wit: they were both *fools* or *idiots*.[21]

But exactly what kind of an idiot is Cloten? As we have seen, he does share some features with the naturals, especially in the way he performs everyday tasks. At the same time, however, he is not a total congenital idiot either, as the way he talks is endowed with an acceptable level of logic. Indeed, according to the early modern outlook, a total fool was an individual who could not understand what their place in society was or, in the case of someone born within the honourable society, a person who could not grasp the importance and implications of honour.[22] However, this is not Cloten's case, as indeed he does know very well what his social status is. For example, after losing at dice and having been humiliated by the player who had reprimanded him for swearing, he says:

CLOTEN When a gentleman is disposed to swear it is not for any standers-by to curtail his oaths, ha? (II.i.10-11)

Would he had been one of my rank. (II.i.14-15)

A pox on't, I had rather not be so noble as I am. They dare not fight with me because of the Queen, my mother. Every jack-slave hath his bellyful of fighting, and I must go up and down like a cock that nobody can match. (II.i.17-22)

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[21] See Goodey, *A History of Intelligence*, p. 125.

[22] Pierre de la Primaudaye, for instance, wrote: "Where shall we find any so dull and blockish, that hath no feeling of pleasure, and that is not mooued with glory and honor? Such a man may be truly taken and accounted as one void of sence and feeling, and like to a blocke" (Pierre de la Primaudaye, *The French Academie*, T.B., transl., London: Edmund Bollisant, 1586, p. 197).

It is fit I should commit offence to my inferiors. (II.i.28-29)

Or when he knocks on Imogen's door he announces himself to the attending lady as "a gentleman" "and a gentlewoman's son" (II.iii.76-77). Later, he boasts that he his "above [Posthumus] in birth" (IV.i.12), and he expects Guiderius and Arviragus to recognize him simply looking at his clothes.[23] I will quote again the passage here because it is of some interest:

CLOTEN	Thou villain base, *Know'st me not by my clothes*?
GUILDERIUS	No, nor thy tailor, rascal, Who is thy grandfather. He made those clothes, Which, as it seems, make thee.
CLOTEN	Thou precious varlet, My tailor made them not.
GUIDERIUS	Hence, then, and thank the man that gave them thee. *Thou art some fool*. I am loath to beat thee. (IV.ii.82-88)[24]

This is the first time the twins see Cloten or speak to him and in a few lines they are already convinced he is a fool. In particular, they start calling him "fool" once he begins hinting at the fact that he is superior to them in rank. Shortly afterwards, when he plainly declares that "I am son to th' Queen" (IV.ii.95), Guiderius decides he is not "so worthy as [his] birth" (IV.ii.96), confessing also: "at fools I laugh, not fear them" (IV.ii.98). This is revelatory of the extreme variability and extensive range of meanings the term "fool" could acquire in the age of Shakespeare. In fact, in one sense being a "gentleman" was the opposite of being a "fool", because of the usual associations of the title with notions of intelligence or wit and honour.[25] The gentleman, unlike the fool and "brute beasts", possesses enough wit to know his place in the world. At the same time, however, a gentleman could become a fool when he counted too much on the external value of his status and not on the political, moral and

[23] See 1.5.2.
[24] Italics are mine.
[25] See Goodey, *A History of Intelligence*, p. 134. For example, this idea is also alluded to in Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. When Thurio, who is in love with Silvia, asks Proteus what she thinks of his honourable birth, the latter answers that she thinks he is "well derived", and Julia comments in an aside that it is "true: from a gentleman to a fool" (V.ii.23-24).

conceptual implications of such a role, in particular on the responsibilities it involved.[26] Cloten commits exactly that mistake, because he thinks that his blood and lineage are enough to grant him the full possession of nobility and honour. Goodey shows instead how this type of attitude was regarded as "mere folly" and "brutal stupidity" in the early modern age.[27] In particular, Laurence Humphrey wrote in his tract *The Nobles, and of Nobility* (1563) of the bragging gentleman that "if nought els renowne hym, but his wormeaten stock [...] [he] is not to be reckoned amongst the noble and honourable, but rather be deemed a foole and fondlinge".[28] And this is exactly what the people who talk to Cloten cannot help but think of him once he starts boasting about his clothes and social standing, which are not matched by any concrete evidence of real nobility.

In this light, one more aspect becomes interesting. Earlier in this section I have noted how in Cloten's lines there is a recurrence of the word "villain", which the character uses as many as eleven times throughout the play, against the five uttered by other characters. He largely uses it as an offensive term against those who, in his opinion, mistreat him: Posthumus (I.ii.13; III.v.132), Pisanio (III.v.81, 85, 95, 109; IV.ii.64), Guiderius and/or Arviragus (IV.ii.73, 77, 82, 90). In fact the use of this particular term reinforces Cloten's reproachable excess of class consciousness, and it is actually one of the key ways in which he states his presumptive supremacy. A villain is not only someone who commits evil actions – a meaning of the term that could anyway apply, given that Cloten feels offended by the others' misuses – but originally it meant "a low-born base-minded rustic" or "a man of ignoble ideas or instincts" (*OED*). Thus, in a sense, Cloten debunks the social position of those he confronts in order to declare by contrast his own peerlessness. However, the term *villain* does

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[26] See Goodey, *A History of Intelligence*, p. 134.
[27] Goodey, *A History of Intelligence*, p. 135.
[28] Laurence Humphrey, *The Nobles*, *and of Nobility*, London: Thomas Marshe, 1563, sig. F7v.

not refer only to the idea of class but in the early modern age it was linked also with an idea of mental inferiority or deficiency, a condition which, from the point of view of the nobility, affected the whole mass of ordinary people.[29] Thus, the excessively recurring insult in Cloten's lines cannot but highlight a striking irony, as he goes about implying that others are foolish for being "villains", when he is actually the only one behaving as such. Moreover, Goodey observes that calling someone of honour "villain" was a typical insult, because it effectively struck the other person's sense of belonging to a privileged elite. Thus, the typical consequence was that the victim would react by starting up a duel.[30] That is in fact what happens between Cloten and Guiderius. Cloten calls him "villain" four times before Guiderius reacts by dubbing him "double villain" (IV.ii.91). Shortly afterwards, Cloten gives a further specification to the word "villain" by calling Guiderius "rustic mountaineer" (IV.ii. 102), he draws on him, and a stage direction informs us that they "*Fight and exeunt*" (IV.ii. 102). Later, after having killed Cloten, Guiderius justifies his deed by explaining that Cloten had called him "traitor, mountaineer" (IV.ii.121): the fact that he could not stand being offended on the grounds of class – and consequently wit – probably tells us that Guiderius, though still unaware of being Cymbeline's son, has some perception of his real honour and bloodline, and is not a "villain".

So far we have seen how Cloten's specific type of foolishness lies in a failure to perform properly as a gentleman, so it involves mainly the social life of the individual. Now, I would like to investigate to what extent his deficiency admits of other facets of the idea of foolishness, in particular considering it from the point of view of early modern medical approaches. Indications pointing at some kind of scientific awareness of the phenomenon of foolishness are not many in *Cymbeline*, definitely outnumbered by suggestions of social

[29] See Goodey, *A History of Intelligence*, p. 133.
[30] Goodey, *A History of Intelligence*, p. 130.

inability and, as we will see, allusions to stock iconographic aspects of the fool. However, they are still quite telling.

In Renaissance Europe, medical discourses regarding intellectual ability were still largely influenced by the work of Galen, a doctor who lived in the second century, and whose thinking was widely based on the theory of humours, previously propounded by ancient Greek and Roman philosophers and physicians, among whom was Hippocrates. In particular, Galen was the point of reference in early modern discussions of speed related to intelligence. Indeed in *The Art of Medicine* he enunciated that

> Quickness of apprehension indicates a fine brain substance, slowness a thick one. Ease of learning indicates a good receipt of impressions, and [good] memory indicates a stable one. Correspondingly, difficulty in learning indicates a difficulty in receiving impressions, and forgetfulness a fluidity in this respect.[31]

Here, Goodey warns, the specific quality of the brain substance does not point to an unchangeable condition of intelligence or idiocy of the person but rather to a temporary health status of the bodily organ devoted to the intellect and to the consequent mental state:[32] however, this principle was interpreted in several – more or less distorted – ways by Renaissance Galenists. These started more forcefully to associate the idea of speed with that of intellectual ability and in particular *ingenium*, a technical term which underwent several changes of meaning, until it settled on being translated simply as "wit" in seventeenth-century England.[33] After Guiderius has killed Cloten he says that he has "sent Cloten's clotpoll down the stream" (IV.II.185). There is an evident allitteration in the line, which perhaps identifies the whole person of the prince with a clotpoll, a term which indicates a fool or blockhead but is also, literally, a "thick or 'wooden' head". Indeed clot is a "hardened lump of earth" and poll is simply a head (*OED*). For Shakespeare, then, Cloten's foolishness

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[31] From Galen, *Ars Medica*, Karl Gottlob Kuhn ed., *Opera Omnia*, Volume 1, Leipzig: Car. Cnoblochii, 1821, p. 322 (translated by Goodey, *A History of Intelligence*, p. 51).
[32] Goodey, *A History of Intelligence*, pp. 50-51.
[33] See C.F. Goodey, "Intellectual Ability and Speed of Performance: Galen to Galton", *History of Science*, 42 (2004), pp. 465-495 (471-475).

is associated, physiognomically, with a hard or thick head. According to Galen, as we saw, a thick brain substance was associated with a slowness of reasoning which, if originally it could have been temporary, according to later interpretations, represented an actual disability of the person.

However, more than one philosophical/medical theory could influence Shakespeare's word choice. Plato, for instance, was famous for his wax-tablet theory of the psyche, which explains how human beings get a knowledge of external reality; our soul is like a wax tablet, which receives a series of impressions from the outside world through our sense organs. Soft wax is easily marked, so the process of learning is quicker and more effective: the downside is that if it is too soft it melts, so the person can have a bad memory and confuse the signs. Conversely, if the wax is too hard it is very difficult to mark, so the person is a slow learner. Though what he/she learns he/she remembers well, because hard wax melts less easily, the signs impressed on it are not deep enough: the result is that they are not clear and the person is led into false opinion.[34] Such a theory is alluded to in the quotation above from Galen and was revived by many Renaissance writers, among whom Roger Ascham who discussed about the dispositions of quick and light wits as opposed to hard and rough ones: he wrote for instance that "if one, by quicknes of witte, take his lesson readelie, an other, by hardnes of witte, takes it not so speedelie" or that "quicke wittes commonlie be apte to take, unapte to keepe"[35] and "harde wittes be harde to receyve but sure to keepe".[36] Though he prefers the latter condition he nevertheless declares that "some quicknes of wit is a singular gift of God".[37] As we have seen, not only is Cloten slow-witted, but he is also a slow learner, given Imogen's aforesaid remark on the fact that he should be formally taught forbearance in order

[34] Plato, *Thaetetus*, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 12, Harold N. Fowler, transl., Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1921, 194c-195a. Also Goodey, "Intellectual Ability", p. 469.
[35] Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster*, London: John Daye, 1571, sig. C4v (first edition, 1570).
[36] Ascham, sig. D2r.
[37] Ascham, sig. D2v.

to be able to practice it. Besides, the whole function of the character in the play is based upon his false opinion that he is socially or intellectually superior to anyone else. Thus, in the light of Galenists' discourses on "cognitive" speed, Pisanio's wish that "this fool's speed/ be crossed with slowness" (III.v.159-160), when Cloten pursues Imogen towards Milford Haven, becomes wittingly ironic.

By terming Cloten's head a clotpoll*,* however, Shakespeare might also be implying that Cloten's actual *skull* is hard, rather than what is inside it. In this case, a brief examination of Renaissance physiognomy is of help. Aristotle and Galen, discussing the shape and conformation of the human head had attributed a great importance to cranial sutures, that is the junctions of the different parts of the skull. Aristotle claimed that humans had more sutures than animals: that was because people's heads were bigger, and "the larger the brain, the more ventilation it requires".[38] The basic principle was that the more sutures one had the healthier the brain. According to Galen, the number of sutures gave the brain a specific shape, which determined different health statuses of the organ.[39] Some Renaissance authors, apparently basing their inferences on direct observation and dissection, claimed that a skull without sutures would make a head harder and more pain-resistant than normal.[40] While in the Renaissance there was no such thing as perpetual intellectual disability as we know it now, there were still some groups in society who were discriminated for some alleged cognitive impairment: in particular the skulls of women and those of people from warm climates, for some Galenists, had fewer sutures than the norm. Women, in particular, were differentiated for the paucity of their sutures but also for the smallness of their heads, a trait

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[38] Aristotle, *On the Parts of Animals*, A. L. Peck, transl., Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1961, 653a.
[39] Goodey, *A History of Intelligence*, p. 224.
[40] C.F. Goodey, "Blockheads, Roundheads, Pointy Heads: Intellectual Disability and the Brain Before Modern Medicine", *Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences*, 41 (2005), pp. 165-183 (177). See also further, 3.2.

which could determine an irascible and impulsive temperament.[41] While there is no explicit indication of Cloten's head size in the play, we could assume that the staging of his rash and aggressive nature – he is always ready to fight and on the verge of committing violence – may also conform to some physiognomical descriptions of small crania.

I have chosen to start from the last of the play'a allusions to early modern medical assumptions about foolishness because it is the one that, from the point of view of the modern reader, is perhaps most predictable and straightforward. I will now show how Shakespeare manages, throughout the text, to describe Cloten's mental condition in ways that occasionally clash with the theory I have outlined so far. In this light, perhaps the most interesting suggestion comes in II.i, when Cloten and his lords talk about his loss at bowls and the brawl between the prince and the insubordinate player who reproached him for swearing:

> FIRST LORD What got he by that? You have broke his pate with your bowl.
> SECOND LORD (*aside*) If his wit had been like him that broke it, it would have run all out. (II.i.6-9)

Here the Second Lord implies that if Cloten's head was broken or pierced, all his wit would quickly exhaust. But why? The easy way to read this would be simply to assume that Cloten has so little wit that if his head broke accidentally he would lose it completely. Further on in the play, Guiderius reinforces the idea of Cloten's lack of wit by saying that:

> GUIDERIUS Not Hercules
> Could have knocked out his brains, for he had none. (IV.ii.115-116)

Again, the idea of stupidity associated with lack of brain substance is familiar to the modern reader. For Renaissance Galenists such a scantiness was in fact a characteristic feature of small heads, and little brain substance implied impairments in the intellect:[42] that was because the spirits flowing in the ventricles of the brain were not enough to carry out

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[41] Goodey, "Blockheads", pp. 174-175. This defect of impetuosity in small-headed people had been already remarked on by Aquinas (see Thomas Aquinas, *Commentaries on Aristotle's 'On Sense and What is Sensed' and 'On Memory and Recollection'*, Kevin White and Edward M. Macierowski, eds. and transl., Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2005, p. 51).
[42] See Goodey, "Blockheads", pp. 169-171.

effectively the intellectual functions and therefore caused "imbecillity".[43] Alternatively, the Second Lord's remark could be understood in yet another way: Cloten's wit would run out completely because of its little viscosity, or because it is "watery", as Nosworthy proposes in his edition of the play.[44] In fact, in the Renaissance an excess of humidity in the cavities of the brain determined the subject's "stupidity", to be intended as some sort of laziness and inert behaviour.[45] What is interesting, however, is that there is a link between the density of the brain spirits and the size of the head, and watery wits usually corresponded to large heads, where fluids could flow freely and were not constricted in a limited space. Conversely, in small heads these spirits were so compressed that they could even dry up.[46] Both conditions, however, determined some type of defect. Small-headed people could be fearful, stupid, inattentive or inconstant, while big-headed ones could be stupid, lazy and dull. That is partly due to the fact that the bigger the head the colder, in terms of humours.[47] The First Lord may be drawing on this notion when he says that Cloten is "the most coldest that ever turn'd up ace" (II.iii.2) – if we accept the pun on *ace*/ass[48] – so that he is basically implying that the prince is affected by the maximum degree of foolishness.[49]

One more medical theory seems to play a role in the characterization of Cloten as a fool. After Guiderius has killed Cloten, Belarius declares that the prince's "humour/ was nothing but mutation" (IV.ii.133-134). Nosworthy, however, along with the Folio, does not read "humour" but "*honour*/ was nothing but mutation", and I agree more with this reading

[43] See for instance Martin Akakia, *Claudii Galeni Pergameni Ars Medica*, Paris: Simon de Colines, 1543, pp. 105-106.
[44] *Cymbeline*, Nosworthy, ed., p. 45 n. 10.
[45] See Goodey, "Blockheads", pp. 172-173.
[46] Goodey, "Blockheads", p. 171.
[47] Goodey, "Blockheads", p. 172.
[48] See 1.5.2.
[49] For example, the Italian physician Paul Zacchias in *Quaestiones Medico Legales* (1621), in distinguishing different types of foolishness considered the various degrees of coldness in their brains. For a translation see Paul F. Cranefield and Walter Federn, "Paulus Zacchias on Mental Deficiency and on Deafness", *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, 46 (1970), pp. 3-21.

that with Wells' in the Oxford edition.[50] Certainly, also Cloten's *humour* could be changeable, thus pointing at some kind of unstable rationality and the impossibility to trust him over far. Yet, sticking with the Folio and reading the word as *honour* is much more cogent in the light of what was explained above about Cloten's distorted conception of his nobleness. Thus Belarius would be contrasting the two ideas of honour and mutation. But mutation of what, exactly? Honour in itself is not something that quickly changes, and certainly not in Cloten's case, who owns very little honour, according to the mountaineers. *Mutation* might point instead at the idea of mobility or instability of opinion, a condition often commented on by Renaissance doctors following Galen's precepts, and which prevented patients from concentrating on one thing at a time, making firm judgments, distinguishing between true and false or decide what they wanted. Consequently, they were most gullible.[51] Such a problem, according to doctors like Giovanni Battista Da Monte (1489-1551), was physically associated with an excessive mobility of the soul spirits flowing to and from the brain, which led to their overheating and "boiling up".[52] This theory, if applied to Cloten, would be also compatible with the Galenic implications of his lack of wit, which I discussed above. More interesting for this analysis, however, is that in the early modern outlook, while a firm opinion was a prerogative of the social elite and the men of honour – who had to achieve what they promised to their subjects – mutability of opinion was stereotypically seen as a global characteristic of the low-rank masses, who were unreasoning and easily persuadable.[53] In this light, Belarius' statement becomes an additional hint at Cloten's foolishness, as he downgrades his supposed honour to the inferiority and gullibility of the masses.

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[50] Martin Butler in the New Cambridge Shakespeare series reads it in the same way as Wells (William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*, Martin Butler, ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
[51] See Goodey, *A History of Intelligence*, pp. 228-229.
[52] Giovanni Battista Da Monte, *In Artem Parvam Galeni Explanationes*, Venice: Balthassarem Costantinum, 1554, pp. 140r-v.
[53] Goodey, *A History of Intelligence*, p. 233.

So much for the clinical traits of Cloten's natural folly. In some ways he conforms also to the traditional features ascribed to the artificial or allegorical fool. To begin with, let us resume our analysis of I.i and I.ii, the scenes where, respectively, Cloten is first mentioned and seen on stage. Here the focus is set on the offstage battle between Cloten and Posthumus. Cloten, who began the skirmish, is presented as an aggressive boor who bears a weapon (namely a sword) but whose prowess in a duel is absolutely laughable. The same image of the fighting foolish prince brandishing a sword is repeated later on. He draws his weapon out of its sheath when he starts his chase of Imogen in the forest of Milford Haven

CLOTEN My horse is tied up safe. Out sword, and to a sore purpose! (IV.i.21-22)

and later, in IV.ii.149-150, Guiderius tells how Cloten had waved his sword against his throat before being killed. In this form Cloten recalls the image of the fool or jester as it was almost always to be seen in medieval illustrations: indeed he was represented with a weapon – which could be a club, a marotte, a bladder, a wooden stick, a dagger or a sword – that stood as a sign of aggression or defence. Such depictions were typically to be found in the illuminated initials of Psalms 14 and 53 in medieval psalters. These are the psalms beginning with "Dixit insipiens in corde suo non est Deus" ("The fool hath sayd in his heart, there is no God"). In these representations he could be seen either alone or disputing with someone else – as for instance King Solomon or a devil – but in any case he projected the image of someone dangerous, in that he had to convey the message, even to illiterates, that he who did not believe in the existence of God was not only foolish but also evil.[54] Though Cloten's characterization does not have anything to do with lack of religious belief, his attitude does bring together the concepts of stupidity and wickedness. The latter trait of his personality, which is brought to full view by the gratuity of his aggressive and outrageous nature as well

[54] See D. J. Gifford, "Iconographical Notes Towards a Definition of the Medieval Fool", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 37 (1974), pp. 336-342 (336).

as his lustful chase of Imogen, make him the most abominable character in the play. His foolishness does not meet the sympathy of the audience – who, on the contrary, loves the fools and clowns of the previous texts – but isolates him and finally ruins him.

Interestingly, the combination of princely status, foolishness and the revelling in violence can once again be traced back to iconography. Gifford documents how in some medieval psalters the illuminations to Psalms 14 and 53 might not be necessarily confined only to the space within the initial "D" but could take a larger space on the page, occasionally portraying the *insipiens,* or fool, as an evil prince who oversees slaughter, pillage and carnage. The earliest example of this type can be found in the Utrecht Psalter (fig. 7), dating to the ninth century: this influenced a very similar depiction in the later Eadwine or Canterbury Psalter (fig. 8).[55] In these psalters the fool as an evil prince is sitting under a cupola on a height. Below him are depicted different scenes of violence: people robbed, torn apart, pierced through with spears, or lying dead on the ground. Interestingly, the prince fool has a sword resting on his lap and he is watching two soldiers who are showing him, perhaps as a tribute, two severed heads they have cut off with their swords. Perhaps not casually, both the motif of the evil fool-prince with a sword and the connection with beheading bear some significance in *Cymbeline*, given that Cloten's head is later cut off by Guiderius.

