

"An O without a figure":
King Lear and the Mask of the Fool

A Thesis Submitted to the College of
Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of English
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

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ABSTRACT

In the topical abundance or superabundance of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, almost all major thematic patterns, images, and symbols are linked to Lear's enigmatic companion, the Fool. The Fool surpasses Shakespeare's other fools when he is given a major role, yet he is more than a major figure: he is the pivot for action and interpretation. The presence and the importance of the Fool are emphasized further when almost half of *Lear's* characters are referred to as fools. The stark, barren hinterland of *Lear* is shot through by the conspicuously forceful presence of folly.

The fool's propensity for misrule coupled with his centrality to the text results in a dramatic structure that itself breaks the rules. *King Lear* is the most generically puzzling play in Shakespeare's corpus. *Lear*, a tragedy, draws upon comedy, history, romantic comedy, romance, and morality in indefinable and unparalleled ways. Just as form is juxtaposed in *Lear*, religious systems or identities are also contrasted. Pagan, Christian, existential, nihilistic, and moralistic interpretations are readily discernable. The fool, a potential nexus for structural questions, may also be at the heart of the question of spiritual identity. To locate the fool at the source of both structural and spiritual problems, and to discern why the fool factors so prominently especially in a play viewed as Shakespeare's darkest, are the two endeavours of this thesis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost I want to extend an on-going thank you to Dr. David J. Parkinson, whose wise, thoughtful, and very human nature provided a supervisorial climate in which this thesis could freely develop. I am grateful additionally to Dr. Parkinson for constantly supporting my work, for encouraging creativity, and for being invariably open to authentic academic conversation.

Also, thank you to my graduate committee, Dr. Ron Cooley, Dr. Len Findlay, and Dr. Moira Day, for their consideration for and interaction with this thesis. Thank you also to the English Department for funding and employment during my graduate studies period.

Finally, I owe much gratitude to my family, Colin and Valerie, Ginger, Murray, Devon, Amber, Tanner, and Taylor for their patience, understanding, and support.

In memory of

Rose Jane Traub, 1916-2004

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PREFACE

In the final stages of the project's completion, I saw the need for a brief explanatory note on this thesis' form. Mikhail Bakhtin offers a starting point for this task.

Bakhtin writes that the fool occupies a certain space between seemingly disparate categories:

Clown fools represented a certain form of life which was real and ideal at the same time. They stood borderline between life and art, in a peculiar midzone, as it were; they were neither eccentrics nor dolts, neither were they comedic actors. (*Rabelais* 8)

The notion of the midzone is important. Just as the clown fool occupies a midzone between certain categories such as life and art, this thesis also attempts to occupy a midzone and to draw upon both intellectual and creative or intuitive spheres in such a way that synchronizes content and form. In other words, this thesis written on the fool is also written in the spirit of the fool. For this reason, and for reasons of economy, I have had to limit certain critical discussions and focus only on the most relevant, though minute, details from the larger critical works.

“This great stage of fools”

The landscape of Shakespeare's *King Lear* excludes nothing. In the most intense way, this play anticipates Rainer Maria Rilke's imperative to hold fast to life's contradictions: "Deine ausgeübten Kräfte spanne, / bis sie reichen, zwischen zwein / Widersprüchen" (13-15).¹ *Lear* knows—is almost the definition of—contradiction: sublimity and absurdity, chaos and order, darkness and light, Love and Strife are juxtaposed in the strangest and yet most realistic ways. In keeping with this multiplicity of oppositions, one finds equally vigorous incongruence between the genres: *Lear*, rightly called a tragedy, draws fundamentally upon history, romance, romantic comedy, comedy, and even morality. Particular attention has been given to the presence of comic motifs and structures throughout. Critics interested in the comic dimensions of *Lear* (Susan Snyder, Ronald Miller, Emrys Jones, John Danby) have focused on the role of the Fool, on the disguiser figures, and on the motif of redemption. Yet, these comic elements are not manifested in typical ways: Shakespeare's "comic scenes do not relieve

¹ "Take your practiced powers and stretch them out / until they span the chasm between two / contradictions;" from Rilke's untitled poem that begins "Da dich das geflügelte Entzücken."

but rather heighten the tragic movement" (Orgel 118). Even Susan Snyder, whose *The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies* (1979) helped reinstate the comic genre in the foreground of Shakespearean criticism, cannot deny that these "constant appeals to the world of romantic comedy . . . are often twisted to serve, intensify, the immediate tragic effect" (141). Yet in this play deemed by Ann Thompson as "ENORMOUS . . . in every sense" (9), generic complication is not the only critical predicament. Indeed, to focus solely on form cannot but neglect the intricacies involved in the question of spiritual identity, for *Lear* has room enough to house Christian, pagan, nihilistic, existential interpretations, and more. Ronald Miller reflects on the very tension between the formal and spiritual complexities in Shakespeare's darkest tragedy:

I am conscious that calling *King Lear* a comedy will not resolve the debates about the positive—redemptive, if you will—aspects of the play which have dominated *Lear* criticism for many years. Neither a study of the tragic nor of the comic form in and of itself will determine whether the play is informed by a Christian understanding, though I am quite willing to grant that an answer to this question may be more important in the scheme of things than any adjudication about genre. On the other hand, neither will resolution of the ongoing debate about the religious overtones settle a debate about form. Some kind of dialectical marriage between cognitive load and form will have to be made. (22)

Indeed, in order to approach *Lear* holistically, and, in Rilke's words, to "span the chasm" between cognitive load and form "some kind of *dialectical marriage* . . . will have to be made" (22 emphasis added).

While many notable studies have been made separately on the formal

structure and cognitive content, no study has yet, to my knowledge, combined these problems and sought a unified, and unifying, alternative. To see whether or not such an alternative that combines formal and spiritual meaning exists, and what that might entail, will be the task of this project.²

Mikhail Bakhtin, theoretician of the dialogic, writes that “truth is not born nor is to be found inside the head of an individual person; it is born between people collectively searching for the truth” (*Dostoevsky* 110). Like many other famous thinkers, Bakhtin takes his cue from Plato: “For Bakhtin, for Kierkegaard, and Erasmus, the first port of call is the Socratic dialogue” (Gash 180). Since we are seeking, as Miller writes, a “dialectical marriage,” it would be worthwhile to return directly to the touchstone of the dialectical process at the wellspring of the centuries-long debate on the relationship between comedy and tragedy: Plato and his *Symposium*, which work is also

² There is first the problem of textual authority. The relation between the Q (quarto) text (or the *True Chronicle Historie*, 1608), and the F (Folio) text (or the *Tragedy of King Lear*, 1623) is one that is not easily resolved, for arguments for and against each version are all well founded. Some favour the quarto because they believe that it “derives from an early manuscript copy in Shakespeare’s hand, and that the Folio derives from a considerably altered and revised version, one more closely approximating the play as the author visualised it in performance” (Halio xiii). So while the Q text provides a fuller, more expansive rendition of *Lear*, the F text may be more authentic; and yet each “involves problems of its own” (xiii). In the end, the “final choice will depend on one’s preference” (xiii). This project, in the end, will favour the Folio because it offers a more tightly-focused version, and one that is more likely to represent the author’s final thoughts. It will be necessary at times to return to the quarto, though, for its fuller versions of particular scenes. All quotations, unless otherwise indicated, will be derived from *The Tragedy of King Lear* edited by Jay. L. Halio. Moreover, first Folio spelling of characters’ names will be used when citing this editor, but will vary in critical material and in alternate editions. All quotations outside of Halio’s edition will be taken from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, and will be indicated by an asterisk (*).

religiously focused, for the core of the dialogue is a discussion on the god Eros. While the whole of the *Symposium* is kaleidoscopically rich in philosophical and spiritual insight, it is the final scene in which Socrates speaks to Agathon and Aristophanes about the nature of comedic and tragic art that is most relevant here. While this scene is loaded with relevance to *Lear*, Orgel warns us that “no Renaissance theorist . . . cites the passages as a precedent” (118). Even without a tidy reception history, the final scene of the *Symposium* offers much to the reader of *Lear*.