The idea of the armed fool, however, did not exist only in iconography. Southworth explains how the figure of the warrior fool or jester existed for instance in eight-century Irish sagas, when, as well as offering entertainment, he fought in battle beside or in the place of his master.[56] Similar stories are narrated also in accounts of the Anglo-Saxon and Early Norman periods: some of these, for instance, tell how a juggler and player named Taillefer joined William the Conqueror's army and with his sword decapitated the English opponents in a

[55] Gifford, p. 338.
[56] Southworth, ch. 3.

7. Utrecht Psalter, *Dixit Insipiens*, Psalm 13 (14),
(Utrecht, Utrecht University Library, MS Script. Eccl. 484, fol. 7v, 9th century)

8. Eadwine Psalter, *Dixit Insipiens*, Psalm 13 (14),
(Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R. 17.1, fol. 22r, 12th century)

prelude to the battle of Hastings.[57] Feeding on these images of the threatening armed jester, popular both in illuminations and in the chronicles, from the thirteenth century onwards the court fool started to be portrayed in a more innocent way, replacing a deadly weapon with a harmless bauble or marotte, which became part of the traditional fool's costume as a remainder and reminder of his boldness. Also in medieval drama, the wooden dagger was retained as a comic prop for the Vice.[58] The motif of the actively fighting fool, however, was not forgotten. In fact, it was channelled into one the court fool's most popular routines: the mock combat, where the entertainer fought using a wooden sword, a padded club, a cardboard shield or armoury.[59] Will Sommers was apparently one of the jesters who practiced this type of performance.[60] Getting back to Shakespeare's play, we note how Cloten's duel with Posthumus ends without bloodshed, given that on one side the prince is a bad swordsman – in spite of his being convinced of the contrary – and on the other his rival does not consider his opponent worthy enough to justify any violent action against him. The result is that the fight becomes practically a harmless game, a motif which is definitely not in the source, *Love and Fortune*: I believe instead that the traditional motif of the jester's fight as an entertainment does have some influence on the construction of Cloten's foolishness in *Cymbeline*. That the fight between the two rivals in love was actually seen by bystanders as a game is indeed implied not only by the fact that nobody was wounded, but also by Pisanio's report that Posthumus "rather played than fought/ and had no help of anger" (I.i.163-164).

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[57] The actual historical existence of Taillefer is not confirmed, but his story is told for instance in the *Carmen of the Battle of Hastings* (1068), in an 1140 account by Geoffrey Gaimar in French, in Henry of Huntingdon's *History of the English* (c. 1150). He is not mentioned by William de Poitiers and he is not depicted on the Bayeux Tapestry (see Southworth, ch. 3).
[58] Billington, p. 27.
[59] Southworth, ch. 1.
[60] A record of the 1551 Christmas revels has it that King Edward VI, who ascended to the throne after Henry VIII and kept his court jester ordered "a devyse [...] for a combat to be fought with William Somer". See Suzanne Westfall, "The Boy Who Would Be King: Court Revels of King Edward VI, 1547-1553", *Comparative Drama*, 35 (2002), pp. 271-290 (278) and Southworth, ch. 8. Welsford also reports that the following year the annual Lord of Misrule organized a mock combat at court performing with three fools (Welsford, p. 212).

Other than mock fighting offstage, Cloten sustains a longer routine, that had been part of the household entertainer's performance since the Roman period: mimicry.[61] But it is not mimicry in the sense that Armin got us used to with Tutch, Feste or Autolycus. It is imitation in a broader sense: Cloten is staged, as has often been observed, as the downscaled double of Posthumus in *Cymbeline*: they are both compared to specific breeds of birds, but while the latter is an eagle, the former is just a puttock. They are both stepsons of Cymbeline and they love the same woman; Cloten temporarily hires Pisanio, Posthumus' former servant, as his servant. He wants to meet Imogen in the place where Posthumus has arranged to meet her but, more significantly, he wears his rival's clothes and, with those on, he determines to rape his wife. In his two monologues he keeps boasting how their physical and moral qualities match perfectly, and when he is dead and headless, Imogen's mistaking of Cloten for Posthumus makes the identification of the two characters complete. In a sense, then, Cloten fulfills the dramatic role of the clown who reenacts and parodies the higher actions of the main characters in the play.

There are other more straightforward references to Cloten as a traditional fool. His attendant lords, in particular, like to draw parallels between the prince and a couple of representative animals. One is the ass, as was pointed out in the first chapter: they confess to the audience that the "fall of an ass [...] is no great hurt" (I.ii.36) and, more indirectly, parodying Cloten's statement that no one should reproach gentlemen for swearing, they say that nobody should "crop the ears of them" (II.i.12-13). The ass was often associated with the fool, who in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, could be depicted wearing a hood with asses' ears: this can be seen in manuscripts and psalters and it is the tradition that Albrecht Dürer and Hans Holbein drew upon for the illustrations of the first editions of, respectively,

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[61] See Welsford, pp. 274, 278.

Brant's *Narrenschiff* and Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*.[62] It is probably to this particular accessory that the lords allude to in the third quotation above, singling out only that particular part of the body of the ass. Immediately after the audience is encouraged to visualize Cloten with ass's ears, the Second Lord provides an image of the prince with a different headpiece on:

> SECOND LORD You are a cock and capon too and you crow cock with your comb on. (II.i.23-24)

The fool, in fact, could wear also a cockscomb, that is, a hood with a cock's crest, or even a cock's head.[63] The cock with his cockscomb represents the idea of senseless vainness, given how he pridefully struts in the barn and crows at a time when no one else does,[64] so it parallels perfectly Cloten's exaggerated self-esteem. However, both the ass and the cock are linked with the fool primarily for their stupidity, which they make up for, however, with their sexual prowess.[65] In this case the Second Lord proclaims that Cloten is even a bigger stupid, being called "capon",[66] while also his sexual prowess is called into question.[67]

His relationship with Imogen confirms indeed this ambivalence. The motif of the fool falling in love with the king's daughter is traditional, as well as the unattainability of his desire because of his foolishness.[68] Cloten on the one hand conceives of love as a dangerous, animal-like lust when he announces he will "ravish" (III.v.138) and "enforce" (IV.i.17) Imogen with Posthumus' clothes on. On the other, he shows his total inability to act concretely in the only scene where he faces his beloved in person. As usual, he proves he

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[62] See F. Saxl, "Holbein's Illustrations to the *Praise of Folly* by Erasmus", *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs,* 83 (1943), pp. 274-279. Real fools in England did not dress up like this, though (see Southworth, ch. 17).

[63] Southworth, ch. 17. Lear's Fool famously wears one of these (see *King Lear*, I.iv.94 ff.).

[64] See Conrad Hyers, *The Spirituality of Comedy: Comic Heroism in a Tragic World*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1996, pp. 112-113.

[65] Willeford, p. 37.

[66] Shakespeare famously uses the term "capon" in a list of synonyms for "fool" in *The Comedy of Errors*, when the clownish servant Dromio of Syracuse yells at the other clownish servant Dromio of Ephesus: "Mome, malt-horse, capon, coxcomb, idiot, patch!" (III.i.32).

[67] On the implications of Cloten's impotence see Mariangela Tempera, "Le Due Teste del Principe: Cloten in *Cymbeline*", in Clara Mucci, Chiara Magni, Laura Tommaso, eds., *Le Ultime Opere di Shakespeare*, Napoli: Liguori, 2009, pp. 105-120 (110-111).

[68] See Willeford, pp. 183-191.

does not know how to behave in specific situations, as he had done when Iachimo visited Cymbeline's court. In II.iii he says "I am advised to give her music o' mornings; they say it will penetrate" (II.iii.11-12). The song that follows, "Hark, hark, the lark at heaven gate sings" (II.iii.19), reaches one of the highest peaks of poetry in *Cymbeline*, so some critics have observed that its association with such a good-for-nothing as Cloten is quite disturbing.[69] However, I am more concerned with the fact that, though Cloten was very likely played by Armin in the early performances, he does not, as far as the text can be trusted, join in the singing. On the contrary, he hires a group of musicians to sing for Imogen. While on the one hand this may seem unusual, given that Armin had sung lines in many of the plays where he was cast, on the other it is consistent with the staging of his idiocy, as well as his extravagance. Since the beginning of the play the audience has been used to witnessing Cloten fail at everything he has engaged in: in wooing Imogen, in the duel with Posthumus and in the game of bowls. So, getting him to sing would clash completely with what came before and what we learn about the character in the following scenes.

Shakespeare's staging of the fool in *Cymbeline* is without parallel in the previous plays. Previous clown and fool roles were constructed so that the audience would like them, so that even if their logic was not exactly ordinary and straightforward, they were actually *good* at shooting quips and well placed malapropisms and at offering intentional entertainment. Even a character like Falstaff, who is largely made fun of, is actually successful in his mission as Vice for Hal, and his simulated death at the end of *1 Henry IV*, though it is a cowardly action, serves to trick the enemy army and save his life. Unlike Cloten, he is no idiot at all. In Shakespeare, unfortunately, there are not any analogue examples of idiocy, but Armin's works are useful for a comparison. *Two Maids* and *Foole*

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[69] Ros King, *'Cymbeline': Constructions of Britain*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005, p. 17.

Upon Foole (and *Nest of Ninnies*) with their descriptions of natural fools show how even those people manage to accomplish something good every now and then: they are able to jest, they manage to steal things and profit from them, Jack Miller and Blue John can sing. Cloten cannot. Shakespeare constructs a dark tragic view not of madness, as in *Hamlet* or *Lear,* but of an idiocy that leaves no space for anything. This time he does not want us to sympathise with the fool, so even singing is barred from him. Once the song is over, the scene with Imogen is the apotheosis of nothingness, which results from Cloten's inability to produce a decent declaration of love – "I swear I love you" (II.iii.88) –, the outspoken illogicality of his argument that Imogen's choice of Posthumus over him is a sin, and the insults to the hero. Finally, once Imogen tells him that Posthumus' "mean'st garment [...] is dearer/ in my respect than all the hairs above thee" (II.iii.130-132), also his ability to speak properly miserably fails: he becomes a stuttering idiot who in about twenty lines of dialogue is only able to repeat as many as four times the last thing he heard – "'his garment'?" (II.iii.134, 136) and "'his meanest garment'?" (II.iii.146, 153) – and he cannot, as Imogen speaks, process any new information or add anything himself. When Imogen exits she leaves an unresponsive Cloten still repeating the same sentence.

However, I believe that the feature of Cloten's staging that connects him most with the idea of the fool is his death. In the Folio edition of Shakespeare's play *Cymbeline* is the only one of the romances to be classified as a tragedy. It is quite a lame tragedy, though, given that the only two deaths of the whole play (*The Winter's Tale* too has the deaths of Mamillius, Antigonus and his fellow sailors, but formally it is a comedy) are Cloten's, a boorish idiot, whom we do not pity at all as an audience, and his mother's, who is the only one who mourns him and falls ill (offstage) on hearing of her son's fate. Considering the indifference of the other characters, however, Cloten's death appears to have very few

consequences, either emotional or political, because it is the death of a fool. After all, thanks to the final discovery, where Guiderius and Arviragus are revealed to be Cymbeline's two long lost sons, nobody is condemned for the foolish prince's murder. The idea of death and the figure of the fool have been sometimes linked in Shakespeare before *Cymbeline*. The maximum effectiveness of such combination is reached in *Hamlet*, when Yorick's skull is tossed up from underground, suggesting that no one can be spared by death, not even a fool, and at the same time that the fool himself, being now a skull, *is* the symbol of death.[70] But Hamlet's jester has been dead for quite a while before the play, whereas in *Cymbeline* the killing of the fool is a key moment of the plot. Though Cloten is killed offstage – Guiderius cuts his head off with his sword – the type of death assigned by Shakespeare to this fool is one that enjoys a great level of visibility. Indeed the prince's dismembered body haunts the stage for a while: Guiderius soon after the fight brings Cloten's head back on the stage and displays it to the audience before exiting again to throw it into a stream. Later in the scene (IV.ii) his headless body is laid on the ground and strewn with flowers in obsequy, before Imogen enters and laments on it by mistake. So, the fool's death is something which stays on the stage for a while and with which the audience is forced to come to terms. Why, if Cloten is a character that nobody likes and cares about?

First, it is important to analyse not just the fact that Cloten dies, but especially the particular way in which he is killed. Why does not Guiderius just stab him but chooses instead to cut his head off? Decapitation seems far too cruel and bloody a way of killing someone, and a severed head is a grotesque and disgusting sight on stage. Such an excess of violence seems wasted, if used to kill an idiot. In this sense, the outcome of Cloten's duel

[70] On the topic see Allan R. Schickman, "The Fool and Death in Shakespeare", *Colby Quarterly*, 34 (1998), pp. 201-225. Strangely enough, though he gives an extensive analysis of the interaction between death and Shakespeare's "fools" in its broadest sense – buffoons, clowns, jesters, pretended fools, madmen and characters who at some point can be seen as comic – he totally neglects Cloten.

with Guiderius clashes with that of his duel with Posthumus, who basically refused to fight. A simple and straight answer to the issue is proposed by critics, among whom Ros King, who observe that some populations among the ancient Celts had the practice of beheading enemies after defeating them. A famous painting by John White displays a similar scene in watercolour: a Pictish warrior with painted body stands with a shield in one hand and a severed head in the other, while his scimitar hangs to his waist (fig. 9).[71] Margaret E. Owens also observes that in the history plays of the period "the display of the head serves as a striking, unmistakable icon signifying not only the defeat and demise of the victim but, more crucially, the transfer of political power that is often consolidated through this act of violence", and that in reality practices of headhunting were usually associated with

9. John White, *A Pictish Warrior Holding a Human Head* (London, British Museum, 1585-1593)

[71] King, p. 27.

barbarians, such as the Turks, the wild Celts and the natives of the New World.[72] All this applies quite easily to the action of the wild mountaineer Guiderius, given that Cloten's death leaves space for him to become the heir of the king. I believe, however, that the interpretation of the scene could be enriched further: we have to remember that this is not the death of a warrior, but the death of a fool. Therefore first, from a purely textual point of view, we must note that Cloten figures as all the more fool for dying specifically by decapitation, given that just one scene before he had promised that Posthumus' "head, which now is growing upon [his] shoulders, shall within this hour be off" (IV.i.15-17) by his hand and in the same scene he would set the heads of the mountaineers "on the gates of Lud's town" (IV.ii.101).[73] Second, it is apt that the fool should die by detachment of the very bodily organ that is the seat of his folly or foolishness, as if he could somehow be healed or made wiser by such an extreme action.[74] Immediately after Cloten is killed, Guiderius reenters holding only his head – like White's Pictish warrior – and leaving his body behind, so that the whole fool is reduced to just an empty head. In a sense, Cloten becomes himself a bauble, one of the emblematic accessories of the court fool and the symbol of his power, a stick or sceptre usually topped by a small jester's head, which the fool could rail at or use as a mild weapon.[75]

In addition to all this, the beheading of the fool in the play might be somehow reminiscent of particular choreographies performed in late medieval and early modern folk festivals: sword dances. These were performed in England, especially in the north, but also in other European countries: in Germany, in Scandinavia, in Italy (with the name *mattacino*), in

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[72] Margaret E. Owens, *Stages of Dismemberment: The Fragmented Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Drama*, Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005, pp. 145-146, 149.
[73] Cloten considers Belarius, Guiderius and Arviragus law-breakers, robbers and villains (see IV.ii.76-77), and the punishment for traitors in early modern London was decapitation and display of their heads on London Bridge.
[74] This could be faintly related to the northern european idea that an individual could be cured of his folly by removing the "stone of folly" from his brain. A scene of this type is depicted for example in Hieronymus Bosch's painting *The Cure of Folly* (Madrid, Museo del Prado, c. 1494).
[75] Or also a doll's or puppet's head (see Willeford, p. 22; also 33-34).

Spain (*matachin*) and in France, where it was called *danse de bouffons*.[76] The French name, in particular, gives away what kind of performances they were: in the group who leaped and danced with clashing swords intertwining them in different patterns were a few comic or grotesque figures dressed as fools or clowns. Other than the evident mock-combat quality of the dance, it is interesting that one of the fundamental moments of such choreographies was the killing of one of the dancers or one of the grotesques. The latter, in particular, was simulated when the dancers moved their swords in a particular layout: they could either place all the blades above the head of the central character or interlock them around his neck, according to specific formations called the Hexagon, the Rose or the Lock. Alternatively, they could cut each other's head or feet with their swords. In early seventeenth-century Spain, such a movement was called *degollada*, that is indeed "beheading".[77] Such dances could be accompanied by spoken and sung parts, especially in the moment of the beheading. The first folk play of a similar fashion ever to be written down was the so called Revesby Sword Play, performed at Revesby Abbey, in Lincolnshire in 1779. Here the central character, called Fool, is killed by his children, who interlock swords around his neck and cut his head off. Shortly after, however, the Fool springs up on his feet and starts singing again. Though the Revesby Play is much later than our period of interest, it is still very useful to get an idea of the kind of folk performances Shakespeare and his audience would have seen.[78] Sword dances were closely related and often confused with *morris dance* performances,[79] more popular in the south of England; these dances also employed very similar fool-like and grotesque figures,

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[76] Edmund K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, Vol. 1, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903, p. 191.
[77] See Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, pp. 193-204, Welsford, pp. 70-71 and Cecil J. Sharp, *The Sword-Dances of Northern England*, East Ardsley: EP Publishing, 1977, pp. 26-30.
[78] François Laroque, *Shakespeare's Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 52. For the Revesby Sword Play see Joseph Quincy Adams, ed., *Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas: A Selection of Plays Illustrating the History of the English Drama from its Origins Down to Shakespeare*, London: George G. Harrap, 1924, pp. 357-364.
[79] In fact, the dancers of the Revesby Sword Play are called "morris dancers". For the morris dance see also 1.1.

mock deaths and revivals, and occasionally choreographies with swords.[80] Shakespeare surely knew this last type: in fact he inserts a morris dance in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613), which he composed with Fletcher.[81] Thus it is possible that Shakespeare chose to have Cloten beheaded because that was the most widely acknowledged type of death a fool would traditionally be associated with, the one the audience would have thought most natural.

There is more to it. Chambers interestingly conjectures that the significance of sword dances, with the murder of one of the main dancing figures, does not lie so much in the representation of a mock-combat – a type of performance which was also elsewhere associated with the figure of the fool, as I discussed earlier – but was more a ritual of propitiation. In fact, both the morris and sword dances were usually performed in concomitance with agricultural festivals, and the costumes of some characters such as the fool, who wore animal skins and a fox's tail, were connected to the idea of nature. In this light, the killing of one of the dancers became a mock sacrifice in the wake of the agricultural cult of worship.[82] If the death was then followed by the revival of the character, the idea of a rebirth of nature in connection with the harvest year was also established. Though Cloten does not come back to life again, we can still say that his death – though little grieved – is some sort of sacrifice which alludes to a positive hope of rebirth in the play. The association of Cloten with the idea of sacrifice is enunciated as early as II.iii, when the First Lord advises him to change his shirt, because "the violence of action hath made you reek as a sacrifice" (I.ii.1-2). Later, when he is killed, Guiderius proposes twice the image of Cloten's head being thrown into the stream and still having the ability to speak:

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[80] See Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage,* pp. 195-201 and Sharp, pp. 28-30.

[81] See III.v. Lois Potter, in the Arden Edition, proposes that the morris dancers in the play might perform "the mock beheading and resurrection of the fool, which sometimes figures in this dance" and which would have "an obvious thematic link with the near-beheading of Palamon in the final scene" (William Shakespeare, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, The Arden Shakespeare, Lois Potter, ed., London: Methuen, 1997, pp. 107-108).

[82] Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, pp. 202-203, and Sharp, pp. 28-29.

GUIDERIUS I'll throw't into the creek
Behind our rock, and let it to the sea,
And tell the fishes he's the Queen's son, Cloten. (IV.ii.152-154)

GUIDERIUS I have sent Cloten's clotpoll down the stream
In embassy to his mother (IV.ii.185-186)

these lines have been often seen as clear references to the myth of Orpheus' death in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (book XI), where the Thracian poet was killed by the Maenads and torn into pieces. His head was thrown into the river Hebron and, while floating, it continued to speak. The story can be interpreted as the power of art to survive its creator: Orpheus dies and transforms into a higher and more abstract element, his own poetry, thus becoming part of a ritual of death as sacrifice and rebirth.[83] Similarly, the idea of Cloten's head travelling along the stream of water and the fact that his headless body stays on the stage for one more scene seem to imply that the fool is still living somehow. Sharp also connects the killing of a victim in folk dances with primitive religious beliefs sacrificing human victims in honour of a deity in order to make future events favourable,[84] and this could somehow be cogent in *Cymbeline*, given that Belarius, Guiderius and Arviragus are staged like savage Wild Men.[85] Belarius asks himself "what [Cloten's] death will bring us" (IV.ii.184) and prepares a decorous funeral for him, as he was a prince. His death, in fact, marks indeed the beginning of a new life for the three hermits, who shortly after his decapitation realize that they cannot hide any more and decide instead to fight the Romans, thus exposing themselves and paving the way for the final agnition before Cymbeline, who restores his two lost sons to the royal line of inheritance and gives Belarius his former status at court. Besides, Butler observes that Cloten's death anticipates Imogen's seeming death (due to a poison) and reawakening, as well as Posthumus' "psychological rebirth" once he gets Jupiter's prophecy that everything

[83] See Simonds, *Myth, Emblem and Music,* p. 76 and *Cymbeline*, Butler, ed., p. 185, n. 149-153.
[84] Sharp, pp. 31-32.
[85] On this point see Peggy Muñoz Simonds, "The Iconography of Primitivism in *Cymbeline*", *Renaissance Drama* 16 (1985), pp. 95-120.

will end well.[86] So Cloten's death makes possible positive outcomes for other characters: in this sense, it may well be considered a ritual sacrifice.