At the end of Plato’s famous dialogue, Socrates is trying to persuade two very drunk and very tired creative geniuses, Agathon the tragedian and Aristophanes the comedian, of the inseparable nature of the two genres. Socrates, who sits between them, cannot complete his idea, for both poets, exhausted from the night’s affairs, fall asleep:

Agathon, Aristophanes, and Socrates were still awake, drinking out of a large cup which they were passing from left to right. Socrates was talking to them. Aristodemus couldn’t remember exactly what they were saying—he’d missed the first part of their discussion, and he was half-asleep anyway—but the main point was that Socrates was trying to prove to them that authors should be able to write both comedy and tragedy: the skilful tragic dramatist should also be a comic poet. He was about to clinch his argument, though, truth to tell, sleepy as they were, they were hardly able to follow his reasoning. In fact, Aristophanes fell asleep in the middle of the discussion, and very soon thereafter, as day was breaking, Agathon also drifted off. (223C-223D)

One’s initial reaction to this passage might be disappointment. By not completing Socrates’ thought, Plato has spurred generations of critics to study the complex dynamics between the apparent polar opposites

of comedy and tragedy. As part of the puzzle, there is Socrates who “after getting them off to sleep . . . got up and left” (223D). From Agathon’s house, the location of the evening’s symposium, Socrates went “directly to the Lyceum, washed up, spent the rest of the day just as he always did, and only then, as evening was falling, went home to rest” (223D). A series of questions immediately arises. First, what has Socrates to do with the problem of comedy and tragedy? What does it mean that he stays awake, while the others eventually drift into sleep? Socrates offers a key to the question of genres, and occupies a possible space of unification: what might this mean? And finally, the inevitable, most important question: who *is* Socrates? This last question might serve as a key to the others. By looking at the mysterious personality of Socrates, we come closer to seeing what unites the formal and spiritual dimensions in *Lear*.

What can be known about Socrates, that proverbially elusive figure who evades easy characterization? In his speech at the symposium, Alcibiades tells us that, foremost, Socrates is unique, and that there is “no one else in the past and no one in the present” like him (221D):

There is a parallel for everyone—everyone else, that is. But this man here is so bizarre, his way and his ideas are so unusual, that, search as you might, you’ll never find anyone else, alive or dead, who’s even remotely like him. (221D)

Socrates is declared by the Oracle at Delphi to be the wisest man in Athens, and yet he never flaunts his knowledge; rather, the only thing he claims to know is that he knows nothing. While Plato emphasizes

many more aspects of Socrates' nature—his ironical responses, his piercing comments—one cannot help but notice how Plato draws especial attention to Socrates' foolish or clown-like characteristics. To begin with, Socrates *sounds* like a fool:

If you were to listen to his arguments, at first they'd strike you as totally ridiculous; they're clothed in words as coarse as the hides worn by the most vulgar satyrs. He's always going on about pack-asses, or blacksmiths, or cobblers, or tanners; he's always making the same tired points in the same tired old words. If you are foolish, or simply unfamiliar with him, you'd find it impossible not to laugh at his arguments. (221E)

Plato shows how Socrates sounds like a fool; but, he also looks like a fool. Erasmus, the Renaissance master of folly whose work draws much from Plato, writes in *Adages* (1536) about the strange and clown-like appearance of Socrates: "He had a yokel's face, with a bovine look about it, and a snub nose always running; you could have thought him to be some stupid, thick-headed clown" (243, translation altered; cf. Zanker, ch. 1 *passim*). What can we know about Socrates? He is a crass fool.

Socrates' relationship to Silenus further emphasizes the unmistakable importance of the fool when identifying Socrates. Silenus, a mythological forest demigod, is the teacher and companion of Dionysus, god of wine and fertility. Since Silenus is often portrayed "drunk, he is believed to always tell the truth, but tell it in riddles" (Anderson 104). Such blurring of truth typifies the fool. For instance, Lear's Fool is an "all-licensed" (1.4.160) critic given freedom to speak

truth at any moment, and this truth is often uttered in riddle or rhyme. But it is the tension between the inner and outer realities of Silenus that links him directly with the fool, for the fool at every moment experiences the tension between his interior and exterior worlds. The fool is never as he seems. Sileni, the statues of Silenus, also appear ugly, but when they are opened, each one reveals miraculous carvings. Alcibiades perceives Socrates exactly this way:

[Socrates] likes to say he's ignorant and knows nothing. Isn't this just like Silenus? Of course it is! And all this is just on the surface, like the outsides of those statues of Silenus . . . I don't know if any of you have seen him when he's really serious. But I once caught him when he was open like a Silenus' statue, and I had a glimpse of the figures he keeps hidden within: they were so godlike—so bright and beautiful, so utterly amazing. (216E)

With his rough surface and beautiful interior, Socrates exemplifies the role of the fool as a mask, a surface that epitomizes—sharpens, articulates—the tensions between inner and outer worlds. Socrates embodies the Silenus figure, which is the example *par excellence* of the fool as a mask. In connecting Socrates to the Sileni of Alcibiades, Plato brings "Socrates closer to being the archetype of the theatrical clown" (Gash 186). What can we know about Socrates then? He is a fool and a wise fool at that: "it was not unjust that in a time when philosophers abounded, this jester alone should have been declared by the oracle to be wise" (*Adages* 27).

Socrates is a fool; this much is clear. But what does his folly have to do with *Lear*? When Socrates, the fool, surpasses the sleep of tragic

Agathon and comic Aristophanes, he responds to the question the world thinks he forfeits. With Socrates' wakefulness, the genres have *come to an end*, their individual identifications as "comedy" and "tragedy" having fallen into rest. When this happens, the genres unite so perfectly so as to produce something entirely new. Then the former designations (i.e. "comedy" and "tragedy") are no longer needed, for they are no longer true; they "fall asleep," having served their purpose. This "something new" that is produced is represented by Socrates: this "something new" is *the fool*. With this in mind, Plato's suggestion is highly relevant to *Lear*, for in all of Shakespeare's tragedies, while comedy and tragedy always operate in close proximity, in *Lear* only is their union achieved. Susan Snyder articulates this achievement of generic union in *Lear*:

From *Romeo* to *Lear* one can see Shakespeare moving through these possibilities in the order I have just set out: that is, comedy and tragedy functioning first as polar opposites, later as two sides of the same coin, and finally as two elements in a single compound. (5)

If one follows the Socratic consequences of this formal unification into a single compound, one should expect the fool to play a revelatory, combinatory, definitive role in *Lear*—and, indeed, one's expectations are not disappointed. The Fool,³ in fact, is pivotal in *King Lear*.

In no other Shakespearean play does the Fool have such an essential role; in *Lear* for the first time, the Fool is on the stage as a

³ Since this thesis refers both to *Lear's* Fool and to fools in general, only *Lear's* Fool will receive capitalization. All other references to the fool will be in lower case.

major character: "the Fool surpasses all his predecessors in that Shakespeare manages here to make the clown a vital component of a great tragedy" (Reibetanz 93). That the Fool has a major role at all is in itself striking, but especially so when we consider that in Shakespeare's "source play, *King Leir*, there is no court fool" (Videbæk 134). Emphasis on the fool is clear. The Fool, holds A.C. Bradley, is "one of Shakespeare's triumphs in *King Lear*" (311). Thus, Bradley certainly does not agree with Nahum Tate, who in 1681 altered the *Lear* tragedy because he felt Shakespeare's version was indecorously harsh and unjust. In Tate's version, which was accepted and even preferred by Samuel Johnson, he married Cordelia and Edgar and made Cordelia Queen among many changes. Tate's version was popularly accepted and played on the English stage for more than 150 years: no other "Shakespearean tragedy, however painful, was felt to be so in need of revision that critics and public could accept an alternate version for so long, with so little objection" (Snyder 140). One of Tate's most drastic editorial decisions, though, was to cut the role of the Fool completely, a decision that Bradley refutes: "to remove him [the Fool] would spoil its harmony, as the harmony of a picture would be spoiled if one of the colours were extracted" (Bradley 311). It is Northrop Frye, though, who makes perhaps the most striking observation about the Fool. Frye observes that there is not just one fool in *Lear*, or even two for that matter, but rather that the "word 'fool' is in course of time