Other than Shakespeare's debt to the folk tradition of folly for the characterization of Cloten, it is useful to consider also how the idiotic prince conforms to literary stereotypes regarding natural folly. In this sense no better touchstone can be used than Armin's own work. Indeed, some of the idiots' features and comic turns he meticulously describes in his *Foole Upon Foole* (and *Nest of Ninnies*) are also part of Cloten's staging. *A Nest of Ninnies* came out in 1608, one or two years before the presumptive composition of *Cymbeline*. I wonder if the choice of giving Armin the part of a dolt to play might have had anything to do with this publication, just as, in the case of Autolycus, Shakespeare chose to make him a ballad-seller and a shape-shifter around the time that *The Italian Taylor and His Boy* came out (1609). As Lippincott has observed, while we cannot assume that Shakespeare used Armin's work as a basis for the creation of his fools, we can still observe that they probably shared a common tradition[87] and that they could both play on the audience's expectations. The difficulty to clothe himself properly is something Cloten has in common with Blue John for instance, who had "a nurse to tend him, to put on his cloathes"[88]. Like Cloten, Armin's Jack Oates and Leane Leanard have an aggressive attitude to playing, as their games usually end up in brawls with the people around, even if they are playing on their own. Jack Oates is also reported to have broken the "pate" of a minstrel with a bagpipe, and causes another to have "his head broake to the scull against the ground"[89] – just like Cloten used a bowl to break the "pate" of the man who reproached him for swearing – and he is described as an innocent, yet aggressive idiot who boxes a gentleman in the ear without reason. The motif of

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[86] *Cymbeline*, Butler, ed., p. 185, n. 149-153 and Simonds, *Myth, Emblem and Music*, p. 75.
[87] Armin, *A Shakespeare Jestbook*, p. 24.
[88] Armin, *A Shakespeare Jestbook*, p. 134.
[89] Armin, *A Shakespeare Jestbook*, pp. 64, 66.

Cloten's trick of stealing Posthumus' clothes seems to have something in common with Armin's fools' petty thefts: Jack Oates steals a valuable quince pie from the kitchen, thus making the cook furious, Lean Leanard steals dairy products from the cellar, a hawk, and a fired log from the fireplace and Jack Miller attempts to snatch a pie from the oven. Armin is also much concerned with the physical characteristics of his natural fools, he lingers on deformities and quirks to show how their mental disability is mirrored also externally, at a bodily level. Jack Miller does not have a deformed appearance – other than being a bit plump – but he dribbles and stammers, so that people cannot but see he is an idiot. Cloten does not seem to have a deformed appearance either, on the contrary "the lines of [his] body are [...] well drawn" (IV.i.9). Yet, Belarius reveals that he has "snatches in his voice" and a peculiar "burst of speaking" (IV.ii.106-107). In the first chapter I pointed out how this might be related to the complexity and jerkiness of the syntax of the lines written for Armin, both in *Cymbeline* and in the actor's own works. I wonder, however, whether Belarius might be alluding also to some defect of utterance, given that a "snatch" is defined by the *OED* as a "hesitancy", perhaps a slight stammering. Cloten would thus conform to early modern stereotypical ideas about idiocy.

Another aspect Armin's natural fools and Cloten partly share is the way they manage to raise laughter. Cloten is neither a jester, nor a trickster, nor a Vice – as he is not able to corrupt anyone – nor a clown endowed with some sort of popular wisdom. On the contrary, he becomes ridiculous because people around him exploit his irrationality and detachment from reality to make fun of him. In *Foole Upon Foole* natural fools are often played tricks upon by members of their households to emphasize how idiotic they are: for example a group of courtiers organizes a prank for Jemy Camber making him believe he can beat a good runner in a forty-mile-run. The fool then brags about the enterprise, while everyone at court

actually laughs at him.[90] Or he is convinced to join in a false bet and he is deprived of the most precious thing he owns, a golden chain.[91] In these cases the natural fool does not realize in the least he is being fooled – similarly to what happens with Autolycus deceiving simpletons to steal from them – and the joke is enjoyed only by those who play them and by the fool's master. In *Cymbeline,* in the first two scenes where Cloten appears, the laughter makers are actually the two lords who, making a heavy use of asides, reverse each of Cloten's supposed "truths", so that comedy is created by the contrast between the foolish prince's distorted perception of people and events and the onlookers' objective views, which they share with the audience.

> CLOTEN The villain would not stand me.
> SECOND LORD (*aside*) No, but he fled forward still, toward your face. (I.ii.13-15)
>
> CLOTEN And that she should love this fellow and refuse me!
> SECOND LORD (*aside*) If it be a sin to make a true election, se is damned. (I.ii.24-27)

Sometimes, more comedy is added when Cloten himself unknowingly offers verbal hooks for the two lords to build up witty quips on the idea of foolishness. In this case he gives the impression of being even more stupid, since he proves he cannot think of the possible various meanings of the words he says – exactly the opposite of what Shakespeare's wise fools do:

> CLOTEN Would he had been one of my rank.
> SECOND LORD (*aside*) To have smelled like a fool. (II.i.14-16)
>
> CLOTEN I must go up and down like a cock that nobody can match.
> SECOND LORD (*aside*) You are cock and capon too and you crow cock with your comb on. (II.i.21-24)

In the following scenes the two sarcastic lords are not there anymore, but at that point their asides are not necessary: the audience knows enough about the character to be able to judge his statements. So the numberless repetitions of the word "villain" in his lines – an actual verbal tic – are so mechanical that they become meaningless, and the character even more

[90] Armin, *A Shakespeare Jestbook*, pp. 83-87.
[91] Armin, *A Shakespeare Jestbook*, pp. 76-79.

ridiculous and puppet-like. At one point he mixes meanings of the same word, thus making the sentence somehow illogical. When he forces Pisanio to become his servant he says:

CLOTEN Sirrah, if thou wouldst not be a villain but do me true service, undergo [...] what villainy soe'er I bid thee do (III.v.108-112).

About the point where Cloten repeats four times the phrase "his meanest garment" Sylvan Barnet comments that

> surely the impression we should get is that of a record that has got stuck. Cloten is a kind of automaton, assemblage of all the conventional stage properties used to identify the villain, he makes all the most obnoxious and villain like noises like a machine.[92]

It is an observation that might owe something to one of the main points on which the Bergsonian theory of laughter pivots: the assumption that the comic effect can be created through mechanical repetition of the same quirk or movement, because it gives the impression that the person is a lifeless machine, rather than a creative individual, so that anything that dehumanises a character becomes laughable.[93] Also Cloten's possible stammering and his clumsy imitation of Posthumus' actions would fall into this category.

In Cloten's monologues, in particular, the absurdity of the assumptions he makes about himself strike a note of deep irony with the audience, as when he talks about his "noble and natural person [...] together with the adornment of [his] qualities" (III.v.136-137), when he deludes himself that "the lines of my body are as well drawn as his" – while this is hardly possible, if it was Armin reciting this line – he is "more strong" than Posthumus, "not beneath him in fortunes", "alike conversant in general services and more remarkable in single oppositions" (IV.i.9-13) – which is again outright false, given that neither of them won the duel.

In his last scene, just before the beheading, he confronts Guiderius, another character who unwittingly reminds Cloten of what a fool he is. In the previous monologue Cloten had

[92] Shakespeare, *Romances*, p. lxxxii.
[93] Bergson, pp. 29-33, 58, 69-73, 92-95, 146.

boasted that Posthumus' clothes fit him perfectly. When he asks Guiderius "know'st me not by my clothes" he proves he has forgotten he is not wearing his own clothes but Posthumus', which also clearly do not fit him so well, given that the mountaineer answers that he does not know his tailor either. The comedy in the rest of the scene is sustained by the contrast between Cloten's attempts to assert his superiority in rank – "Hear but my name and tremble" (IV.ii.89), "I am son to th' Queen" (IV.ii.95) – and Guiderius' unimpressed reactions, best represented perhaps by his final remark that

> GUIDERIUS Those that I reverence, those I fear, the wise.
> At fools I laugh, not fear them (IV.ii.97-98)

which definitively disjoints the interaction between folly and wisdom, which was so dear to the Erasmian philosophy proper of Armin and Shakespeare's court fools. Cloten's type of folly does not admit of the slightest spark of wisdom, but it feeds on pure ignorance. So while the audience laughs at him, no feeling of sympathy is possible either. His foolishness is not of the innocent kind – like that of Armin's natural fools – but on the contrary, it leads him to the darkest thoughts. This arises in particular in the monologues which, on the one hand, result comic for Cloten's bawdy language and lack of self-consciousness, but on the other leave the audience horrified:

> CLOTEN With that suit upon my back will I ravish her – first kill him, and in her eyes; then shall she see my valour, which will then be a torment to her contempt. He on the ground, my speech of insultment ended on his dead body, and when my lust hath dined – which, as I say, to vex her I will execute in the clothes that she so praised – to the court I'll knock her back, foot her home again. She hath despised me rejoicingly, and I'll be merry in my revenge. (III.v.138-145)

> CLOTEN How fit his garments serve me! Why should his mistress, who was made by him that made the tailor, not be fit too? – the rather – saving reverence of the word – for 'tis said a woman's fitness comes by fits. (IV.i.2-6)

Criticism has sometimes pointed out how Cloten's threats cannot be taken seriously,[94] and that the character who actually poses a danger in the play is Iachimo, who plots against

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[94] For example Thomas Allen Nelson, *Shakespeare's Comic Theory*: *A Study of Art and Artifice in the Last Plays*, Paris: Mouton, 1972, p. 46.

Posthumus to make him think Imogen has committed adultery with him and to win the wager. Though technically he manages to carry out his plan, while Cloten is unable to do so, he never reaches the rapacity and lustfulness of the foolish prince. Cloten has sometimes been compared to Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* and Parolles in *All's Well*: Richman comments that they are the only ones "among the hundreds of characters in Shakespeare's comedies [who] are made the objects of so strong a dislike and such a sustained campaign of derisive laughter".[95] Still, while on the one hand Malvolio and Parolles are not the primary comic sources their plays rely on – indeed they were not played by the leading comedian – on the other they never show a similar sadistic kind of attraction to the heroine and thirst for blood. Cloten instead pushes to the extreme the potential threat of the Vice but in that way, starting from his revelatory monologue in III.v, he eliminates all the comedy from the character. So once again in *Cymbeline* we have a liminal type of fool: on the one hand his idiocy makes him laughable, on the other he is so crude and evil that he is despicable and potentially really dangerous.

Of all the fools in Shakespeare, Cloten is perhaps the darkest of all: Granville-Barker defined him "a comic character drawn with a savagely serious pen".[96] With his deadly desires and blatant idiocy he manages however to bring together tragedy and comedy. The tragicomic quality of the character becomes fully evident with his death. But death in his case is not treated in the way the first gravedigger in *Hamlet*, according to Warde, treats Yorick's skull, with "irreverence and familiarity [...] recall[ing] the pranks of the dead jester, [...] gleefully chuckl[ing] as memory revives the 'mad rogue's' wit and humour".[97] On the contrary Cloten's death is a serious matter, deserved, bloody and never regretted. It is still the death of

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[95] Richman, p. 27.

[96] Harley Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, Volume 2, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946, p. 143.

[97] Frederick Warde, "The Grave Diggers in *Hamlet",* in Bloom H., ed, *The Trickster,* New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010, pp. 77-87 (85).

a fool, though, and there is no scene in the play that documents the combination of laughter and pain better than IV.ii. Here the audience is naturally encouraged by the flow of the events to feel deeply sympathetic to Imogen, who abandons herself to a passionate lamentation over the presumptive body of the husband. At the same time, however, they cannot forget that she is mourning over the wrong body, so that anything she says is misplaced:

> IMOGEN A headless man? The garments of Posthumus?
> I know the shape of's leg; this is his hand,
> His foot Mercurial, his Martial thigh,
> The brawns of Hercules (IV.ii.310-313)

The speech unfortunately results grotesque to the audience because not only is she listing the superior qualities of a person whom she actually loathes, Cloten, but also because her sight of Posthumus' garments persuades her that she can also see things that are not there: Cloten's leg and hand can hardly be similar to those of Posthumus, if the actor playing him was Armin. But the peak of tragicomedy in Imogen's speech is reached by the last line quoted above, as indeed with "the brawns of Hercules" she unknowingly echoes verbally and phonetically a remark Guiderius made just a little earlier about Cloten's foolishness: "not Hercules/ could have knocked out his brains, for he had none" (IV.ii.115-116). Thus, while on the one hand she becomes an unaware instrument of comedy in the play, on the other the presence of Cloten on the stage cannot but dismiss the seriousness of her emotions in the scene.

3.2 Caliban

In *The Tempest* Caliban is presented as a savage monster, the son of a witch, who has lived on the island since before Prospero and Miranda's arrival. When the banished duke of Milan found him he took hold of the island and started to civilize him, until the savage attempted to rape Miranda and was consequently confined and turned into a slave. For this reason Caliban bears a grudge against his master and, once he meets the shipwrecked Stephano and Trinculo, two drunken fellows belonging to the court of Naples, he envisions a plan to get rid of Prospero and get his island back.

Caliban is certainly one of the characters most commented on by Shakespearean criticism, in that he has been taken to represent the victim of colonialism in an age when Western Empires were discovering and exploiting the resources of the New World in America.[98] Being so much unlike any other character that came before him and given his triple identity as a savage, a monster and a slave, he has offered innumerable possibilities of interpretation, as well as issues for later cultural appropriations. Unfortunately, as there is no known direct source for *The Tempest*, it is very hard to say univocally where Caliban comes from. Presumably, he is the result of Shakespeare's blend of several types: a native of America (an Indian of the Caribbean, as his name might suggest, a Bermuda savage, given

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[98] See for example William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Morton Luce, ed., London: Methuen, 1901; Leo Marx, "Shakespeare's American Fable", *The Massachussets Review*, 2 (1960), pp. 40-71, Leslie Fiedler, *The Stranger in Shakespeare,* New York: Stein and Day, 1972; Paul Brown, "This Thing of Darkness I Acknowledge Mine": *The Tempest* and the Discourse of Colonialism", in Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, eds., *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985, Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbeans, 1492-1797*, London: Methuen, 1986, ch. 3, Meredith Anne Skura, "Discourse and the Individual: The Case of Colonialism in *The Tempest*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 40 (1989), pp. 42-69. Such a view resulted also in cultural and anthropological studies like Octave Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, Pamela Powesland, transl., New York: Praeger, 1964 or Roberto Fernández Retamar, "Caliban: Notes Toward a Discussion of Culture in Our America", *The Massachussets Review*, 15 (1974), pp. 11-16.

that he worships the Patagonian god Setebos, or an inhabitant of Virginia),[99] a deformed being – a monster, yes, but in human form[100] – an African or gypsy rogue threatening the commonwealth, and perhaps even a representative of paganism or early modern political intrigues.[101] Plus, he might owe something to previous literary and cultural motifs such as the beast-like Polyphemus from Homer's *Odyssey* – in that Caliban is temporarily besotted by Stephano's "celestial liquor" (II.ii.115) – the half-human-and-half-goat Roman satyrs and of course the medieval figure of the Wild Man – an irrational human being who estranges himself from civilization and lives in the forest like a brute, sleeping in caves and feeding on berries and raw meat.[102]

The question is, however, whether or not he can be mapped out also on the role of the fool. Certainly he is not as idiotic as Cloten: on the contrary, he is smart enough to utter highly poetical lines and to lead boldly the conspiracy against Prospero. At the same time, he is no stage fool either, in the sense of a professional entertainer. Yet, he is a "natural" fool because of the perception the other characters have of him and because of the implications of some of his multiple identities. In a 2011 journal article by Paromita Chakravarti, the author

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[99] A pioneer in the identification of Caliban as American was Sidney Lee (*A Life of William Shakespeare*, London: Smith Elder, 1898; "The Call of the West: America and Elizabethan England", *Scribner's Magazine*, 42 (1907), pp. 313-30) followed, among others, by Robert Ralston Cawley, "Shakespeare's Use of the Voyagers in *The Tempest*", *PMLA*, 41 (1926): 688-726. Also Kermode in *The Tempest*, the Arden Shakespeare, London: Methuen, 1958, pp. xxxiii, xxxvii-xxxix; D.G James, *The Dream of Prospero*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967; Corona Sharp, "Caliban: The Primitive Man's Evolution", *Shakespeare Studies*, 14 (1981), p. 267; Jan Kott, "*The Tempest*, or Repetition", *Mosaic*, X (1977), pp. 9-36.

[100] William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Comedy, 'The Tempest', as Arranged for the Stage by Herbert Beerbohm Tree*, London: J. Miles 1904, pp. x-xi, provided one of the early argumentations on Caliban's humanity and this is now a widespread view, though some commentators are still reluctant to accept it (Vaughan and Vaughan, *Caliban*, p. 10, n. 19).

[101] e.g. Paul A. Jorgensen, "Shakespeare's Brave New World", in Fred Chiappelli et al., eds., *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, Vol. 1, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976, pp. 83-90; Emma Brockway Wagner, *Shakespeare's The Tempest: An Allegorical Interpretation*, Hugh Robert Orr, ed., Yellow Spring: Antioch Press, 1933, pp. 72, 78-79.

[102] All these different influences are discussed comprehensively and at length in Vaughan and Vaughan, *Caliban,* especially pp. 23-85. For the wild man see for instance John E. Hankins, "Caliban, the Bestial Man", *PMLA*, 62 (1957), pp. 793-801, Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*, New York: Octagon Books, 1970 (on Caliban, p. 11) and Barbara Baert, "Caliban as Wild-Man. An Iconographical Approach", in Nadia Lie, Theo D'Haen, eds., *Constellation Caliban: Figurations of a Character*, Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1997, pp. 43-59.

advocates for an enlarged critical approach to the discourse of folly.[103] Starting from an acknowledgment of how the metaphorical concept of wise folly is as important as the idea of folly as intellectual disability, she moves on to consider how not only did Renaissance discourses of natural folly involve congenital idiots but also how they might occasionally interact with notions of monstrosity as well as bestiality – especially in relation to the way European colonizers saw the natives of the New World. In particular, in an afterword to her article, Chakravarti briefly takes into account Shakespeare's Caliban who, in the light of her previous analysis,

> straddles the discourses of natural folly, monstrosity, primitivism and the New World. He embodies the problems of humanist attitudes towards the natural and questions the categories of the human and inhuman, rational and foolish. Despite his otherness, Caliban compels Prospero, the scholar-magus epitomizing the humanist quest for knowledge, to acknowledge the thing of darkness as a part of nature, humanity and the rational self, an image perhaps of the common origins of all men. Although he has clownish traits, Caliban is not the typical Renaissance stage fool; nor is he the Shakespearean witty jester. He embodies instead the pathology of folly and represents the idea of the fool as a monstrous natural. Critical literature on *The Tempest,* whether liberal–humanist or new historicist, reads Caliban as a 'natural', a monster or a New World native, but rarely as a fool, suggesting that these discourses remain discrete in Renaissance scholarship.[104]

Thus, considering some of the points she makes and starting from where she left off with Caliban, I would like to give a closer reading of *The Tempest* in order to examine in what ways the text fashions the character as a fool, other than a monster and a slave.

Much in the same way the actual source for Caliban baffles us, we have another problem: so many epithets are used to define him throughout the text that ultimately we cannot piece out a single consistent and definite image of the character. Rather, we can construct a juxtaposition of different impressions, some of which do seem to fit together quite naturally, but others are harder to account for. Basically, we do not know what he looks like exactly, and that is one of the main reasons why the character is so interesting. He is defined (in order of appearance): "freckled whelp, hag born, not honoured with/ a human shape" (I.ii.

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[103] Paromita Chakravarti, "Natural Fools and the Historiography of Renaissance Folly", *Renaissance Studies*, 25 (2010), pp. 208-227.
[104] Chakravarti, p. 227.

284-285), “tortoise” (I.ii.318), “savage” (I.ii.357), “a thing most brutish” (I.ii.358), “a fish; he smells like a fish” (II.ii.25-26), “a man or a fish” (II.ii.24-25), “legged like a man, and his fins like arms” (II.ii.33-34), “this is no fish, but an islander” (II.ii.35-36), “moon-calf” (II.ii. 104, 135, III.ii.21, 22), “a born devil” (IV.i.188) or demi-devil (V.i.275) and then, most frequently, “monster”[105] – including also the variants “puppy-headed monster” (II.ii153-154), man-monster (III.ii.11), and “half a fish and half a monster” (III.ii.29) – as well as “misshapen knave” (V.i.271) and “strange thing” (V.i.292). This uncertainty about Caliban’s real shape has led to numerous interpretations in performance, art and criticism: sometimes he was to be seen as a human native (perhaps black), as an anthropomorphous monster with fish-like attributes, such as fins instead of arms, as a hairy wild man, or also as a tortoise or a dog.[106] In fact early modern accounts of the natives of the New World could equally describe the savages as well-proportioned men – though deprived of civility, a comprehensible language and highly organized political and social institutions – or as individuals whose baseness was epitomized by their being half beasts and half human, displaying some of the physical attributes (such as heads, or limbs) of animals. Such descriptions were often inspired by the fictional accounts of marvelous creatures by Pliny, John Mandeville or Marco Polo.[107] However, ultimately Caliban is no tortoise, though he is as slow as one. He is no fish, as Trinculo says, but he only smells like one: indeed he has no fins, but arms and legs.[108] Similarly, the reference to him as a hag’s “whelp”, does not tell us anything about his actual body shape, but stresses only his low, wild and animal-like nature. Again, the allusion to the

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[105] II.ii.144, 145, 146, 150, 155, 156, 157, 164, 178, III.ii.3, 4, 8, 11, 16, 18, 25, 32, 36, 70, 81, 107, 121, 137, 153, IV.i.196, 199, 201, 249.

[106] See Vaughan and Vaughan, *Caliban*, esp. ch. 2-3, 7-9 or Christine Dymkowski, ed., *Shakespeare in Production: ‘The Tempest’*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 49-50.

[107] Bernard W. Sheenan, *Savagism and Civility: Indians and Englishmen in Colonial Virginia,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, pp. 70-71.