applied to almost every decent character in the play" (Sandler 110). Strangely enough, Frye "does not press on a great deal further with this insight" (Evans 4). It is the second intention of this project, then, to *press on* and discern why the fool appears in such overt superabundance on this dark, ever-transforming, and apocalyptic landscape of *King Lear*. It does seem strange in this play deemed as Shakespeare's darkest that the fool should factor so prominently. It is almost as if Jaques' "ducdame"⁴ that is sounded in *As You Like It* finally succeeds much later in *King Lear* in gathering all fools in this unusual collective. Before one can ask why they, the fools, are present *en masse* in this tragedy imbued with bitterness, hostility, and malice, it is important to know who *they* are.

For those who are called fools, the title does not carry a consistent meaning; it is used both endearingly and pejoratively. Those who evade being specified as fools use the term as an insult, while the fools among themselves use the term more benignly, even affectionately.

For example, the crafty Edmond calls his father Gloucester, and brother Edgar, foolish:

⁴ JAQUES. If it do come to pass
That any man turn ass,
Leaving his wealth and ease
A stubborn will to please,
Ducdame, ducdame, ducdame!
Here shall he see
Gross fools as he,
And if he will come to me.

AMIENS. What's that "ducdame"?

JAQUES. 'Tis a Greek invocation, to call fools into a circle. (2.5.50-60)*

A credulous father and a brother noble,
Whose nature is so far from doing harms
That he suspects none; on whose *foolish honesty*
My practices ride easy. I see the business.
Let me, if not by my birth, have lands by wit.

All with me's meet that I can fashion fit. (1.2.151-156 emphasis added)

Edmond regards both Gloucester and Edgar, his unsuspecting kin, as naïve, gullible, and excessively simple. We shall discuss below the difference between the fool who is wise and the one who is foolish, for not all fools are the same. At this point it is important mainly to recognize who the fools are in the play.

Albany, who in the end changes sympathy and abandons Gonerill—who, like Edmond, is also not hailed as fool—is himself called a fool five times in Act Four alone. When Albany is slow to summon his army to meet the approaching French, Gonerill chides and insults him:

France speaks his banners in our noiseless land,
With plumed helm thy state begins [to threat],
Whilst thou, a moral fool, sits still and cries,
"Alack, why does he so?" (4.2. 56-59)*

Albany is a *moral* fool, which coming from Gonerill, who is farthest from being a moral touchstone, is meant to be anything but complimentary: seen thus, Albany's scruples mark the fullest reach of his insanity—morality equals disability. Again, to Albany's rebuke, Gonerill retorts, "O vain fool!" (4.2.37), which suggests that not only are Albany's moral efforts futile, but that they also stem from a self-gratifying, narcissistic source.

The Fool himself is one of the first characters, though, to start bestowing this highly-charged name on others. The connotations behind the Fool's renaming are significantly more than those of Gonerill's. Kent, imprisoned in the stocks, heeds the Fool's wisdom, but is branded a fool as the consequence:

FOOL. I would have none but knaves follow it [advice] since a fool gives

it.

That sir which serves and seeks for gain
And follows but for form,
Will pack when it begin to rain
And leave thee in the storm.
But I will tarry, the fool will stay,
And let the wise man fly;
The knave turns fool that runs away,
The fool no knave, perdy.

KENT. Where learned you this, fool?

FOOL. Not i'th'stocks, fool. (2.4.69-81)

The Fool uses the term both to identify Kent appropriately but also to mirror Kent's own words. Fools are notorious for their mimicry.

Cordelia, who also earns the common name of fool, is shown in the end with a mirror above her mouth. Lear commands that an attendant fetch him "a looking-glass; / If that her breath will mist or stain the stone, / Why then she lives" (5.3.235-7). While the mirror is used practically to ascertain whether or not she is still alive, the mirror also takes on symbolic implications: uttering sound, drawing breath, without sound or breath, the fool is a mirror—mimic and epitome—of humanity.