[108] Kermode comments that Caliban is called “fish” for his oddity and not his appearance (William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Frank Kermode, ed., The Arden Shakespeare, London: Methuen, 1954, p. 62).

head of a puppy may not be taken literally, as I am going to explain in a while. Caliban is, instead, an islander and a human being, as Miranda implies.[109]

To get the most reliable indication of Caliban's looks we should consider the way he is presented in the Folio list of characters, that is as a "salvage and deformed slave", a definition that certainly owes much to the early performances of *The Tempest*. "Deformity" does not seem necessarily to imply a chimeric Caliban, but it may just point at an actual physical disability or a serious bodily defect. Indeed, the epithets "misshapen knave", "monster", "not honoured/ with a human shape" (I.ii.284-285) and "disproportioned [...] in his shape" (V.i.291-292) are all consistent with the same idea though, again, the exact type of disability remains unspecified. As A. W. Bates points out, in early modern accounts of monstrous births most writers – among whom Ambroise Paré who published *Des Monstres et Prodigies* in 1575 – drew a distinction between the words "monster" and "prodigy": the first referred to an unnatural birth, anything that occurred "outside the usual course of nature", such as children with two heads, missing or extra limbs or other malformations; the second referred to "supernatural" births that totally defy the laws of natures, as for instance animals born from human beings.[110] This may reinforce once again the idea that Caliban is an abnormal human being, and no beast. In the text, his monstrosity has a symbolical connotation because it reflects, according to the early modern outlook, his wickedness and the corruption of his soul. For example Francis Bacon in his 1612 essay "Of Deformity" wrote that "deformed persons are commonly even with nature [...] for as nature hath done ill

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[109] Talking about Ferdinand she says "This/ is the third man that e'er I saw" (I.ii.445-446), after Prospero and evidently Caliban.

[110] Bates observes however how the boundary between the two categories was not univocal, as authors' opinions about what was within or without the laws of nature could vary. A. W. Bates, *Emblematic Monsters: Unnatural Conceptions and Deformed Births in Early Modern Europe*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005, pp. 13-15. One of the definitions of *monster* in the *OED* is "a fetus, neonate, or individual with a gross congenital malformation" (with examples dating from 1400 onwards).

by them, so do they by nature"[111] and Helkiah Crooke's *Microcosmographia* (1631) displays the woodcut of a murderer slated for dissection, accompanied by the comment that

> Almighty God doth sometimes set his brand and mark upon wicked men: first that we may know and avoid them: secondly to shew his detestation of a minde which in his eternall wisedome he foresaw would be so foule and ulcerated, and finally because so wicked a minde might have a proportionable habitation, to wit, a prodigious and deformed body.[112]

In Shakespeare the most famous case of the connection of wickedness, criminality and physical disability is the Duke of Gloucester in *Richard III*.[113]

Less symbolically, Caliban's appearance is monstrous because, as I implied above, that is one of the typical ways in which Europeans projected their views of the Indians' otherness.[114] At the same time, however, they discriminated savages also for their bestiality and lack of civilization, which were allegedly an effect of their intellectual inferiority. Early modern theories of the Indians' intellectual capacity were justified by biased interpretations of Aristotle's theory of the natural slave, which he enunciates in his *Politics.*[115] The Scottish philosopher John Mair (1467-1550), reporting on the people living in the Antilles wrote:

> As the Philosopher says [...], it is clear that some men are by nature slaves, others by nature free; and in some men it is determined that there is such a thing [i.e. a disposition to slavery] and that they should benefit from it. And it is just that one man should be a slave and another free, and it is fitting that one man should rule and another obey, for the quality of leadership is also inherent in the natural master. On this account the Philosopher says in the first chapter of the aforementioned book that this is the reason why the Greeks should be masters over the barbarians because, by nature, the barbarians and the slaves are the same.[116]

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[111] Francis Bacon, *The Essays or Councels, Civil and Moral*, Rockville: Arc Manor, 2008, p. 96.
[112] Helkiah Crooke, *Microcosmographia*, London: Thomas and Richard Cotes, 1631, sig. f r-v.
[113] For a discussion on the implications of Richard's physical disability see Katherine Schaap Williams, "Enabling Richard: The Rhetoric of Disability in *Richard III*", *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 29 (2009); also Besnault, p. 188.
[114] Such expectations, however, were gradually being disappointed as European visitors of the New World looking for monstrous races reported that they had not found them. For example Columbus, like Fernández de Oviedo (1476-1557) and others, remarked that the natives were well-proportioned human beings and not monsters – as they had been described in fictional travel books (see John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought,* Cambridge (MA) and London: Harvard University Press, 1981, pp. 198-199 and Fernández de Oviedo, *Sumario de la Natural Historia de las Indias*, José Miranda, ed., Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1950, ch. X).
[115] See Aristotle, *Aristotle in Twenty-Three Volumes*, Vol. 21, Harris Rackham, transl., Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1944, book I, 1252a-1252b.
[116] Quoted and translated from Latin in Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, pp. 38-39.

The Spanish, who were primarily influenced by such an assumption,[117] (though similar views were common in the other European countries) engaged in formal debates on the capacity of the Indian natives in order to establish whether or not they could receive the Christian doctrine. The missionary Domingo de Betanzos (1480-1549), for instance, while on the one hand supporting their conversion, on the other admitted that the Indians "had very little capacity, like children", and the Dominican Tomás Ortíz in 1525 said: "they are incapable of learning [...] Indians are more stupid than asses and refuse to improve in anything".[118] Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1490-1573), one of the most convinced propounders of the Indians' inhumanity, held in his *Democrates Alter* (1544) that "in prudence, talent, virtue and humanity they are as inferior to the Spaniards as children to adults, women to men [...] as monkeys to men" and that "they are absolutely lacking in any knowledge of letters, do not know the use of money".[119] Even more tellingly, Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, in a passage translated into English by Richard Eden in 1555, claimed that he had observed how the Indians

> have the bones of the sculles of theyr heades *foure tymes thicker and much stronger then owres.* So that in commyng to hand strokes with them, it shalbe requisite not to strike them on the heades with swoordes. For so have many swoordes bynne broken on theyr heades with lyttle hurt doone.[120]

This explained their bestial understanding and their inability to become christians.[121]

Therefore, accepting Chakravarti's view, we need to draw a connection between the way Renaissance Europeans saw the savages of the New World and the fools of their own

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[117] See Pagden, pp. 27-56. Stephen Orgel comments that Caliban "is not presented as a noble savage, and his immediate attachment to Stephano is sufficient to confirm Prospero's view of him as a natural servant" (William Shakespeare, The *Tempest,* Stephen Orgel, ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 24).

[118] Quoted in Lewis Hanke, *All Mankind is One: A Study of the Disputation Between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in 1550 on the Intellectual and Religious Capacity of the American Indians*, DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994, pp. 11-12, 19.

[119] Quoted in Hanke, pp. 84-86.

[120] Italics are mine. Richard Eden, *The Decades of the Newe Worlde or West India* (1555), repr. in Edward Arber, ed., *The First Three English Books on America*, Birmingham: Turnbull & Spears, 1885, p. 238. The passage was originally published in Spanish in Oviedo's *Natural History of the West Indies* [*Historia General y Natural de las Indias, Islas y Tierra Firme del Mar Océano*] (1526).

[121] See Hanke, pp. 41-42 and Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, "El Indio Americano y su Circunstancia en la Obra de Fernàndez de Oviedo", *Revista de Indias*, 17 (1957), pp. 483-519 (493).

society. As both categories were in some sense "others", similar argumentations were constructed in order to set these people apart from the ordinary: for instance Europeans asked themselves why God would create such people that were not able to understand his teachings.[122] More importantly, both groups shared the characteristics of monstrosity, intellectual incapacity, childishness – because of their underdevelopment with respect to mature or civilized human beings – bestiality and ineducability. Caliban, as a dramatized version of an early modern savage, displays quite distinctively all of these aspects, perhaps with a particular insistence on his unspecified grotesque features which, if on the one hand they add to the general marvel and prodigious tone of Shakespeare's romance, on the other tie him to the reality described by medical accounts of foolishness. The Swiss physician Paracelsus (1493-1541), for instance, equates fools, "misgrowths", monsters, the deformed, the crippled, the blind, the deaf, the mute and the lame and views their existence as a consequence of Man's fall from Eden.[123] He writes that the fools "sometimes also carry misgrowths on their bodies, that is, overgrowths, as goitres and the like: although this is not a proprium stultorum [peculiarity of the fools] but also of others, it yet befalls mostly these".[124] He claims that because fools are "marred statues", they must necessarily exhibit not only mental deficiencies but also bodily malformations.[125] In particular, he was the first to study the incidence of goitre[126] in combination with foolishness,[127] a phenomenon he could observe

[122] Chakravarti, p. 216. For instance, such questions were an important part of Paracelsus' *De Generatione Stultorum* (1567) (translated in Paul F. Cranefield, "The Begetting of Fools: An Annotated Translation of Paracelsus' *De Generatione Stultorum*", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 41 (1967), pp. 56-74) and were dealt with by the Spanish who were debating on the humanity of the New World natives, notably the dominican Bartolomé de las Casas (1484-1566), who defended the Indians and did not accept that God had created "one whole race, nation, region, or country anywhere in the world that is slow-witted, moronic, foolish, or stupid" (Hanke, p. 84).
[123] Cranefield, "The Begetting of Fools", p. 61 and C.F. Goodey, "Foolishness in Early Modern Medicine and the Concept of Intellectual Disability", *Medical History*, 48 (2004), pp. 289-310 (293).
[124] Cranefield, "The Begetting of Fools", p. 66.
[125] Cranefield, "The Begetting of Fools", p. 63.
[126] A goitre, also called *struma*, is "a morbid (often enormously developed) enlargement of the thyroid gland of the neck" (*OED*).
[127] See Paul F. Cranefield and Walter Federn, "Paracelsus on Goiter and Cretinism: A Translation and Discussion of *De Struma, Vulgo Der Kropf*", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 37 (1963), pp. 463-471.

specifically among some peasant populations of the Alps and which he connected with the type of water these people had access to.[128] Similar remarks – that the goitrous were often stupid – had been made later on by others, such as the Swiss historian Josias Simler (1530-1576), the physician Eustachius Rudius (1551-1611) and above all by the physician and psychiatrist Felix Platter (1536-1614),[129] who in 1602 wrote:

> in Bremis, a village of the Valais, as I have seen myself, in a valley of Carinthia called Bintzgerthal, it is usual that many infants suffer from [innate folly]. Besides, the head is sometimes misshapen; the tongue is huge and swollen; they are dumb; the throat is often goitrous. Thus they present an ugly sight: and sitting in the streets and looking into the sun, and putting little sticks in between their fingers, twisting their bodies in various ways, with their mouths agape they provoke passersby to laughter and astonishment.[130]

As we know that Caliban was likely played by Armin, his deformity involved at the very least some vague dwarfishness. Besides, the characterization of Caliban as a monster would have profited from an actor who was not particularly good-looking. But apart from medical accounts of deformity in connection with disability, there is a whole cultural tradition of clowns and court entertainers whose "folly" was accompanied by ugly looks, physical defects or utter misshapenness. Indeed for early modern audiences the connection between faulty body and mind was taken for granted. Idiotic dwarves or African pygmies had been hired as court entertainers since the times of the Egyptian pharaohs, ancient Rome and among the Celts[131] – for example Archie Armstrong, James I's court jester from 1603 to 1625, was himself dwarfish, like many other jesters around the European courts.[132] People found freaks of nature exhilarating as well as entertaining, and their appearance was a crucial part of their grotesqueness. For the same reason, the fools of Armin's *Foole Upon Foole* all have some

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[128] Modern medicine would in fact claim there is a connection between intellectual deficiency, thyroid hormone deficit (the cause of goitre) and low levels of iodine in Alpine spring waters (Goodey, "Foolishness in Early Modern Medicine", p. 293).

[129] Paul F. Cranefield, "The Discovery of Cretinism", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 36 (1962), pp. 489-511 (especially pp. 492-496).

[130] From Platter's *Praxeos Medicae*, translated in Cranefield, " The Discovery of Cretinism", p. 496.

[131] See Welsford, pp. 56-64 and Southworth, ch. 2.

[132] Beatrice K. Otto, *Fools are Everywhere: the Court Jester Around the World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001, p. 24 and Ruth Von Bernuth, "From Marvels of Nature to Inmates of Asylums: Imaginations of Natural Folly", *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 26 (2006).

abnormal physical characteristics or clashing/ugly traits: Jack Oates is bald with long sidelocks, a black wrinkled brow, a sullen forehead and hollow eyes, a short hooked nose, hollow cheeks, “his upper lip turned in [...] his under lip so big t’might sweep a manger” – so that it basically looks like that of a horse – a chin growing upwards, a swarthy neck overgrown with hair and a big belly; he has a big robust physique, apart from “his hands, both long, leane, fingered small, seldom the like in any naturall”, big long feet and gouty legs.[133] Jemy Camber is very short with a small head, one ear bigger than the other, flat nose, little lips but “wide of mouth” and has few teeth, little feet but big hands.[134] Lean Leanard is lean and tall but has a little head, one squint eye and “as he goes he holdes his necke awry”, “one hand stands crooked and the other right”.[135] Jack Miller is fat, “grose unto the eye” and his lips are “sodden with his fawling rume”.[136] Will Sommers is lean with hollow eyes[137] and finally Blue John has staring eyes and “his head/ lay on his shoulder still, as sicke and sad”, and he is “splay footed”[138] – that is, he has “a flat, spread out, clumsy foot, especially one which turns outwards” (*OED*).

As was shown earlier, Caliban’s physical disability and ugliness is quite evident and often commented upon, but we need to look at how this feature is sided by perceptions of his mental deficiency or inferiority. A few direct allusions to his foolishness are made, especially in the scenes with Stephano and Trinculo. When Trinculo creeps under Caliban’s gaberdine to find shelter from the storm, the monster thinks he is being pursued by Prospero’s invisible spirits:

> CALIBAN Do not torment me, prithee! I’ll bring my wood home faster.
> STEPHANO He’s in his fit now, and does not talk after the wisest. (II.ii.71-74)

[133] Armin, *A Shakespeare Jestbook*, pp. 56-57.
[134] Armin, *A Shakespeare Jestbook*, pp. 74-75.
[135] Armin, *A Shakespeare Jestbook*, pp. 92-93.
[136] Armin, *A Shakespeare Jestbook*, p. 106.
[137] Armin, *A Shakespeare Jestbook*, p. 120.
[138] Armin, *A Shakespeare Jestbook*, p. 135.

Stephano, unaware of the marvels of the island, assumes that Caliban is not talking sensibly and, by using specifically the noun "wise" in contrast with his performance, he implies that the monster's mind is faulty. As we saw earlier, in fact, wisdom was the emblematic opposite of folly, and this dichotomy was particularly significant in relation to Shakespeare's earlier court fools, and to Armin's works. Caliban's foolishness is remarked upon a little later by Trinculo too, who dubs him "shallow monster" (II.ii.141-142) for being persuaded that Stephano is the man in the moon. "Shallow" in this case points at a person who lacks depth of mind, thought or reasoning,[139] so it implies again Caliban's stupidity. Shakespeare occasionally uses this term to reinforce the meaning of the word "fool": for instance in *The Rape of Lucrece* – "Out, idle words, servants to shallow fools" (l. 1016) – or in *Much Ado About Nothing,* where Borachio says: "What your wisdoms could not discover, these shallow fools have brought to light" (V.i.224-225). In III.ii. Trinculo comments even more straightforwardly on Caliban's idiocy for choosing Stephano as his lord:

> CALIBAN Lo, how he mocks me.Wilt thou let him, my lord?
> TRINCULO 'Lord' quoth he? That a monster should be such a natural! (III.ii.30-33)

Here Trinculo puns on the double meaning of the word "natural": a congenital idiot (or "natural fool") and and an ordinary creature of nature, in playful contrast with Caliban's unnaturalness, as he is a monster. At the same time he signals the need to connect Caliban's bodily deformity with his mental deficiency, something which is done on other occasions throughout the play. An interesting instance of this idea is the fact that Trinculo and Stephano repeatedly call Caliban "moon-calf" (II.ii.104, 135, III.ii.21, 22), a word that can have again two meanings. First it indicates a shapeless mass: Philemon Holland, who translated Pliny's *Natural History* in 1601 used the term as a synonym for "mole", that is "a false conception [...], a lumpe of flesh without shape, without life, and so hard withall, that uneth a knife will

[139] *OED*.

enter and pierce it either with edge or point".[140] Second, "moon-calf" was used to describe a congenital idiot or a born fool.[141] Warburton in 1747 commented that "it was imagined that the Moon had an ill-influence on the infant's understanding [,] hence idiots are called *Moon-Calves*".[142]

Perhaps, however, the most striking allusion to Caliban's deficiency both in body and mind is Trinculo's memorable comment "I shall laugh myself to death at this puppy-headed monster" (II.ii.153-154) when Caliban kneels to swear on the bottle of liquor that he will be a faithful servant to Stephano. This might indeed point at some type of deformity, but not of the kind it has sometimes be taken to mean: rather than pointing at a Caliban literally showcasing a canine head, the sentence could just indicate that he is stupid or "stupid looking".[143] In fact this could be a plain allusion to Renaissance medical descriptions of abnormal types of skulls. The Italian humanist and physician Alessandro Benedetti (1450-1512) claimed that at a public dissection in Padua he had once seen a hard, pain-resistant sutureless skull, one of the type that is usually called *caput caninum* or dog's head.[144] This denomination is due to the fact that animals in general were said to have fewer sutures than men (hence their lower intelligence):[145] the skull of dogs, in particular, as also Aristotle had written, "consists of one single undivided bone".[146] Consequently dogs were occasionally used as a term of comparison for idiocy: Da Monte, describing Ianelus, the Cardinal of Ferrara's fool, wrote that he was

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[140] Pliny the Elder, *The Historie of the World, commonly called The Natural Historie*, Philemon Holland, transl., London: Adam Islip, 1601, (p. 163). This description of Caliban as a shapeless individual recalls the way the Duke of Gloucester is called in 2 *Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI*: respectively "indigested lump" (V.i.155) and "unlicked bear whelp" (III.ii.161-162), which has no shape until his mother forms it.
[141] See *OED*.
[142] William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Works in 8 Volumes*, Volume 1, Alexander Pope and William Warburton, eds., London: 1747, p. 45.
[143] See *OED* and Vaughan and Vaughan's comment in *The Tempest,* The Arden Shakespeare, p. 216, n. 151-152.
[144] Alessandro Benedetti, *Historia Corporis Humanis, Sive Anatomice*, Giovanna Ferrari, ed. and transl., Florence: Giunti, 1998, p. 245.
[145] Goodey, "Blockheads", pp. 168, 178.
[146] Aristotle, *The History of Animals*, D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, transl., Adelaide: The University of Adelaide Library, 2000, III.7.

> less wise than a dog [*minus prudens quam canis*], he was a mimic with a big head that looked like a vegetable and a crippled hand: he was wrathful and always wanted to fight [...], he did not know the name of anyone or anything [...] and I think he did not have a rational soul, as he was like a dog in all operations [*similis cani in omnibus operationibus*][147]

Some authors, such as the German physician Johannes Schenk (1530-1598), listed the suturless skull type among actual monsters such as Pliny's Blemmyes – a legendary headless population from Ethiopia who wore their faces in their chests – people born with horns on their head, conjoined twins or people with two heads. As an example of this monstrous skull type Schenk cites the case of a Venetian child who, other than being affected by a number of other bodily deformities, was also "mindless" (*amens*).[148] Other authors, however, claimed that abnormal skull types, such as that devoid of sutures, were common in far away places. Celsus (25 BC-50 AD) had written that "it is rare for the skull to be solid without sutures; in hot countries, however, this is more easily found; and that kind of head is the firmest and safest from headaches";[149] in the Renaissance other authors conformed to this view, such as the Sicilian Gian Filippo Ingrassia (1510-1580), who applied it to the Aethiopians[150] or Caspar Hofmann (1572-1648) who, in his 1625 commentary on Galen, located abnormal skull types in places where people were different, notably the West Indies.[151] This last work, in particular, comes after the presumptive composition date of *The Tempest* and certainly we cannot demonstrate that Shakespeare knew these particular authors. Still, however, he could have been influenced by early modern tendencies – fuelled by Galenists – to use the association between cognitive impairment and particular characteristics of the skull in order to stereotype the weakest social groups – women, non-Europeans and the lowest ranks (i.e.

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[147] Da Monte, p. 132.
[148] The same case was cited by other authors, most notably Andreas Vesalius who reported, however, that the child's skull was not sutureless but was longer from ear to ear than from front to back. See Johannes Schenck von Grafenberg, *Observationes Medicae de Capite Humano*, Basel: Frobeniana, 1584, pp. 24-25 and Goodey, "Blockheads", p. 177.
[149] Aulus Cornelius Celsus, *On Medicine*, W.G. Spencer, ed. and transl., Heinemann: Harvard University Press, 1938, VIII.2.
[150] Gian Filippo Ingrassia, *In Galeni Librum de Ossibus Commentaria,* Palermo: Maringhi, 1603, p. 66.
[151] Caspar Hofmann, *Commentarii in Galeni de Usu Partium Corporis Humani*, Frankfurt: Aubry, 1625, p. 219.

peasants and slaves) – who were looked down upon by white educated men for not being able, in their view, to think logically or abstractly, being therefore termed foolish.[152] Thus Caliban's monstrosity is, like the character himself, interpretable in different ways simultaneously: on the one hand the puppy-head allusion recalls the fantastic accounts of the legendary *cynocephali*, marvellous creatures with canine heads who were thought to live in the New World;[153] on the other, it refers to a more "clinical" type of monstrosity: an abnormal conformation or deformity of the head – due to the total lack of sutures – which could be connected with congenital witlessness.

So far I have highlighted the biased labels of idiocy other characters thrust upon Caliban. Now I would like to concentrate on his actual performance as a fool. On his first appearance in I.ii, while Caliban attempts to set himself as an innocent victim of Prospero's despotism, Miranda focuses instead on the monster's greatest deficiency:

> MIRANDA Abhorrèd slave,
> Which any print of goodness wilt not take,
> Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee,
> Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
> One thing or other. When thou didst not, savage,
> Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
> A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes
> With words that made them known. But thy vile race,
> Though thou didst learn, had that in't which good natures
> Could not abide to be with; [...]
> CALIBAN You taught me language, and my profit on't
> Is I know how to curse. (I.ii.353-366)

Though Caliban, as part of his civilization process, underwent a good amount of teaching, he could not master all that information in the same way Miranda herself did. In fact, she asserts that he is morally ineducable, being unable to develop a full understanding of good and evil. This incapacity also tampers with his acquisition of language, which for him only serves the purpose of cursing. What is more, however, is that this situation is perceived as stable, in that Caliban is judged incapable of further improvements: Prospero says he is a devil "on whose

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[152] See Goodey, "Blockheads", pp. 174-176.
[153] See Friedman, pp. 15, 198-200.

nature/ nurture can never stick; on whom [his] pains humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost" (IV.i.188-190). As Chakravarti noted, ineducability was one thing both fools and primitive natives shared, in the view of early modern Europeans.[154] Indeed, the degree of learning capability in an individual was one of the factors according to which the seriousness of his foolishness was assessed. The English judge Anthony Fitzherbert in 1534 wrote that "if he have such understanding, that he know and understand his letters, and to read by teaching or information by another man, then it seemeth he is not a sot, nor a naturall idiot"[155] and similar ideas were destined to get more and more importance later on in the century with the work of Thomas Willis (1621-1675) and especially John Locke (1632-1704) on the mentally deficient.[156] Also, considering Renaissance physiognomy, we may note that usually a learning difficulty in an individual was the sign of a cold brain, in terms of humours.[157] As I discussed in the previous section, a cold brain was a consequence of a big head. In this light we may hypothesize that the monstrosity or deformity of Caliban's head lies not only in its lack of sutures but also in its atypical size. If this was the case, also the critical theory that views Antonio Pigafetta's Patagonian giant as a possible source for Caliban could actually be accommodated. Pigafetta, drawing an account of Magellan's travels around the world, described a native saying that he was

> so byg, that the head of one of our men of meane stature came but to his waste. He was of good corporature and well made in all partes of his bodie, with a *large vysage* paynted with dyvers coloures.[158]

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[154] Chakravarti, pp. 224-225.

[155] I am quoting from the first English translation, Anthony Fitzherbert, *The New Natura Brevium*, London: 1652, p. 584. The first edition was published anonymously and in Latin in 1534. Also Jonathan Andrews, "Begging the Question of Idiocy: The Definition and Socio-Cultural Meaning of Idiocy in Early Modern Britain: Part 1", *History of Psychiatry*, 9 (1998), pp. 65-95 (82).

[156] Andrews, "Begging the Question of Idiocy 1", pp. 84-87.

[157] Goodey, *A History of Intelligence*, p. 227.

[158] Italics are mine. The suggestion of Pigafetta's giant as a possible archetype of Caliban was initially Malone's, but it was followed by many later scholars. Shakespeare might have read the account in a translation, in Pietro Martire D' Anghiera, *The Decades of the Newe Worlde or West India*, Rycharde Eden, transl., London: William Powell, 1555, sig. 219r. See Vaughan and Vaughan, *Caliban* and Alden T. Vaughan, "Shakespeare's Indian: The Americanization of Caliban", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 39 (1998), pp. 137-153 (139).

Furthermore, Galenists associated big cold humid heads not only with foolishness but also with dullness and laziness. Pietro D'Abano (1257-1318) wrote that in these individuals "actions are dulled [...] and we look upon big heads as dull, mindless and full of catarrh" and in 1631 Jean Riolan (1577-1657) affirmed that big heads have the "leaden wit [...] of the lazy and somnolent man".[159] Caliban indeed gets reproached for his dilatoriness and lack of zeal. Prospero says to him "come, thou tortoise" (I.ii.318), and orders him: "fetch us in fuel. And be quick, thou'rt best,/ to answer other business" (I.ii.368-369); but the monster himself is aware of his slowness, as he knows Prospero's spirits "torment [him]/ for bringing wood in slowly" so that, for fear, he promises: "I'll bring my wood home faster" (II.ii.71-72). Da Monte discussed in similar terms the impairments of the slaves, a category of which Caliban is a significant representative. He describes their particular skulls as second in his list of nine abnormal "types". As an example he mentions Aesop, who was a slave, and whose skull lacked the rear eminence because of the absence of the lambdoid suture (which, according to Galen runs from one side to the other in the back part of the head): for this reason he was "lazy, deformed and weak of motion" (*piger, et deformis, et debilis ad motum*) but, because he had the frontal eminence, he was at the same time "clever and very wise" (*ingeniosus [...] et prudentissimus*).[160] Also this second quality, though unacknowledged by the rest of the characters, bears a part in the characterization of Caliban.

Even if Caliban had not originally been intended to display physically any animal body parts, certainly beastliness and animal-like traits account for an important part of the character. Not only is he dubbed "tortoise", "puppy", "fish" and "whelp", but also "strange beast" (II.ii.31), "beast" (IV.i.140), "cat" (II.ii.83) and finally "ass" (V.i.299), which he calls

[159] Goodey, "Blockheads", p. 172. D'Abano's work, *Conciliator Controversiarum Quae Inter Philosophos et Medicos Versantur* was first printed in 1472. One reprint came out in 1565.
[160] Da Monte, p. 127; Goodey, "Blockheads", p. 175.

himself when he realizes that his plan was a failure; he says to Prospero "when thou cam'st first/ thou *strok'st me* and made much of me" (I.ii.335);[161] he exhibits a brutish sexuality in attempting to assault Miranda, he lives in a cave, he has long nails to dig (II.ii.167), he howls (II.ii.178), and he prostrates to lick Stephano's shoe as a sign of awe (III.ii.23). While on the one hand Shakespeare wanted to stress the brutishness of the uneducated savage, on the other he also established one more connection with the figure of the fool. In fact, one thing idiots and animals, as well as savages had in common was a supposed lack of understanding, incapability of abstraction and incomprehension of morality.[162] In Galenic terms, for example, a deficiency or a faulty layout of sutures was a characteristic shared both by unhealthy human brains and by animals, as I suggested earlier. Also, in some physiognomy books, such as Arcandam's *Most Excellent Booke* (1564), certain physical characteristics were associated with psychological or personality features in human beings and linked with specific animals which shared similar features. A few of the physical traits Arcandam lists are indicative of "fooles", who are equalled to asses in the animal kingdom.[163] In literature, art and folklore, also, the fool or clown was represented with animal appendixes such as ass's ears – or even an ass's head, as in the case of Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – or a cockscomb, as we saw before, as well as pig's bladders, calf-skins, fox or cow's tails or feathers – as for instance in the morris dance.[164]

Just as Caliban's animal qualities link him with the tradition of the fool, also his devilry accomplishes a similar effect. As is known, Caliban is a "hag-seed" (I.ii.367), the son of the evil witch Sycorax, who first reached the island from Algiers and died long before

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[161] Italics are mine.
[162] Jonathan Andrews, "Begging the Question of Idiocy: The Definition and Socio-Cultural Meaning of Idiocy in Early Modern Britain: Part 2", *History of Psychiatry*, 9 (1998), pp. 179-200 (186-188).
[163] See Arcandam, *The Most Excellent Booke... with an Addition of Phisiognomie*, William Warde, transl., London: James Rowbothum, 1562.
[164] Andrews, "Begging the Question of Idiocy 2", pp. 186-187, Welsford, p. 123, Swain, pp. 67, 85.

Prospero's arrival. Though the identity of his father is not known precisely, Prospero claims that he was "got by the devil himself/ upon [Caliban's] wicked dam" (I.ii.321-322). The magus thus explains Caliban's monstrosity and corrupted morality with the extraordinary circumstances of his birth, which followed the unnatural intercourse between a witch and an incubus. Consequently, according to Prospero, he is "a devil, a born devil, on whose nature/ nurture can never stick" (IV.i.188-189): this statement then symbolically links the two realms of mental deficiency and demonic wickedness. In fact these two issues were sometimes linked in culture and society. For example, while usually governmental commissions applied rational criteria in examinations of alleged idiots – as we saw in the previous section – there were also some cases where demonological theories came into play. Neugebauer reports the case of a woman, Emma de Beston, who in the fourteenth century had undergone an inquisition for idiocy and examiners eventually decided that she was mentally impaired because she had fallen into "the snares of evil spirits".[165] Similarly, Felix Platter, in his discussion of the "alienation of the mind" – a category which includes, among others, inbred foolishness (*stultitia*) or "weakness of mind" – states that "the cause of every alienation of the mind" can be "natural", that is, deriving from a physical affection of the brain or "one preternatural proceeding from an evil spirit".[166]

Even more tellingly, theories of miscegenation with devils and deficiency came together in the myth of the changeling. Changelings were substituted children previously generated by demons who, in the form of *incubi* or *succubi*, stole the semen from humans. As Goodey and Stainton document, starting from the mid-seventeenth century the word "changeling" became interchangeable with "idiot", as faulty children of that type were

[165] Neugebauer, p. 31.

[166] Felix Platter, *Praxeos Medicae*, Basel: König, 1666, p. 89 (first published in six tomes in 1602-1608). I am quoting from the first English translation, Felix Platter, *Platerus Golden Practice of Physick*, Abdiah Cole and Nicholas Culpeper, transl., London: Peter Cole, 1664, p. 29. See also Goodey, "Foolishness in Early Modern Medicine", pp. 298, 301.

automatically to be taken as fools.[167] Such constructions of intellectual disability probably derived from the prominence, at the end of the fifteenth century, of the theological theory of traducianism, which claimed that God infused the rational soul only into the first man, Adam, while later generations got it from their parents. The theory was then used to back up assumptions about the existence of idiots: if the offspring was mentally disabled it meant that something other than the parents was implied in their begetting, namely the devil.[168] Formal discussions of the intellectual disability of changelings started only with John Locke's seminal *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, published in 1690, but even in the previous century opinions were held about these individuals behaving abnormally. Martin Luther in 1566 reported an account of a changeling who "did nothing but feed, and would eat as much as two Clowns, or Threshers, were able to eat [...] when one touched it, then it cried out" and he commented that these children "prosper not, onely they feed and suck". Other reports claimed that these children were "always ailing and [did] not grow", and that they were "without speech".[169] Chances are, therefore, that Caliban's alleged blood relationship to the devil – and not only his own devilish practices – would have justified, in the view of an early-modern audience, his inferiority and perhaps also his initial inability to speak, other than his monstrosity.

So far I have analysed in what ways Caliban stages early modern conceptions of natural folly but now it is time to see if and to what extent his "disability" pairs up with comicality or clownishness, as was the case with Cloten. The problem with Caliban in this sense is that at the beginning of the play he is not set up as a comic character at all. On the

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[167] C.F. Goodey and Tim Stainton, "Intellectual Disability and the Myth of the Changeling Myth", *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences*, 37 (2001), pp. 223-240 (234).
[168] Goodey, *A History of Intelligence*, pp. 258-260
[169] Goodey and Stainton, pp. 228-229.

contrary, it is precisely the initial scene with Prospero and Miranda (I.ii) that stages the most serious traits of the character: the fiend and the innocent savage. All the demonic cursing – which Caliban is proud of – takes place in between this scene and the monster's monologue at the beginning of II.ii, and it coexists with the issue of his undeserved victimization on the part of Prospero. The audience may not do much else than either loathe or pity him: certainly, however, at this stage there is no place for laughter. That is why Caliban's later comic power, which starts showing up with the arrival of Trinculo and Stephano in II.ii, often tends to be overlooked. However, the play stages a clear development of Caliban: his brutish attempt at sexual violence is confined to the past and though his threatening potential is still very much present, it is mitigated by his meddling with the pure comic characters. In particular, as I am now going to show, while Caliban cannot be considered *only* comic, he nevertheless displays a certain degree of conventionality in terms of clownish traits, despite his apparent remoteness from the ordinary, and his belonging to the world of the marvellous and the exotic.

In fact Caliban's particular "folly" in the later scenes is enriched by traits which are exquisitely iconographical. That is the case with his eyes and mouth. In III.ii. Stephano, bidding Caliban to drink, comments that "[his] eyes are almost set in [his] head" (III.ii.8-9), an expression which means that he is almost drunk.[170] David I. Macht saw it as a biblical allusion to *Ecclesiastes* 2:14: "the wise mans eyes *are* in his head, but the foole walketh in darknes",[171] so that it might be a reference to Caliban's not being completely wise, in a moral and religious sense, namely a sinner. However it could also point at the fact that Caliban's

[170] See Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, London: Routledge, 2013.
[171] Macht reads the passage according to the Jewish interpretation: the wise man uses eyes, the chief organs of perception, to observe phenomena of nature. These perceptions are transmitted to the brain, analysed, and eventually converted into action. In the fool this does not happen: "he does not think, but when he gets an eyeful, his sensations are transmitted at once and directly by the shortest and easiest paths to the heart, viscera, glands and muscles. A slave of his emotions, he is truly in darkness intellectually, and falls a prey to hasty and usually harmful reactions. Is not this a most appropriate epithet to apply to Caliban?" (Harold Bloom, ed., *Caliban*, New York and Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1992, p. 53).

eyes are somewhat protruding. If this was the case, this attribute could be interpreted, in the light of Renaissance physiognomy, as a sign of foolishness. Gianbattista della Porta, who in 1586 published his *De Humana Physiognomonia* – becoming the most influential authority on physiognomy in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe – reports indeed Aristotle and Alexander the Great's remarks that prominent eyes are typical of asses, and that anyone who has eyes starting out like them are ignorant – a feature of Caliban that Trinculo brings forward little later, calling him "most ignorant monster" (III.ii.25) – and hard-witted (*insipiens est et durae cervicis*).[172] That is of course a consequence of the Renaissance bias that deficiency of the mind should be associated with abnormal physical traits.[173] For this reason Renaissance artists have sometimes called attention to the idiot's eyes, besides the rest of the stereotypes. Fools with big or bulging eyes are shown for instance in two 1568 prints by Hans Hanberg (fig. 10). Or in Quentin Massys' painting *Ill-Matched Lovers* (fig. 11), the capped fool on the left hand side has crossed eyes. A similar effect is achieved by the image of the open mouth, which is also exploited quite effectively in connection with Caliban. When Stephano bumps into the strange creature made up by Trinculo lying on top of Caliban, he offers to pour sack into the savage's mouth:

> STEPHANO Come on your ways. *Open your mouth.* Here is that which will give language to you, cat. *Open your mouth*. This will shake your shaking, I can tell you, and that soundly. You cannot tell who's your friend. *Open your chaps* again. (II.ii.82-86)[174]

This image is dominant because it marks the union of the three clowns. About the open mouth della Porta writes that it is also a physiognomical sign of foolishness (*stultitia*), stupidity and ignorance.[175] Consequently, for instance, Hyeronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel used this physical trait to portray real or symbolical folly in their paintings. In Bruegel's *Operating the Fool's Stone* (fig. 12), two patients with open mouths are being

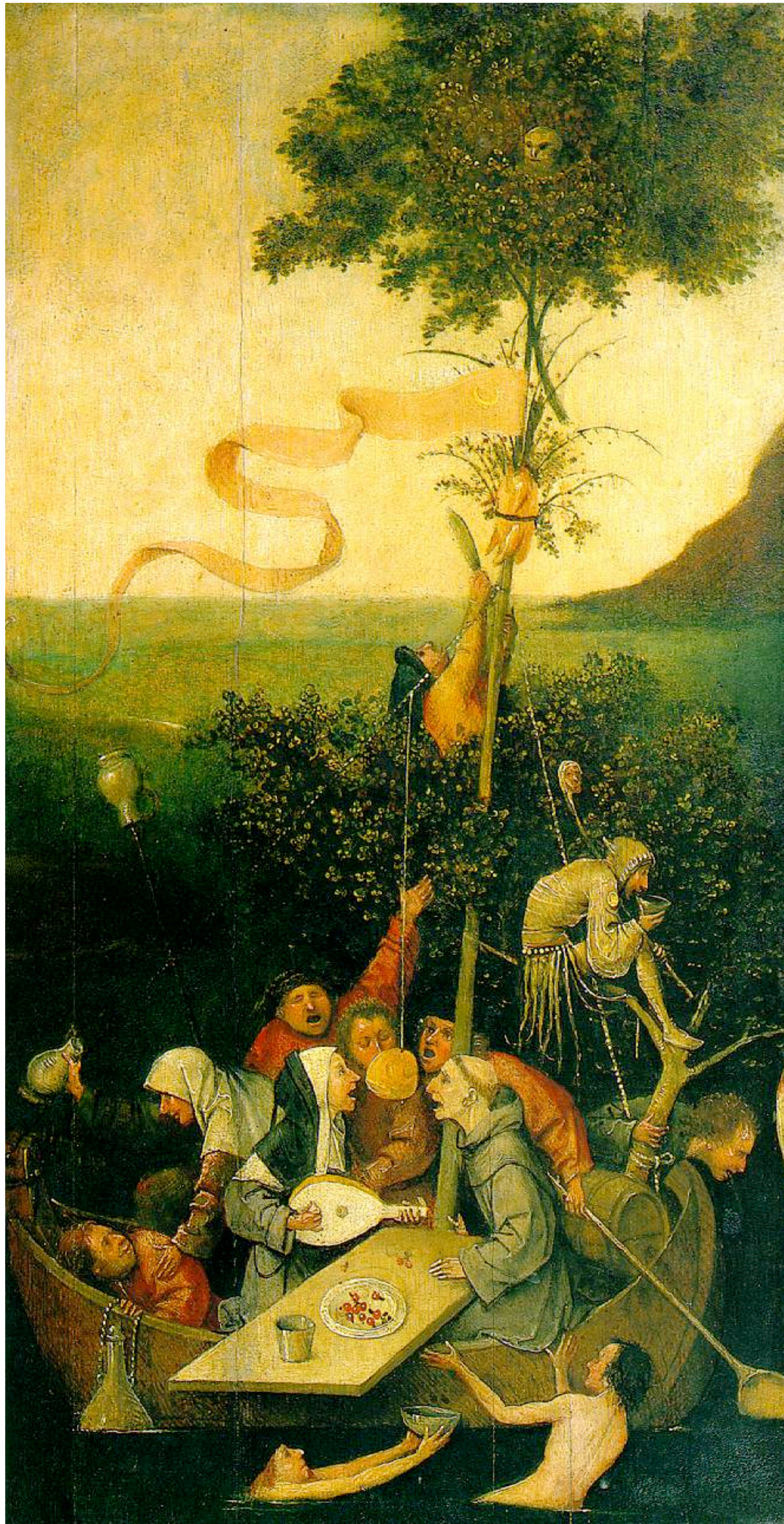
[172] Gianbattista Della Porta, *De Humana Physiognomonia*, Ursellis: Rosa, 1601, p. 388 (first edition, 1586).
[173] See Andrews, "Begging the Question of Idiocy 2", pp. 183-184.
[174] Italics are mine, except in the stage direction.
[175] Della Porta, p. 221.

10. Hans Hanberg, *Fools* (London, British Museum, 1568)

11. Quentin Massys, *Ill-Matched Lovers*
(Washington, National Gallery of Art, 1520-1525)

12. Pieter Bruegel, *Operating the Fool's Stone* (Saint-Omer, France, Musée Sandelin, early 17th century)

13. Pieter Bruegel, *The Cripples* (Paris, Musée du Louvre, 1568)



14. Hieronymus Bosch, *The Ship of Fools* (Paris, Musée du Louvre, 1494-1510)

extracted the stone of folly from their skulls, while others who are gaping too are waiting for their turn; in *The Cripples* (fig. 13) the deficiency of the lame beggars with crutches is suggested by their open mouths, so that once again physical and intellectual deformity are linked. Even more tellingly, in Bosch's allegorical painting of *The Ship of Fools* (fig. 14) a group of four foolish men with open mouths are all trying to eat one suspended wafer, thus suggesting the folly of gluttony. Caliban keeps his mouth open to drink from Stephano's flask and a similar image is recalled by the fact that he later *howls* while singing,[176] thus suggesting a particularly exaggerated movement of the mouth and the protruding of lips, which was also a sign of stupidity in physiognomy.[177]

On top of that, mouths agape, protruding lips and bulging eyes are all typical elements of the carnivalesque, and they are discussed at length by Bakhtin in relation to the grotesque image of the body in Rabelais' work. The grotesque body, he claims, "is not separate from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits".[178] The grotesque is therefore centred on the exaggerated representation of the parts which function as a gateway to and from the outer world – namely, mouth, nose, orifices – and looks "for that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out beyond the body's confines", such as the potbelly or the bulging eyes, which "manifest a purely body tension".[179] However, no element is more exemplary than the gaping mouth, which is enough on its own to represent the idea of the grotesque, and is "the fundamental traditional method of rendering external comic features, as pictured by comic masks, various 'gay monsters' (Mâchecroûte of the Lyon carnival), devils in diableries and Lucifer himself". The gaping mouth is "the open gate leading downward into the bodily underworld", it is

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[176] See Trinculo's comment "A howling monster, a drunken monster!" (II.ii.178).
[177] See Della Porta, p. 218.
[178] Bakhtin, p. 26.
[179] Bakhtin, pp. 316-317.

"related to the image of swallowing, this most ancient symbol of death and destruction".[180] Also, Bakhtin argues, the gaping jaws were a central element in mystery plays, as the audience expected the comic characters (e.g. devils and vices) to emerge from the open hell-mouth, so that it became a symbol of the generation of humour and entertainment.[181] The grotesque, he continues, is also fuelled by all those actions which take place on the border between the body and the world such as immoderate eating and drinking, performance of physiological functions, copulation and pregnancy. Drinking, in particular, has a key role in the making of Caliban a comic character, as it makes him lose control and at the same time it stresses the savage's inexperience of the things of the civilized world. While on the one hand this part of the play exploits the early modern stereotype of the Indians having little familiarity with strong drink,[182] on the other it draws on the Elizabethan and Jacobean conventions of clowning, which often relied on the humour generated by drunkenness. In Shakespeare, drinking is often associated with standard clowns such as Christopher Sly, Bottom, Falstaff, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, or the Porter in *Macbeth*.