In one of the best-known lines of the play, Lear calls Cordelia a fool. Lear uses the name entirely affectionately. Here Lear confirms Cordelia's role as fool in the play, and in an image reminiscent of the Pietà, Lear holds Cordelia and laments her death: "And my poor fool is hanged" (5.3.279). The relationship between Cordelia and the Fool will be discussed further below; here it is important to note that Cordelia is called a fool, lovingly, plangently, by her father.

But the most striking references to the fool are to Lear. Shakespeare, from the beginning of the play, shows that "Folly's cap sits on the greatest of them, King Lear" (Reibetanz 104). Gonerill is the first to call Lear a fool when she relates to Oswald her real opinion of her father:

Idle old man,
That still would manage those authorities
That he hath given away! Now, by my life,
Old fools are babes again, and must be us'd
With checks as flatteries, when they are seen abus'd. (1.3.16-20)*

For Gonerill, her father is nothing but an old fool, unpredictable and extemporaneous as a child whose untimely behaviour must be controlled with "checks as flatteries." Again, Gonerill cuts down masterful men by calling them fools: the term points to their impotence. But the most striking reference to Lear as fool is, predictably, by the Fool himself. Having banished Cordelia and Kent, and given his power and wealth to Regan and Gonerill, the old king

begins to respond to the Fool's comments, hesitantly at first but with increasing confidence, with marked wit, just like a fool:

FOOL. Canst tell how an oyster makes his shell?

LEAR. No.

FOOL. Nor I neither; but I can tell why a snail has a house.

LEAR. Why?

FOOL. Why, to put 's head in, not to give it away to his daughters, and leave his horns without a case.

.....
FOOL. The reason why the seven stars are no mo than seven is a pretty reason.

LEAR. Because they are not eight.

FOOL. Yes, indeed, thou wouldst make a good fool. (1.5.21-6, 28-31)

Even the Fool is impressed with Lear's apparently new-found fool-like abilities to fix on an unconsidered potential to multiply meaning. One begins to sense early on in *Lear* a developing realization of Ecclesiastes' "*infinitus est numerus stultorum*" (1:15). One also perceives the echoes of earlier Renaissance works in which fools and their lives' journeys are listed, namely Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff*, *The Ship of Fools* (1494). It would not be a stretch to compare *Lear* to Brant's influential *Narrenschiff*, a sea vessel brimming with every type of fool that sets sail for a fool's paradise. Although the destination of the *Lear* vessel, as it were, still needs to be ascertained, the striking bounty of fools in the tragedy makes one view *Lear* as a ship of fools indeed.

Shakespeare's spectacular emphasis on the fool signals to the reader that the drama will not follow the standard structural patterns, but will "[c]rack [dramatic] moulds" and present the reader perhaps

with a new generic emphasis (3.2.8). Lear's desire to "[c]rack nature's moulds" (3.2.8) indicates that the play does not just express a desire to treat form in an entirely uncharacteristic and unique way, but executes this treatment. The uniqueness of the play's form, like the uniqueness of the fool and the uniqueness of Socrates, renders *Lear* fascinating. The tragic drama, itself like a fool with its singular and enigmatic composition, presents the reader with a dark, harsh, even apocalyptic landscape that suddenly and without warning explodes into one "great stage of fools" (4.5.175).

Knowledge of the history of the genres which the fool is uniting is necessary, for the fool does not dismiss them, but rather embodies them. Thus, history of the comic and tragic genres will be brought into the discussion as necessary. Still, the fool does not *belong* to any genre—and never has— even though he is often spoken of as mechanical property of the comic genre, or, socially speaking, of the performance festivals annually celebrated. For example, the satire and invective of Lear's Fool arise in the sots and sotties of the late-medieval French tradition. These sotties were dramas performed in the marketplaces at specific festive points during the liturgical and seasonal calendar—Mardi Gras, Epiphany, Christmas Eve, and Midsummer's Day—and which contained "virulent invective and strong critique of contemporary morals and politics" (Perret 413). Lear's Fool also "strongly critiques"—even harshly—the king's political and moral