The transition of Caliban from a demonic and tragic character to a clown in the storm scene with Stephano and Trinculo coincides with an exceptional accumulation of different levels of grotesqueness. We may spot at least five: on the level of performance Caliban is actually Robert Armin, whose diminutive size and ugly traits naturally connect him with his role as a stage clown; second, the already unattractive Caliban is also a monster, deformed and misshapen; third, with Trinculo lying on top of him under the gaberdine we may either interpret the scene as an image of an even more horrible monster or as a parodic copulation; fourth, the monster also adds to the natural repulsiveness of his face the distorting expression

[180] Bakhtin, pp. 317, 325.
[181] Bakhtin, pp. 348-349.
[182] Baert, p. 54.

of the gaping mouth and finally he drinks until he gets drunk. The comic power of this scene is maximum, with Caliban as the victim and protagonist of that humour. The scene as a whole is even more grotesque for its ambivalent, tragicomic quality. In fact when Caliban, hearing someone approaching, says "I'll fall flat./ Perchance he will not mind me" (II.ii.16-17) and lies – presumably face down – on the ground, he basically enacts a counterfeit death or an abstraction from the real, as Y Gamaury has observed.[183] This may remind us of the scene in *King Lear* where Gloucester falls forward from the brink of an inexistent cliff – thus becoming almost a tragic parody of a parodical suicide[184] – but even more, of the stratagem Falstaff devises at the end of *1 Henry IV* in order to save his own life. Trinculo is deceived in the same way the enemy army is deceived by Falstaff's trick. In fact, it is his words that give shape to the idea of Caliban's act as a sort of death: he says indeed that people back home will pay a lot "to see a dead Indian" (II.ii.33), he explains that this is "an islander that hath lately suffered by a thunderbolt" (II.ii.35-36) and he uses his gaberdine as a shelter because he assumes that, being lifeless, he will not mind ("I took him to be *killed* with a thunderstroke [...] I hid me under the *dead moon-calf*'s gaberdine for fear of the storm" [II.ii.106-110]).[185] A few moments later, however, that apparent death becomes full of life and humour. It actually is a death that gives birth to something else – Stephano wonders indeed if the moon-calf "can [...] vent Trinculos" (II.ii.105) – another motif which is again typical of the grotesque, in bakhtinian terms.[186]

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[183] Martine Y Gamaury, "Le Rire, le Visible et l'Invisible dans *La Tempête* de Shakespeare", in *Tudor Theatre: For Laughs Pour Rire,* Volume 6, Bern and Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002, pp. 231-248 (244).

[184] For a discussion on the illusionary value of the scene in *Lear* see Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Nostro Contemporaneo*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2002, pp. 105-108.

[185] Emphasis is mine.

[186] To illustrate the point he mentions the example of "the famous Kerch terracotta collection [where] we find figurines of senile pregnant hags. Moreover, the old hags are laughing. This is a typical and very strongly expressed grotesque. It is ambivalent. It is pregnant death, a death that gives birth. There is nothing completed, nothing calm and stable in the bodies of these old hags. They combine a senile, decaying and deformed flesh with the flesh of new life, conceived but as yet unformed. Life is shown in its two-fold contradictory process; it is the epitome of incompleteness" (Bakhtin, pp. 27-28; also p. 237).

Finally, there are two more exterior features in Caliban that make him straddle the definitions of savage on the one hand and clown on the other. First, his apparel: Caliban is not a naked savage nor can it be safely assumed that he is covered with hair; we do know, however, that he wears a "cloak" or, more precisely, a "gaberdine".[187] The gaberdine was a long loose coat or a smock frock with long sleeves which could be worn with or without a girdle.[188] The only other character in Shakespeare to wear this type of garment is Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, who shares with Caliban also the multiplicity of functions in the text as marginalized stranger, tragic victim and comic villain with devilish features.[189] The "Jewish gaberdine" (I.iii.111) Shylock says he wears and Caliban's garment, being made of coarse cloth, help defining their social separation from the rest of the characters, who do not wear the same costume.[190] Callaghan also comments that Caliban's gaberdine, a European and not a typical New World robe, nevertheless represents his savagery, given that in Shakespeare's times the indigenous Irish wore similar mantles and were equally seen as wild and subhuman.[191] At the same time, however, the gaberdine reminds us of some of the typical fool's costumes in the age of Shakespeare. In Cotgrave's *A Dictionary of the French and English Tongues*, published the same year *The Tempest* was first performed (1611), the french term *galleverdine* is translated as "a gabbardine; a long coat or cassock of course [=coarse], and (for the most part) motley, or partie-coloured stuffe".[192] The motley, intended as made up

[187] See II.ii.37, 103, 109.
[188] Robert I. Lublin, *Costuming the Shakespearean Stage: Visual Codes of Representation in Early Modern Theatre and Culture*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2011, p. 160.
[189] Russell Brown for instance commented that "in his plan of revenge Caliban is like Shylock but he outdoes his predecessor in his sensitivity to beauty and willingness to kiss the foot of a rival king" (John Russell Brown, *Shakespeare: 'The Tempest'*, London: Edward Arnold, 1969, p. 19). Norhrop Frye (*Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 176) places both Caliban and Shylock in the category of the churlish blocking character of the Greek comedy (*alazon*).
[190] See M. Channing Linthicum, "My Jewish Gaberdine", *PMLA*, 43 (1928), pp. 757-766.
[191] Dympna Callaghan, *Who Was William Shakespeare? An Introduction to the Life and Works*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, p. 290 and Dympna Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage*, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 130.
[192] Randle Cotgrave, *A Dictionary of the French and English Tongues*, London: Adam Islip. 1611 (Channing Linthicum, p. 758).

of coloured patches or woven from variagated threads of wool, was the traditional livery of the court fool though, as Wiles has noted, it was usually in the form of a short garment in iconography. Like the gaberdine, however, the motley was made of a coarse cloth.[193] Mentions of the long motley coat connected with fools are scantier, especially in art, but for instance in the already quoted passage from *Henry VIII* the prologue warns the audience that there will not be a fool "in a long motley coat, guarded with yellow" (Prologue, 16); Lean Leanard, in Armin's *Foole Upon Foole*, wears a "long coate of Frieze" and is "motly warme".[194] There is no way to establish whether or not Caliban's gaberdine was also particoloured, but the shape of the garment still associates him with idiots and real household fools. In fact the plain long coat, as Hotson and Southworth show, was commonly acknowledged as a telltale sign of a witless individual, natural fool or of an artificial fool posing as the innocent fool, and it had been derived from the smock or pinafore usually worn by children in those times: Armin's Blue John, who is dressed in the long blue livery of Christ's Hospital – as may be seen on the frontispiece of *Two Maids* – is a case in point.[195]

The other interesting physical feature of Caliban is the possible colour of his skin. Though the text does not give incontrovertible evidence about it, there are indications that Caliban may be black or dark-skinned. His mother was an Algerian witch, therefore of Moor origins, he is called "earth" (I.ii.316), "filth" (I.ii.348) and "thing of darkness" (V.i.278).[196] Also, in the gypsy language – of which Shakespeare might have had some knowledge, because it was largely spoken in England at the time – the word *Cauliban* or *kaliban* meant indeed "black" or something associated with blackness.[197] That would have implied that

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[193] See *OED* and Hotson, p. 54.
[194] Armin, *A Shakespeare Jestbook*, pp. 50-51. See Wiles, pp. 185-186.
[195] See Hotson, pp. 53-70 and Southworth, ch. 17.
[196] In addition, Vaughan and Vaughan suggest that Caliban's dark hue may be assumed through a comparison between *The Tempest* and the Jacobean play *The Birth of Merlin* (first performed in 1622): here Merlin finds out he is, like Caliban, the son of a devil whose blackness is alluded to in several occasions throughout the text (*The Tempest*, Vaughan and Vaughan, eds. p. 172, n. 320).
[197] Vaughan and Vaughan, *Caliban*, pp. 33-34.

Armin, as a white actor, would have had to paint his face black or to wear a mask to play the part. But even if Caliban had not been conceived as a black-skinned savage, he could still have had his face and/or body painted. Indeed for example Eden, translating Oviedo, reported that

> This *Cacique* [the Indian chief] had a great part of his body *paynted with a blacke colour* which never fadeth: And is much lyke unto that wherwith the Mores paynt them selves in Barberie in token of nobilitie. [...] the principal Indians use theyr payntynges on theyr armes and brestes, but not on theyr vysages, bycause amonge them the slaves are so marked.[198]

Caliban's likely blackness, therefore, could bear on the one hand racial significations and on the other moral ones, in that darkness of complexion was associated in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance with damnation and wickedness. Devils in mystery and morality plays were played by blackened actors, in contrast with virtues and angels,[199] so that Caliban, being a "born devil" himself, as well as a New World savage, may have aptly followed the same tradition.

Yet, on the English stage before Shakespeare blackness and blackface had heavily interacted with the notion of folly, even if such a tradition has been seldom commented upon by scholars. Robert Hornback has shown how in medieval mystery cycles the blackening of the angels' bodies after their fall is often remarked upon as a sign of their folly or witlessness, rather than just their evilness – for example, in the play devoted to the Creation in the Wakefield cycle (c. 1460) the first demon says "Now ar we waxen blak as any coyll [coal],/ and vgly, tatyrd as a foyll [fool]".[200] Also, the fool of Psalm 53 ("Dixit insipiens non est Deus") could be depicted in psalters with black skin.[201] Thus blackness, Hornback argues, "was [...] associated less with evil [...] than with folly, madness and an absence of that divine

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[198] Eden, p. 237. Italics are mine.

[199] Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Performing Blackness on English Stages 1500-1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 2, 20.

[200] George England, Alfred W. Pollard, and Eugen Kölbing, eds., *The Towneley Plays*, London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1966, ll. 136-137. Quoted in Robert Hornback, *The English Clown Tradition from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2009, p. 29.

[201] For example in the Stuttgart Psalter (sig. 15r) or in Bodleian MS Liturg. 153.

gift, the "light" of reason".[202] Such a tendency was consolidated in Renaissance interludes, where the comic foolishness of black-masked devils was their most evident feature. In some of these texts, such as the *Play of Wit and Science* (c. 1534), *The Marriage of Wit and Science* (1569-1570), *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom* (1579) or *The Three Ladies of London* (1584), the everyman character is tempted by a Vice and subsequently his face is blackened: such a transformation usually invites comments on how the colour change implies also a change in wits. For example, in *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom*, the Vice Wantonness, while coaling Wit's face, sings that she will make him a "noddy", a word which indicates both a fool and a black bird.[203] Other than theatrical performances, however, fools and grotesques in blackface were the hallmark of the morris dance, but they were also to be found in the sword dance and May games.[204] Armin himself shows he was perhaps aware of the connection between folly and blackness, in that in *Foole Upon Foole* he depicts his Blue John – the most serious case of idiocy among his fools – "splay footed[,] visage black".[205] Chances are, therefore, that Shakespeare and his audience would have recognized the link between Caliban's foolishness and irrationality – which is so often commented upon – and his looks. The black face or mask was also a characteristic feature of the clownish Harlequin, a stock character of the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, which had been known all over Europe since the 1580s. Harlequin has probably demoniac ancestors, which explains his blackness, but also embodies the traditional

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[202] Hornback, *The English Clown,* p. 31. Prospero too associates darkness with ignorance and brightness with sense or reason in *The Tempest:* "The charm dissolves apace,/ And as the morning steals upon the night,/ Melting the darkness, so their rising senses/ Begin to chase the ignorant fumes that mantle/ Their clearer reason" (V.i.64-68).

[203] *The Marriage Between Wit and Wisdom*, Trevor N.S. Lennam, ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, l. 432. See Hornback, *The English Clown*, pp. 33-42 (esp. 41) and Robert Hornback, "Blackfaced Fools, Black-headed Birds, Fool Synonyms, and Shakespearean Allusions to Renaissance Blackface Folly", *Notes and Queries*, 55 (2008), pp. 215-219.

[204] Chambers, p. 199, Sharp, p. 36 and Robert Hornback, "Extravagant and Wheeling Strangers": Early Blackface Dancing Fools, Racial Impersonation, and the Limits of Identification", *Exemplaria*, 20 (2008), pp. 197–223.

[205] Armin, *A Shakespeare Jestbook*, p. 135.

motif of the comic valet or *zanni*.[206] Caliban shares with him the keenness on lustfulness and deception.

It is Caliban's identity as a natural – and not that as a vicious scheming savage – that predictably determines the way he results comic: he is not the trickster we laugh with but, just as he is humiliated by Prospero in the earlier part, from II.ii onwards he is scorned for his intellectual inferiority by Stephano and Trinculo, who would thus appeal to and exploit the original audience's prejudices against the savage other. Initially, on their first appearance on the island, their sole presence is enough to enrich Caliban's permanent folly with a further performance of irrationality or madness, in that he is immediately caught in a fit of persecution mania. The delusion that Stephano and Trinculo are Prospero's servants with the mission of harming him is accompanied by wild rantings: "do not torment me! O!" (II.ii.56), "The spirit torments me! O!" (II.ii.64), "Do not torment me, prithee" (II.ii.71). Thus the natural fool temporarily becomes a lunatic as well, maximizing the contrast between reality and his perception of it and also somehow darkening the tone of his foolishness. Once the fit is over, dismissed by the intervention of Stephano, Caliban's irrationality is fuelled once again, but this time by the effect of drunkenness. The audience laughs at Caliban's inconstancy of opinion, namely at how little it takes for him to switch from believing that those unknown fellows are evil spirits that "Prosper works upon" (II.ii.81) to the exact opposite:

> CALIBAN These be fine things, an if they be not spirits.
> That's a *brave god*, and bears *celestial* liquor.
> I will kneel to him. (II.ii.114-116)[207]

In what becomes a comic parody of New World natives' alleged intellectual incapacity to recognize true faith, Caliban temporarily neglects his god Setebos to follow a sot instead,

[206] See Welsford, pp. 287-293.
[207] Italics are mine.

which he believes has "dropped from heaven" (II.ii.136) on the grounds that he carries with him a "liquor [that] is not earthly" (II.ii.124), a liquor which leaves him so idiotically spellbound that for as many as thirty-three lines, while Stephano and Trinculo are talking, he does not utter a single line (from II.ii.81 to II.ii.114). When he recovers, he promises he will worship his new god in the most reverential ways he knows but which finally result just grotesque: "I'll swear upon that bottle" (II.ii.123), "I will kiss thy foot" (II.ii.148) and, later on the already recalled "let me lick thy shoe" (III.ii.23). In the meantime, Stephano and Trinculo pretend they are seconding his distorted view of them while actually deriding him – interestingly, however, unlike Cloten's lords, they never use asides, as they are confident enough that whatever they say is just out of Caliban's depth. When Caliban assumes Stephano has fallen from heaven, the drunken butler lets him believe so, a move which highlights his naivety even more:

STEPHANO Out o'th' moon, I do assure thee. I was the man i'th' moon when time was.
CALIBAN I have seen thee in her, and I do adore thee.
My mistress showed me thee, and thy dog and thy bush. (II.ii.137-140)

While Stephano is busy attending to Caliban's overenthusiastic servility, the task of satirizing on the savage's behaviour is delegated to Trinculo, whose jesting principally relies on the hammering recurrence of the term "monster" – often repeated multiple times in the same line of dialogue – plus a varying qualification. In this sense, we may say that an important part of the way the two clowns look down on Caliban is through laughter at his deformity, a comic device that – especially given the insistence placed upon it – stirs mixed feelings of amusement and bitterness. As Chris Holcomb shows, rhetoricians of the time were split between those who thought that targeting the deformed or the disabled definitely exceeded the boundaries of decorous jesting – the majority – considering it inappropriate to laugh at

somebody's misfortunes, and those who thought it was acceptable.[208] In the case of Caliban, humour explicitly directed at his deformity is probably the least effective among the range of jests of which he is victim. With him, we have a problem that with Cloten we did not have: we do not loathe him completely. On the contrary, because we are occasionally led to reflect on his role as a powerless victim, and to a certain extent we pity also his poor shape, rather than laugh wholeheartedly at it – something which the characters on stage do, instead. Trinculo's comment that he will laugh "*to death*" at the "puppy-headed monster" (II.ii. 153-154) not only suggests the great humour of a scene where the jester himself cannot but burst into laughter, but it also testifies to a darkened comic vision on Shakespeare's part, as also Richman has claimed,[209] especially considering that the adjective "puppy-headed" taken either literally or figuratively points also at the idea of monstrosity (other than foolishness, as I showed earlier).

Trinculo continues his jesting campaign by voicing what lies at the core of the spectator's amusement in this scene: not so much Caliban's shape but the absurdity of his behaviour:

TRINCULO A most ridiculous monster, to make a wonder of a poor drunkard! (II.ii.166)

It is right at this point, after the audience has been largely entertained by Caliban's clumsy humorous actions that the savage resumes his former poetical potential:

CALIBAN I'll show thee the best springs [...] (II.ii.159)
I prithee, let me bring thee where crabs grow,
And I with my long nails will dig thee pig-nuts,
Show thee a jay's nest, and instruct thee how
To snare the nible marmoset. I'll bring thee
To clust'ring filberts, and sometimes I'll get thee
Young scamels from the rock. (II.ii.166-171)

(*Sings drunkenly*)
Farewell, master; farewell, farewell! [...]

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[208] For example, Giovanni della Casa (*Galateo of Manners and Behaviour*, 1576) and Thomas Wilson (*The Art of Rhetoric*, 1560) belonged to the first group, Simon Robson (*Courte of Civill Courtesie*, 1582) to the second (see Holcomb, pp. 120-121, 128). See also Andrew Stott, "The Fondness, the Filthiness": Deformity and Laughter in Early-Modern Comedy, *The Upstart Crow: A Shakespeare Journal*, 24 (2004), pp. 15-24 (17-18).
[209] Richman, p. 22.

> No more dams I'll make for fish,
> Nor fetch in firing
> At requiring,
> Nor scrape trenchering, nor wash dish.
> Ban' ban' Cacaliban,
> Has a new master. – Get a new man!
> Freedom, high-day! High-day, freedom! Freedom high-day, freedom! (II.ii.176-186)

These lines – together with the later "be not afeard [...] The isle is full of noises" (III.ii.138) famous speech – strike an emblematic contrast between the sensitivity of the savage and the hollow clowning of the drunkards. Still, however, the slapstick comedy context in which such lines are inserted is enough to downscale the intensity of their dramatic potential, as if their implications were just over the top for such a laughable situation. Caliban employs the best descriptions of nature he is capable of to celebrate not so much freedom but a new enslavement – this time not to a crafty powerful sovereign, but to a drunken clown. Criticism is usually not inclined to calling Caliban a "fool" but actually, from his encounter with Stephano and Trinculo, his actions lose credibility, in that he is intelligent enough to plan the overturn of Prospero's command, but he is not able to judge the material and intellectual skills of his accomplices in that enterprise – at least not until their attempt miserably fails. In what looks like a stock clowning routine of drama where the group of lower characters comically mimics the main action of the play – namely the colonization of the island (consequent to a violent overthrow of the previous political power) and the usurpation of power pursued by Antonio and Sebastian – Caliban is part of both the main and the comic plot. In both cases, however, he cannot aspire to being more than just a subject: in the comic plot he is even a baser subject than he used to be before, given the social level of his masters. That is comic and tragic at the same time, as also the passage above clearly exemplifies. The freedom song he sings provides entertainment both to the characters onstage and to the audience, because it symbolically seals the farcical pact and because Caliban sings drunkenly while (possibly) faltering and every now and then hiccuping – the "Ban', ban', Cacaliban"

line (II.ii.183) may be indeed onomatopoeic. Yet, while Stephano and Trinculo laugh at him, what Caliban actually describes in his song is a situation of painful oppression and a passionate ideal of freedom as his supreme aim, so that he stirs contrasting emotions in the spectator: derision, feelings of superiority and loathing but also bitterness and pity.

In the following scene where the trio appears (III.ii) Caliban's drunkenness and his bickering with Trinculo emphasise the whiny childish side of him, as he begs Stephano to protect him using hilariously overemphatic titles of respect:

> CALIBAN How does *thy honour*? Let me lick thy shoe. I'll not serve him; he is not valiant. (III.ii.23-24)
>
> Lo, how he mocks me! Wilt thou let him, *my lord*? (III.ii.30-31)
>
> Lo, lo, again! Bite him to death, I prithee. (III.ii.34)
>
> I do beseech *thy greatness* give him blows [...]
> He shall drink nought but brine, for I'll not show him
> Where the quick freshes are. (III.ii.65-68)[210]

Caliban's cursing and violent self starts coming out again around the middle of the scene, when he starts openly insulting Trinculo – "What a pied ninny's thus? Thou scurvy patch!" (III.ii.61) – and he relishes the details of the several possible physical tortures he dreams of putting Prospero through: "thou mayst knock a nail into his head" (III.ii.62), "thou mayst brain him [...] or with a log/ batter his skull, or paunch him with a stake,/ or cut his weasand with a knife" (III.ii.89-92). The prospect of Prospero's destruction becomes again a pretext for more clowning as he associates plotting for his previous master's death with merriment:

> CALIBAN Thou mak'st me merry; I am full of pleasure.
> Let us be jocund. Will you troll the catch
> You taught me but while-ere? (III.ii.118-120)

Caliban's serious and focused attitude at getting the island back is finally ridiculed once again as he reenters in IV.i "*all wet*" and covered in scum – after Ariel has led him and his

[210] Italics are mine.

companions into a stinky and "filthy-mantled pool" (IV.i.182) – and Stephano and Trinculo acknowledge his instructions by turning him into a living clothes hanger:

STEPHANO	Monster, lay to your fingers. Help to bear this away where my hogshead of wine is [...] Go to, carry this.
TRINCULO	And this.
STEPHANO	Ay, and this. (IV.i.249-253)

More chance for comedy is provided given that immediately after these lines Prospero's spirits enter and chase him, as he is probably urged to run up and down the stage clumsily holding a bulky stack of clothes.

Analysing Caliban as a fool and comic character – a role he plays for as long as four acts – shows us a multiplicity of facets. Like the theatrical Vice (and the stage devils of medieval pageants) he combines devil-like qualities and wishes of upward mobility with stock clowning and slapstick. His social identity as a slave-servant also conventionally links him with such a tradition, as well as with that of the clownish servant, who is so typical in Shakespeare and in the literature of the period.[211] He is staged partly as a natural idiot but at the same time he provides a bitter criticism on the condition of the slave, so that he also retains something of the previous court fools' function as social commentator. Plus, he works as the comic villain of the play: the trio of clowns here are indeed the only ones who are – to a certain extent – allowed to create disorder and consciously endanger Prospero's strategy. Without them the play would be entirely filled with unaware and passive victims of Prospero's revenge and no tension would be created. On the contrary, even though Prospero knows about their plan, his reaction shows he has a radically different attitude towards them than he has towards the Neapolitans. To face his former enemies he just plays with them, simulating the tempest and sending Ariel in the form a Harpy to perform a magic trick before

[211] Wiles explains how the convention of the Vice becoming household servant to the protagonist was initiated in John Skelton's moral interlude *Magnificence* (1533) and later followed by other plays of the same kind: "the Vice/servant proved a useful figure when writers tried to weld the indigenous comic tradition onto neo-classical plots which gave a pivotal role to the comic slave" (Wiles, pp. 3-4). For a comprehensive discussion of the clown servant in Shakespeare see Videbæk, pp. 13-22.

their bewildered eyes; on the contrary he reserves a much more harmful treatment for those who plot against his life, even if they are just three fools to his eyes:

> PROSPERO Go, charge my goblins that they grind their joints
> With dry convulsions, shorten up their sinews
> With agèd cramps, and more pinch-spotted make them
> Than pard or cat o' mountain. (IV.i.256-259)

3.3 Cloten and Caliban: disability, depravity and devilish mothers

As we have seen so far, being both conceived as natural fools, though at different degrees of gravity, Cloten and Caliban share the way they provide entertainment to the audience – namely they become the target of others' scorn – and their foolishness is constructed with similar implications regarding the monstrous conformation of their brains. Also, they occupy a similar place in society: the natural fool and the savage slave are categories alike in that they are not recognized any rights, responsibilities or public authority. We have seen how Cloten's presumptive honour is little more than a nominal feature, as in fact nobody but his mother acknowledges it. Caliban, for his part, used to rule upon the island before Prospero's arrival, and that power represents his mother's legacy. The fact that he is subsequently deprived of it can be inscribed in early modern debates on the natives' intellectual capacities and their right to property. Indeed, as Chakravarti notes, the dominican Francisco de Vitoria (1483-1546) for instance, though opposing the campaign of colonization, admitted that the natives' land could be taken over if they were found to be *insensati* or *amentes*, that is brutes or idiots.[212] Moreover, both Cloten and Caliban, though displaying a lechery that is consistent with early modern ideas on the fool and the wild man, are nevertheless barred from marrying and having any offspring – Cloten is killed before finding Imogen and giving vent to his lust on her, Caliban is stopped by Prospero just in time before he can finalize his rape – so that

[212] Francisco De Vitoria, *De Indiis et de Juri Belli: Reflectiones* (1532), quoted in Chakravarti, p. 220.

they are even denied the right of propagating their own lineage. While on the one hand failure to beget children was indeed one of the criteria used by authorities to give a legal definition of idiocy,[213] on the other the fear that idiocy could be passed on to one's offspring was at the basis of the idea of the unsuitability of marriage for fools.[214]

Cloten and Caliban, however, have other common traits. Felix Platter maintained that *stultitia originalis*, that is deficiency from birth – that was physiognomically displayed by a head either too small or too big – "proceeds [...] from the Seed of the parents, who either were Fools themselves, or their seed had contracted some fault".[215] We have already considered how Caliban's demoniac paternity could have some bearing on the character's alleged deficiency. In fact, however, there is no proof that Caliban's father is actually the devil, as that is only Prospero's claim based on a biased view of the monstrous savage and especially of his immorality. While Caliban has a clear picture of his mother, he never mentions his father, as if he was in some sense "unfathered". Thus he is suitably called "moon-calf", as we saw, which according to Pliny was a monster generated by a woman alone.[216] Also, early modern discussions of monstrous births pointed out how the imagination of the mother and what she was thinking about when she was pregnant determined the particular shape the baby would take (a phenomenon known as "maternal impression").[217] The identity of Cloten's father, on the other hand, is not known: the introductory scene of the play just tells us that the Queen his mother is a widow whom Cymbeline has lately married.

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[213] McDonagh, pp. 86-87.

[214] For example Paulus Zacchias in 1621, speaking of the deaf and the dumb, which he accounts among the most serious cases of intellectual impairment, says that they "ought to abstain from marriage not only because they do not understand the end of marriage, but also for the good of the commonwealth, because there is evidence that they beget children like themselves, and it profits the commonwealth that people sound and in every respect perfect are born, not such strikingly impaired ones" (Cranefield and Federn, "Paulus Zacchias on Mental Deficiency", p. 17).

[215] Platter, *Praxeos Medicae*, Basel: König, 1666, p. 105 (first published in six tomes in 1602-1608). In Culpeper's translation, p. 35.

[216] See Pliny, p. 163 and above, 3.2.

[217] Wes Williams, *Monsters and their Meanings in Early Modern Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 18-20.

Janet Adelman has defined Cloten an “experiment in female parthenogenesis”, whose encounter with Guiderius represents a chance for the latter to prove his masculinity and identity as father’s (and true) heir in the victory against the mother’s heir.[218] So, both in the case of Caliban and in that of Cloten the father is a missing or baffling figure. What is more, however, is that these mothers are also very similar, insofar as they both meddle with dark arts. Sycorax was a “foul witch” (I.ii.259) who performed “mischiefs manifold and sorceries terrible” (I.ii.265), “earthy and abhorred commands” (I.ii.274). The Queen in *Cymbeline* is also an evil witch-like figure – even though she is never called explicitly so in the text – who knows how to prepare portentous potions and uses them to manipulate people.

> QUEEN [To Cornelius] Hast thou not learn’d me how
> to make perfumes, distil, Preserve – yea, so
> That our great king himself doth woo me oft
> For my confections? Having thus far proceeded,
> Unless thou think’st me devilish, is’t not meet
> That I did amplify my judgement in
> Other conclusions? I will try the forces
> Of these thy compounds on such creatures as
> We count not worth the hanging, but none human,
> To try the vigour of them, and apply
> Allayments to their act, and by them gather
> Their several virtues, and effects. (I.v.12-23)

In the play she has Cornelius prepare a poisonous potion in order to kill Imogen, but she does not realize it is actually a sleeping potion. Besides, on her deathbed she confesses that she has prepared “a mortal mineral” (V.vi.50) in order to take Cymbeline’s life and replace him with Cloten as ruler. When the Second Lord, speaking of Cloten, expresses amazement at the fact “that such a crafty devil as his mother/ should yield the world this ass!” (II.i.51-52), not only does he hint at the fact that intelligent parents can give birth to fools[219] but he also gives us a clue to interpret also Caliban’s irrationality, as in both cases the fool was born from a faulty

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[218] Janet Adelman, “Masculine Authority and the Maternal Body”, in Ryan, Kiernan ed., *Shakespeare: The Last Plays*, London: Longman, 1999, pp. 107-127 (113).

[219] Such an incident was remarked upon, among others, by Platter (see above) and also Juan Huarte (1529-1588), who wrote: “of wise parents, are born foolish children; and of foolish parents, children very wise; [...] And amongst children of one self father and mother, one prooveth simple, and another wittie”. The reason is that “a man is caried away with many imaginations, during the carnall act: and hence it proceedeth that the children prove so divers” (Juan Huarte, *The Examination of Mens Wits*, London: Adam Islip, 1594, pp. 306-307).

woman whose imagination was corrupted as a consequence of her devilish practices and thoughts.

The motif of the fool as a mother's son seems to be traditional: it is reflected for instance also in Armin's narration of the story of Blue John – who used to have a blind mother, Alice, but no father[220] – and even more interestingly, as I will discuss shortly, it is at the core of the whole of *A Nest of Ninnies*. This makes sense if we consider that the notion of "intellectual disability" in the early modern period could be *gendered*, as well as socially and racially biased. Women, regardless of their social rank, were seen as less rational and therefore inferior to men. Aristotle in his *Politics* had claimed that "the male is by nature better fitted to command than the female"[221] because in the woman the "deliberative part" of the soul, that is the rational soul, is "without full authority".[222] In *The Examination of Mens Wits* (1594) Juan Huarte wrote that God, "filling" both man and woman "with wisedome [...] infused the lesser portion into her" and that "the natural composition which the woman had in her braine, is not capable of much wit, nor much wisedome".[223] In some medical discourses, then, women were deemed to have smaller brains with fewer and narrower sutures – which indicated a poorer drainage effect – excessively moist heads or harder skulls, all of which determined some kind of cognitive impairment.[224] Goodey also notes how female characteristics in men denoted mental torpor or weakness:[225] for example, in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* Cassius labels Caesar "a man of such a feeble temper" (I.ii.131) and later he speaks about his authority and its influence on the people:

CASCA 'Tis Caesar that you mean; is it not, Cassius?
CASSIUS Let it be who it is; for Romans now

[220] Armin says that after his mother's death Blue John was kept in Christ's Hospital "as a fostered fatherlesse childe". Armin, *A Shakespeare Jestbook*, p. 137.
[221] Aristotle, *Politics*, book I, 1259b.
[222] Aristotle, *Politics,* book I, 1260a.
[223] Huarte, second proeme.
[224] See Goodey, "Blockheads", p. 174.
[225] Goodey, *A History of Intelligence*, p. 131.

Have thews and limbs like to their ancestors;
But woe the while, our fathers' minds are dead,
And we are govern'd with our mothers' spirits;
Our yoke and sufferance show us womanish. (I.iii.79-83)

As concerns the physiological reason why fools are mothers' sons, Huarte gives us an explanation. He maintains indeed that every new life is formed by the combination of the mother's seed and the father's: of the two seeds, however, only one is dominant, which is the one that "forms" the child, while the other functions merely as nourishment. The engendering seed and the nourishing one can be equally the mother's or the father's, but depending on the situation the result is different:

> the man who is shaped of the womans seed, cannot be wittie, nor partake abilitie through the much cold and moist of that sex. Whence it becommeth manifest, that when the child prooueth discreet and prompt, the same yeeldeth an infallible token, that he was formed of his fathers seed. And if he shew blockish and untoward, we inferre, that he was formed of the seed of his mother.[226]

Cloten and Caliban are particularly interesting examples of natural fools. While on the one hand they are staged through similar constructions of cognitive impairment, on the other they can also be mapped out on alternative notions of folly. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance natural folly was not necessarily seen as a negative condition. In church teaching the allegorical figure of the idiot as a denier of faith was indeed complemented by St. Paul's idea of the fool as an innocent ignorant whose relationship with God was not corrupted by the force or reason and wisdom:

> If any man among you seemeth to bee wise in this world, let him become a foole, that he may be wise. For the wisedome of this world is foolishnesse with God. (I Cor. 3: 18-19)

A similar idea was proposed by thinkers such as Nicholas de Cusa and Paracelsus,[227] but it was also present in mystery cycles, where Christ himself, scorned by his torturers, was seen as the most illustrious bearer of pauline folly.[228] This is not, however, the case of Cloten and

[226] Huarte, pp. 316-317.
[227] Respectively in *Idiota de Sapientia et de Mente* (1450; first translated into English in 1650 with the title *The Idiot in Four Books*) and *De Generatione Stultorum* (1530; see Cranefield, p. 71-72); see Tim Stainton, "Reason's Other: The Emergence of the Disabled Subject in the Northern Renaissance", *Disability and Society*, 19 (2004), pp. 225-243 (228) and Goodey, "Foolishness in Early Modern Medicine", p. 294.
[228] See Billington, pp. 18-20.

Caliban. Their mental and, in the case of Caliban, physical infirmity is accompanied by neither holiness nor innocence but by evil depravity – represented by bestial instincts, lechery and relish in violence, both with words and actions – a precise intention to create disorder and a willingness to kill. That is why they are (potentially dangerous) villains in their respective plays, as well as fools, and both are given demoniac titles: Caliban is a "born devil" and "demi devil", and Cloten is called "irregulous devil" (IV.ii.317). Tim Stainton has noted how in the fourteenth century, with the emergence of a clear distinction between the natural fool and the artificial fool, this second type was the one which the Church connected with the devil or the spreading of evil, while the first was the innocent. Both of these, however, were metaphorical conceptions of the fool. Similarly, at the end of the fifteenth century Sebastian Brant in his *Ship of Fools* represented the fool uniquely as a sinner and social offender, but not as a disabled subject, and it is only a few years later with Erasmus that a faint interest in the actual weak-minded starts to arise. Yet Erasmus, as I also showed in chapter 1, does not see congenital idiots as morally degenerate individuals: the depraved are the wise, while real fools in his view are just happy, because they are not touched by worldly worries.[229] Stainton and McDonagh interestingly purport that, to see a conflation of the discourse on natural folly with that on man's sin and depravity we have to wait for Armin's *A Nest of Ninnies*[230] which was published, as we have already recalled, in 1608 as an extended version of *Foole Upon Foole.* In the narrative frame to the jestbook, the philosopher Sotto explains to the World why she is pregnant with six fools:

> See World in whose bosome ever hath abundance beene powred, what thy imps of impietie bee, for as they are all for the most part, as these which I will present to thee in my glasse prospective, mark them well, and see what thou breedst in thy wantonesse, sixe Children like thee, not the Father that begat them, where were they nursed, in folly? Fed with the flottin milke of nicetie and wantonesse, curdled in thy wombe of water and bloud, unseasoned, because thy mother bearing temper was ever untrue, farre from the rellish of right breede, and it is hard that the taste of one Apple should distaste the whole lumpe of this defused Chaios, but marke me and my glasse, see into some (and in them thy

[229] See Stainton, pp. 228-230.
[230] Stainton, p. 231 and McDonagh, p. 140.

> selfe) whom I have discride, or describde these sixe parts of folly in thee, thou shalt see them as cleare as day, how mistie thy clouds be, and what rancknesse rains from them.[231]

Moreover, Sotto, at the end of each fool's section, exploits the anecdotes he has just told to attack the moral folly of real people living in the world. For example in the jest of the quince pie, which Jack Oates steals after the cook has struggled to find the ingredients, the fool symbolizes the "fooles [...] most artificiall" who squander everything their parents industriously accumulated and "doe such apish tricks, that rapine, ruine and a thousand inconveniences follow"[232]. Or Blue John's visits to St Paul's Church, where he listens to the Dean's sermon and expects from the clergyman some pocket money, signify "many who come to Church to meete acquaintance, more then for piety, and will sooner sell the Church for mony, then pawne ought to underprop it".[233] So, as Stainton and McDonagh state, *A Nest of Ninnies* depravity and intellectual disability are certainly linked. Yet – it is important to note – they are also displaced onto separate individuals: in fact it is the World who embodies depravity and moral corruption and, being faulty, all she can give birth to is six fools. Besides, let us not forget that the moralizing narrative frame to the work was added only in its 1608 edition: the 1605 version was simply a collection of unlinked stories of natural fools. Given that nothing changes in the single stories between the two editions, reading *A Nest of Ninnies* we realize that while the World is a depraved woman, the six unfathered fools are nothing like their mother in this sense: on the contrary, if we set them aside from the narrative frame – where they become Sotto's inspiration to comment on the actual corruption of the wise – it is clear how they are portrayed as more or less innocent simpletons. They may be considered "pure" fools in the sense that whatever they do is out of playfulness or idiocy: their detachment from reality leads them to be scorned, but they never mean to do any

[231] Armin, *A Shakespeare Jestbook*, pp. 54–55.
[232] Armin, *A Shakespeare Jestbook*, p. 73.
[233] Armin, *A Shakespeare Jestbook*, p. 146.

deliberate harm to those around them. If they cause any trouble, they are forgiven by their masters on the grounds of their witlessness and they usually get away without any punishment.[234] That is precisely why Caliban and Cloten are different from them: not only are these conceived of – for different reasons – as natural fools, but they also inherited moral corruption from their mothers, who are not allegorical characters, like Armin's World, but living incarnations of evil. I think that Shakespeare with these two characters achieved the final step that the literature before him had aspired to but had not reached, the aim that Armin had almost attained one or two years before Shakespeare composed *Cymbeline*. Shakespeare's advancement in the staging of folly might be considered therefore an additional fruit of the "collaboration" with his fellow actor. The same professional partnership which previously gave rise to the court fool as a moraliser and "persecutor of vice"[235] results now in Cloten and Caliban, who do not so much "persecute" corruption as savagely *pursue* it.

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[234] Peter Cockett ("Performing Natural Folly: the Jests of Lean Leanard and the Touchstones of Robert Armin and David Tennant", *New Theatre Quarterly*, 22 (2006), pp. 141-154) singles Lean Leanard out, as he is described as a more aggressive fool than the others: he is able to start a brawl with himself while playing cards on his own, but also to hit the "country Plow Jogger" who daubs his head with shoe wax (Armin, *A Shakespeare Jestbook*, p. 98); he eats the dairy supplies in the cellar and runs away, he steals and eats a hawk with all the feathers and, when he sets a wheelbarrow on fire and nobody comes to help him, he decides to throw it into the hay barn. However his mischiefs, like Jack Oates', cannot be classified as serious or sinful misdeeds resulting from the workings of a wicked mind. Armin himself comments on the wheelbarrow episode in these terms: "such is the envy of fooles, who seeing none would help him, thought to doe them mischiefe, which he did, but not much" (Armin, *A Shakespeare Jestbook*, p. 102).

[235] Van Es, *Shakespeare in Company*, p. 180.

4. Armin's last fools in Shakespeare: drawing conclusions

My work stemmed from the question of what the place of laughter was in each of Shakespeare's late romances. More specifically, I have narrowed down my research to the roles written for the leading comedian of the King's Men in those years, Robert Armin. Now, in the light of what has been discussed so far, it is time to address another issue, or rather two. If these four plays belong to the same group and are so strongly linked to each other for tone and themes, can we spot any analogies or regularities between some or perhaps all of those comic characters (besides those which have already been taken into account in the closing sections of chapter 2 and 3)? Moreover, what are the consistencies and, more interestingly, the differences between the last characters of Robert Armin in Shakespeare and the previous ones, namely those from Touchstone to Apemantus?

As my analysis has shown, the characters created for Armin in Shakespeare's romances are not "fools" in the standard meaning of the term, pointing at the professional entertainer in motley that used to be the hallmark of the actor a few years before. Technically, their dramatic function is that of the "clown", not in the sense of the standard country bumpkin, but as a broader label for the character who, in one way or another, brings laughter to a play. Yet, Boult, Cloten, Autolycus and Caliban can be suitably called "fools" for reasons that go beyond the carnivalesque attitude they share with their predecessors in cap and bells and with the figure of the fool in traditional folklore. They are "fools" also because each embodies a precise manifestation of what the early modern culture viewed as folly. As we have seen, Boult and Autolycus embody the folly of pandering and begging or cozening, while Cloten and Caliban stage natural folly combined with the folly of sin and of the thirst for violence. Thus, ultimately, they are all linked to the same negative idea of folly as

depravation and vice, a very serious trait in the characters that stresses a dark, tragic nature pairing up with the comic one. Not just the lack but specifically the intentional rejection of ethical principles associates them with the devil, his practices and the idea of him as the greatest fool, according to the moral and religious teachings of the time. Throughout the previous chapters, I have often pointed out how specific features of these characters, such as the use of asides, declaratory speeches and the crafty plotting or scheming against others stress the link between them and the former stage Vice. A further link should be now emphasised. The medieval stage devil and the later Vice were the result of a balance between wickedness or sinfulness – of the specific kind suggested by their telltale name, e.g. Mischief, Ignorance, Pride, Folly, Idleness, Envy etc. – and the power of mirth-making in the play. From such a character both the Shakespearean villain and the clown or fool were derived. The difference is that the former dwelt on the Vice's evil machinations and the desire of harming others, while still retaining some of his typical glee and histrionic attitude;[1] the latter, on the contrary, expanded on his humour as well as his musical and improvisational abilities while leaving his deadly wrongdoing almost totally behind,[2] only in a few cases downscaling it to merry tricks against gullible victims – as in the case of Launcelot Gobbo playing "confusions" with Old Gobbo, or Feste making fun of jailed Malvolio. The point, however, is that usually the clown does not call for a proper moral judgment of his actions – even if minor vices may occasionally be remarked upon, as in the case of Launcelot Gobbo who, according to Shylock, is "a huge feeder,/ snail-slow in profit, and he sleeps by day/ more than the wildcat" (II.v.45-47) and has impregnated a Moor. That is because his contribution to the plot is normally limited to mirth making – or, at the very most, to acting as

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[1] Maurice Charney, *Shakespeare's Villains*, Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012, p. xv.
[2] Goldsmith, p. 18.

messengers, a task they may or may not be successful in[3] – but the duty of creating disorder is delegated to others. For this reason, the clown is usually marginal to the plot: that is especially true of many of Kemp's roles, but also of Armin's court fools and his smaller roles; these are linked to the plot because they meddle with the major characters and, offering their sarcastic comments on the action, they certainly influence the overall tone and the audience's judgment of what is going on. Generally, however, they have no concrete power on the events: the example of Lear's Fool, who is finally forced to give up on healing his king, is a case in point.

Shakespeare's late plays, instead, place the clown in a different position. Boult and the Bawds in *Pericles*, just like Cloten in *Cymbeline* stand as characters who complicate things for the heroine and threaten her well-being; Caliban attempts a rape and leads an insurrection; Autolycus is the most benign of the last clowns, but he subverts the peaceful order of the Bohemian countryside and is finally able to turn the events to suit his own objectives. In other words, all of them are either blocking or potentially blocking characters in their texts. Most importantly, all of them, to the eye of a Jacobean playgoer, are associated with some type of moral shortcoming: Boult and Autolycus cannot be detached from the vicious implications of their criminal activities – which lie at the core of their onstage performance and are not merely commented on by other characters – while Cloten and Caliban, whose links with the devil are sometimes remarked upon, are keen on ruthless violence. In particular, all the characters share the trait of sexual immorality: in the case of Autolycus this means carefree pimping and whoring with his many "aunts", whereas for Boult, Cloten and Caliban it becomes downright perverted brutishness. Indeed their three different attempts at rape achieve through the texts a climactic sense of fierceness and vividness, with Caliban

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[3] See Mullini, p. 81.

apparently coming most dangerously close to his objective. Such an attitude contrasts with the more innocent or playful type of wantonness of Armin's previous clowns and their relationships with women. Lavatch does not hold women in very high esteem but he admits that he wants to marry because he is "driven on by the flesh" (*All's Well That Ends Well*, I.iii. 28-29) and because he wants to have some offspring. Touchstone too courts Audrey and finally marries her, though he admits that if the wedding service is celebrated by an unreliable parson like Sir Oliver Martext it is fair enough for him, so that he is entitled to leave his wife as soon as he wants. While lechery was a typical trait of the clown or fool in folklore and in the Commedia dell'Arte, in fact not many of the clowns in Shakespeare before the romances do actually play out this convention – though they may employ bawdy wordplay (as for instance Lavatch himself or the Clown of *Othello*). Launcelot and Falstaff do, though never touching brutality, while with Bottom the motif is reversed, as his ass's head does not turn into a symbol of an enhanced beast-like sexuality but rather makes of him simply a hay-craving sot totally neglecting Titania's advances.

All things considered, therefore, we may see how Shakespeare in the late plays seemingly works his way back to the medieval and Tudor Vice, where the comic and the serious side were two faces of the same coin and where the evil characters were also the major source of comedy. Boult, Autolycus, Cloten and Caliban, though they are conceived of as clowns, are also given back the share of depravity which their Shakespearean predecessors had been deprived of. The idea of tragicomedy is thus tied to their ambivalent dramatic self, and can be connected with the double quality of the texts. Such a closeness between the ambivalent clown of the late plays and the Vice is not overly surprising if we consider moralities as would-be tragedies: indeed only the final redemption of the Everyman figure, a

tragic hero subject to death and damnation, prevents these texts from being so.[4] Sometimes morality plays were themselves defined in tragicomic terms. This is the case of Thomas Lupton's *All for Money* (1578), which the author defines alternatively a "pitiful comedy" and a "pleasant tragedy".[5] Even more significantly, as Howard Felperin has shown, morality and miracle plays – which were still performed until late in the sixteenth century – had many motifs in common with chivalric romance and Elizabethan prose romance but, unlike these genres, they were written for the theatre, so that they may have provided Shakespeare and his fellow playwrights with the conventions for dramatising that material and maximising the experience of the audience.[6] Therefore also the particular staging of the clowns in *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* may also attest to Shakespeare's reception of romance.

Yet, it is perhaps not accurate to call the clowns of the romances "comic villains", a label applied to characters like Iago, Richard and Shylock, who are comic only insofar as they rejoice in inflicting pain on others.[7] In the late clowns, instead, the comic or laughable part is as important as the vicious one, so that we may call them perhaps more suitably "villainous fools", as their quality as villains is spoiled by their being clownish or fools. Like the Vice's, their actions are influential on the plot but, ultimately, because they are clowns and not real villains, the audience expects their misdeeds to end laughably. So not only are

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[4] Spivack, p. 195.

[5] Thomas Lupton, *A Moral and Pitieful Comedie, Intituled, All for Money*, London: Roger Warde, 1578, sigg. A1r and A2v.

[6] Felperin, p. 13. He mentions for instance the Digby *Mary Magdalene* (1480-1490) which features the birth in a storm of the Queen of Marcylle's child as well as her death and resurrection; *The Castle of Perseverance* (1400-1425) and *Pride of Life* (1400-1425) share with chivalric romance the motives of the castle under siege and knightly combat; *Wit and Science* (1531-1547), "the purest example of what might be termed morality-romance" stages a quest for love, the battling against monsters, and the killing and resurrection of the hero. "The typical action of the morality", Felperin continues, "no less than that of medieval or classical romance, is a quest for self-realization through love, a journey ending in homecoming and reunion in spite of all the obstacles and detours thrown up by the world" (p. 14). He also contends that in moralities the errant hero is saved through "some form of divine machinery", like the intervention of a Virtue or the Virgin, who talk him into repenting (p. 15).

[7] See Charney, p. xv and Spivack, pp. 193, 435.

Boult, Cloten and Caliban's attempts at discharging their brutish sexuality stopped in time, but they are also all forced back to the role where they actually belong: Boult and Caliban go back to the life they were leading before respectively as a tapster and a slave of Prospero, while Autolycus is barred from creating any more disorder by ensuring he gets again a master to serve: as Overton comments, unlike Puck and Ariel, he is a tricky slave who is "denied his expected triumph".[8] Even Cloten, though he dies, follows an analogue progression, as his head is sent by Guiderius "down the stream/ in embassy to his mother" (IV.ii.185-186). Besides, in *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* the clown is talked into becoming a better man: however, while we are made to understand that they consciously repent of their wrongdoing, in fact there is little certainty that they are fully changed.[9] In the specific cases of Boult and Autolycus, in particular, the character does not leave the stage before saving the heroine and paving the way for her final happiness: the former by protecting Marina's dignity as well as providing for her a setting where she meets her future husband, Lysimachus; the latter by exchanging clothes with Florizel and temporarily covering up his and Perdita's flight to Sicily.

This final modification of the characters confirms the general nature of Armin's last clowns who, contrarily to what is commonly held about comic roles, are not flat. Indeed in the previous sections I have shown how Boult, Autolycus and Cloten all stage some kind of progression from a lighter comic beginning to a darker, uneasy, and puzzling ending: Boult turns from a cynic satirist to a potential raper, Autolycus from a light-hearted rogue to a sadist, and Cloten from a boorish idiot to the victim of a death that appears almost unjustifiably bloody. Caliban, though following the reverse path, namely from a lusty and

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[8] Bill Overton, *The Winter's Tale. The Critics Debate*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989, p. 74.

[9] John Russell Brown, for instance, suggests that the fact that in his last scene Autolycus exits *after* his new masters may be acknowledged by the clown in performance as "an invitation to provide his own idiosyncratic business: simple mimicry or a renewed picking of pockets [...]" (Brown, p. 115).

cursing savage to a horseplay character, still conforms to the pattern of dramatic development that distinguishes the group. In particular, in his meticulous description of the tortures he would like to put Prospero through he has much in common with the later, darker side of Autolycus, so that they evoke a similar type of cruel laughter.[10]

The tragicomic quality of these four clowns does not happen only because they embody laughter as well as serious depravity, but also because of the other implications of their professions or social roles. With the criminal clowns Shakespeare can stage the country and city underworld, also alluding in more or less direct ways to the calamitous social events that led to those phenomena as well as the risks and anxiety of living such a life. With Cloten, Shakespeare explores the tragic nothingness of idiocy without innocence or artifice, and with Caliban the frustration and powerlessness of the discriminated native. Besides, three out of four interact with decreasingly vivid ideas of death. In *Cymbeline* Cloten's attempt at challenging Guiderius is laughable but he finally suffers a real death, thus being almost glorified as a heroic victim in a play that used to be considered, in fact, a tragedy. In *The Winter's Tale*, Autolycus's fear of death from hanging or torture is omnipresent, and such an experience is projected into the scenario he envisions to punish the Clown and the Shepherd. Finally, in *The Tempest*, death becomes a farce, a remote representation of the actual destiny Caliban may experience if he does not heed his master's orders. The same characters are not only linked with death but also become metaphorically the central figures of rituals of fertility, rebirth and renewal: Cloten with the sacrificial value of his killing, Autolycus with his changing of clothes – which he has in common with his predecessor in *Cymbeline,* especially the part where he wears the hero's suit – that epitomizes social change and a new life for the heroes, and finally Caliban with his enactment of grotesque and carnivalesque

[10] For exemplifications of cruel laughter in Shakespeare and his contemporaries see also Laroque, esp. pp. 162-166.

birth. Thus the fool, by including in his dramatization the contrasting elements of death and life or, more specifically, of death that becomes new life, epitomizes in a smaller scale the very progress of tragicomedy which, according to Fletcher's definition in the preface to *The Faithful Shepherdess*, is a genre that is different from tragedy insofar as it "wants deaths",[11] as death must usually be averted and life recovered in order to achieve the standard comic ending.

Comparing Armin's last fools with his previous roles in Shakespeare's plays we realize that there are continuities with the previous parts created for the actor, but there are also many changes. As has been also shown at length in the first chapter, continuities regard for instance the scattered references – more or less ironical – to his looks and physique, disguise or the performance of mimicry (chiefly Autolycus, but also Boult and Cloten), the use of song or the association with music (Cloten, Autolycus and Caliban) and allusions to Armin's activities as a goldsmith, balladeer, or tailor's son (Boult, Cloten and Autolycus). There is also a variability of speech mode, as all these clowns take advantage of Armin's command of both prose and verse. Boult, however, speaks almost only prose, like previous characters such as the Clown in *Othello* and *Anthony and Cleopatra*, the Porter in *Macbeth*, Pompey in *Measure for Measure* and Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida.* Autolycus and Cloten definitely increase the use of verse, as they have respectively 48 (including songs) and 104 lines of poetry, accounting respectively for 18% and 43% of the total amount of their lines: these figures which locate them closer to the range of some of Armin's court fools, namely Feste and Lear's Fool, who have respectively 22.5% and 34.5% (31% in the Quarto) of verse. Finally Caliban consolidates this trend further and reverses the tendency of supplying clown parts with prose more than verse: he speaks indeed almost seven times as many lines of

[11] John Fletcher, *The Faithfull Shepheardesse*, London: 1609, sig. A2v. The play is an adaptation of Gianbattista Guarini's tragicomedy *Il Pastor Fido* (1590).

poetry as he does of prose (88% of the total). No other character played by Armin equals him for amount of poetry compared to prose; Shakespeare destined verse as the norm to Menenius (*Coriolanus*) and Casca (*Julius Caesar*), two roles only remotely linkable to the clown, but also to Apemantus (*Timon of Athens*) who shares much with the railing fool type (e.g. Thersites), and in this sense may have something in common with Caliban, who curses and wishes the worst for Trinculo when he roars: “the dropsy drown this fool!” (IV.i.229).[12]

Looking at the four clowns together, we realize that there is also a variability in the ways they elicit laughter. In the previous plays the hallmark of Armin’s roles was that he was always the one who outwitted others, thanks to the use of wordplay, chop-logic or quips, or displaying brilliant popular wisdom, no matter whether he was a wise fool or a rustic. Even in the tiny parts of the Clowns in *Anthony and Cleopatra* and *Othello*, the characters manage with their ignorance and naïveté to bend words and distract, for a few moments, Cleopatra who is willing to commit suicide and the musicians playing for Othello. In the romances, therefore, Boult and Autolycus are definitely consistent with Armin’s distinctive clowning style in Shakespeare. They are both well in control of the mirth-making in their plays: the first displays his cynicism and taste for obscene remarks; the second, who is unique in the range of characters created for Armin, is nevertheless a laughter-maker with his malicious machinations. Therefore, while in *Pericles* and *The Winter’s Tale* we laugh *with* the clown, in *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest* we laugh *at* him, and we witness the protracted campaign of derision of which Cloten and Caliban are victims. A similar way of raising laughter was characteristic of Kemp’s gulls, in particular of much of Falstaff’s comedy, but it is definitely

[12] Thersites showcases a similar type of impious language, wishing disease and suffering on others: e.g. “The plague of Greece upon thee, thou mongrel beef-witted lord!” (II.i.12-13), “I would thou didst itch from head to foot” (II.i.28), “I will see you hanged like clodpolls” (II.i.118), “the vengeance on the whole camp! Or rather, the Neapolitan bone-ache!” (II.iii.17-18). Cf. Apemantus: “Aches contract and starve your supple joints!” (I.i. 252), “great men should drink with harness on their throats” (I.ii.51), “a plague on thee, thou art too bad to curse!” (IV.iii.362), “I would my tongue could rot [your hands] off! (IV.iii.367), “would thou wouldst burst!” (IV.iii.371)

a novelty for Armin's characters in Shakespeare. It is perhaps less so in the actor's own work, where the natural fools are constantly made fun of but, unlike Cloten and Caliban, they are occasionally praised for their sparks of unconscious wit.

Another of the characteristic features of Armin's characters that is repeated in the late plays is the clown's apparition in a trio of characters: Boult with the Pander and the Bawd, Autolycus with the Clown and the Shepherd and later with the two gentlemen reporting on the reunion between the king and his family, Cloten with his two attending lords in the earlier part of the play, and finally Caliban with Stephano and Trinculo. This last group, in particular, repeats a routine that is to be seen also in *Twelfth Night*, where the three clowns entertain themselves with a tune. On Feste's entrance, Sir Toby says "Welcome, ass. Now let's have a catch" (II.iii.17) and eventually he and Sir Andrew join in. In *The Tempest* it is Caliban who asks for entertainment, after his new master has agreed on destroying Prospero: "Let us be jocund. Will you troll the catch/ You taught me while-ere?" (III.ii.119-120), a request that is followed by Stephano's singing accompanied by Trinculo and by Ariel's invisible tabor and pipe. However, while the formation of the characters surrounding Armin in these four plays is typical, there are still some slight changes from previous examples of trios, namely the clowns in *Twelfth Night*, Lear, the Fool and Poor Tom in *King Lear*, Elbow, Froth and Pompey in *Measure for Measure* and even the two gravediggers along with the prince of Denmark in *Hamlet*. In the romances the trios are governed by stricter hierarchical ties. In *Pericles* this is most evident, where the trio is actually a family of bawds and within it Boult is the servant of two masters; the same scheme is repeated in *The Tempest*, with Caliban offering his services to Stephano and Trinculo – who are respectively the governor and the second-in-command of this bizarre triumvirate – and in the final part of *The Winter's Tale*, where Autolycus is hired by the two rustics, now gentlemen. In *Cymbeline*, Cloten is a prince

but in fact his two attending lords have quite some power over him. Moreover, while in the previous plays Armin's character is always the one who stands out or above everyone else thanks to his ability to bend the language and the logic as he wishes, in the romances the situation is not as clear and the status of actor's "foil" within the trio is not quite the same. Boult uses sarcasm in a finer way than the Bawd but he ultimately does not make of her, who is his mistress, the target of his wit; on the contrary, they work together to create a deeper sense of bawdy comedy: they stand on the same side, in a sense. Cloten and Caliban, being natural fools, are victims who have little power against their scornful onstage detractors, respectively the Second Lord and Trinculo – even if the former is much wittier than the latter. Autolycus, who in the earlier part of the play does show off his cunning against the gullible Clown, in the end becomes just a victim and a subaltern, thus actually giving power to his opponent, who treats him as a son to educate.

Armin's last fools are not quite as festive as they used to be: generally they employ less wordplay, less chop-logic and less playful bantering. They display dark, uneasy traits, even in the merrier Boult and Autolycus. Boult, in particular, who has a comparable predecessor in *Measure for Measure*, is a more brutish figure who dwells on more serious, obscene bawdiness than Pompey, who instead concentrates his comedy on his talking skills in order to get himself out of risky situations, and keeps his lighthearted attitude even when he is arrested and becomes an executioner. The result is that Boult is a character whom the audience likes much less than Pompey, and in this sense he anticipates Cloten, who does not raise any sympathy at all. From the wise court fools these late clowns inherit some of the ability of criticizing or satirizing the world they live in, but they do not share the same position in society. The wise fools are outsiders in a symbolical and positive way, in that they are able to hold up a mirror to society voluntarily keeping their detachment from it at all

times; their privilege of speaking comes indeed from such a distance – they are in a sense aloof, and superior to the rest. The other roles created for Armin, with the exception of Pompey, maintain their power but they represent individuals who are rightfully part of society, as is the case of clowns and servants. The status of the last fools is, again, different, as they all represent categories of individuals who are forcefully marginalized and looked down upon in society: being a pander, a vagabond, an idiot and a dispossessed native, their detachment from the civil part of the community is real, even tragically so, and not just a pose for the sake of entertaining others. Boult, Autolycus and Caliban, in particular, while on the one hand seem to acknowledge the tradition of the clown as a servant, on the other present three different disruptions of the very concept of servitude: the first is an underworld varlet, the second a masterless man, and the third a slave.

These character's baseness and status as outcasts functions to some extent as a realistic counterpart to the wondrous and supernatural world of romance. Still, they are also tied to that world because of their familial relationships. I have discussed in the previous chapter how both Cloten and Caliban have witch-like figures as mothers, a circumstance that might justify their natural folly. Besides, Caliban is considered the son of a devil. In the brothel family in *Pericles* the Bawd, who represents a kind of maternal figure who brings up the bastards of the prostitutes who work there,[13] is also connected to magic practices when Lysimachus calls her "herb-woman;/ she that sets seeds of shame, roots of iniquity" (Sc. 19, 86-87). Indeed, as Richard Levin explains, bawds in the period might visit women in their houses to arrange assignations and, to keep their real business secret from the women's husbands, they usually went under disguise as sellers or starch-women. The dealer of herbs might well have been one of those disguises or undercover trades. Besides, the "herb-

[13] See *Pericles*, Gossett, ed., p. 144.

woman" in the early modern period indicated a wise woman who knew very well herbs and their medicinal powers and that used them to make remedies and magical treatments. Consequently, she could be called "witch" or also "bawd", because with her art she could produce love potions or charms, contraceptives or medicaments against abortion, and she could cure infertility and impotence. Additionally, she could serve as a midwife and, if necessary, conceal births.[14] Finally, Autolycus, whose earthly father was "a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles" (IV.iii.25-26) has Mercury as a godly patron. As Pitcher suggests, the Ovidian myth of the god Mercury having an intercourse with a mortal woman, Chione, who would later give birth to a child named Autolycus, raised in early modern readers implications of moral and demonological nature, leaving them to imagine whether miscegenation with incubi-like gods was actually possible.[15] Caliban and Autolycus, therefore, can be associated with similar connotations regarding their birth, a circumstance which in both cases is underlined by the same verb: just as Sycorax "did litter" (I.ii.283) Caliban on the island, also Autolycus was "littered under Mercury" (IV.iii.25). The *OED* suggests that this expression could be used contemptuously for human beings or for animals, so both allusions are cogent for the two characters.

Armin's concern with folly is pervasive in the actor's own work, and such an attitude paved the way for the creation of the court fool in Shakespeare, a character who, with his mastering of the power of words, was able to comment explicitly on the folly of the world, adopting a moralizing viewpoint close to the philosophy of Stultitia in Erasmus's essay, thus directing his observations at how wisdom is highly overvalued by those who think themselves wise. Their purpose is that of telling the truth to those who are considered the

[14] Richard Levin, "The 'Herb Woman' in *Pericles*", *The Shakespeare Newsletter*, 56 (2006), pp. 3, 6 and Richard Levin, "Flower Maides, Wise Women, Witches and the Gendering of Knowledge in English Renaissance Drama", in John M. Mucciolo, ed., *Shakespeare's Universe: Renaissance Ideas and Conventions. Essays in Honour of W.R. Elton*, Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1996, pp. 95-107 (97-98).
[15] Pitcher, "Some Call Him Autolycus", pp. 261-262.

wisest in the community, that is those who have some political power. The artificial fool in cap and bells played by Armin, just like Erasmus' allegorical figure, is a personification of the idea of folly, a condition which he simulates in order to offer his view of reality and escape punishment. When Shakespeare writes his late plays, he has abandoned that tradition and, apparently, he has also broken with Armin's greatest personal contribution to the idea of comic character. It is true that characters like Boult, Autolycus, Cloten and Caliban expose specific sins of early modern society but they do not do it in terms of the explicit idea of folly as opposed to wisdom. Being a social commentator does not seem the central function of Armin's clown any more. Other features are brought forward, such as alternative, uneasy ways of raising laughter and an enhancement of the power of the comic character as someone who does not only speak but also acts and represents the essence of tragicomedy and romance with his multiple and ambiguous traits as well as their development throughout the plot. This last feature, in particular, seems to be partly anticipated in Lear's Fool, who starts getting more authentically compassionate and less detached the more his king loses his mind. Thus the loss of power of the Fool in the only great tragedy where he is employed is reflected, though definitely less dramatically, in the endings of the tragicomedies. The explicit commentary on the idea of folly, then, becomes instead a show of less explored contexts of folly, such as sin, intellectual deficiency without wit, and savagery. Armin's contribution to the staging of these characters is perhaps less superficially visible than in the court fools, but it is still present insofar as he may have influenced Shakespeare with his own interest in physical embodiments of folly, their links with wordly depravity, as well as in the dramatic traits of his final roles, which result similar to the characters he presented in the works he published around the same years the romances were written.

Boult, Autolycus, Cloten and Caliban may not be the greatest clown parts of the whole shakespearean canon but they are compelling because of their multifacetedness. As much as Shakespeare was experimenting with interacting patterns of tragedy, comedy and the wondrous in the late plays, he also experimented with what the clown and the comedian could do, with their relationship with both iconographic and alternative but very much concrete ideas of folly in the early modern period, and with the combination of laughter with the usually discordant feelings of pity and moral reproach. At the same time, perhaps, he wanted to experiment also with the possibilities of the audience's response to a variety of characters: on one side Autolycus, who makes the most of Armin's persona and achieves maximum identification, thus eliciting complete sympathy. On the other Caliban, Boult and Cloten who, in this order, raise increasing degrees of loath, a feeling which in the Jacobean playhouse contrasted sharply with the fact that they were physically impersonated by an actor that everyone loved and was used to side with. Those of the romances are clowns of ambiguities, contrasts and liminalities between the old and the new, realism and the supernatural, social stigma and sympathy, laughter and pain, and are therefore suitable for the hybrid genre of the texts. It is simplistic to state that after the great fools of the comedies the partnership between Shakespeare and Armin had nothing new to offer: on the contrary, the playwright and the actor, both heading towards the end of their professional careers, showed that they had not lost the will to achieve something different, and that it was still possible, through the combination of conventions, to distort the boundaries of the concept of clowning.

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