decisions. In her classic study *The Fool*, Enid Welsford points out, for example, that the fool commonly functions as an "'all-licensed' critic who sees the truth about the people around him" (256), and as a "link between the stage and auditorium" (248). Lear's Fool is called an "all-licensed fool" (1.4.160), who also might function as the revealer of truth and a tie between audience and stage. While many similarities can be identified between medieval fools and Lear's Fool, it is important to recognize the individuality of each, which recalls the uniqueness that Alcibiades saw in Socrates. Robert Armin, who joined Shakespeare's acting troupe, warrants special esteem for his contribution to Lear's Fool. Armin's success at playing fools took off after meeting Richard Tarlton, "playwright, ballad maker, fencer, tumbler, and dramatic clown" (Aspinall 42). A multi-talented, even protean fool, Armin had a great influence on Shakespeare's own interest in the fool, and his first role as Touchstone in *As You Like It*, 1599, began a "long and productive professional association" (144). Nonetheless, no fool is a mere instrument of theatrical strategy, even though he will have qualities common to other fools. The attributes of truth-telling and analogizing, for instance, may indeed be manifest in many fools, but not because of any tradition of foolery. For while the fools across time share a multiplicity of characteristics (clothing, wit, scepter or bauble, function), each fool is a perfectly new and fresh creation in himself:

Clowns maintain their distinctive characteristics despite, not because of, tradition. All Greek and Roman comedies, the medieval religious plays, the Commedia dell'arte and the English Harlequinade certainly possess definite types in common. Yet these are the very types that are manifestly not borrowed but spontaneously created afresh . . . [At] each [historical] metamorphosis the world has to hatch another clown from a clod. (Disher 33-4)

One should acknowledge the rootedness of Robert Armin and Lear's Fool within their particular social and literary contexts. Disher's fool that is "spontaneously created afresh" reasserts Plato's own emphasis, through the mouth of Alcibiades, on the uniqueness of Socrates, and thus the fool. Alcibiades hails the originality of Socrates' personality as "by far the most amazing thing about him" (221C). It would be stultifying to forget the fool's singularity, and to treat his creation like the shaping of cookies all from the same cutter. Thus, insofar as there is a tradition of the fool, this tradition necessitates change and variation, and is not mere repetition without development or uniqueness. The fool is not an instrument of a form but embodies form that is constantly being re-created within him. With this ahistorical dimension of the fool we are drawing nearer to the second aspect of the "dialectical marriage" between form and spiritual content.

The debate about religion in *Lear* is an on-going one, and is, of course, more far-reaching than can be discussed here. Many hold that much of *Lear's* religious content stems from the old English morality plays in which personified experiences, moral states, and psychological qualities interact. For example, Pleasure, Pomp, and

Fraud are characters in the play, *Three Ladies of London* by Robert Wilson (1584); these “characters” enact a drama with a heavily moral message. And yet, while the morality pattern of deception, fall, and purgation is detectable in *Lear*, “there is no doctrinal message” (Thompson 34). One could never identify *Lear* as solely a morality play, an allegory that establishes one-to-one correspondences between characters and abstract states. *Lear*, though, allows for greater range of correspondences between the literal and the abstract. Since *Lear* allows for multiple interpretations, critics often debate whether *Lear* is a pagan or a Christian play. Snyder holds that the play is pre-Christian:

Shakespeare created for it [*Lear*] a thoroughly pagan milieu quite unlike that of his source play [*King Leir*, 1594], which is steeped in Christian allusion and assumption. The play world of *Lear* is emphatically, if not totally, primitive. (Snyder 178)

Proof for Snyder’s argument is readily discernible. In the first scene, for example, when Lear banishes Cordelia, he swears by pagan figures:

For by the sacred radiance of the sun,
The mysteries of Hecate and the night,
By all the operation of the orbs
From whom we do exist and cease to be,
Here I disclaim all my parental care. (1.1.103-107)

Lear also swears “by Apollo” (1.1.154), and “[b]y Jupiter” (1.1.172), even though Kent assures Lear that “thou swear’st thy gods in vain” (1.1.155). And yet the play is also imbued with Christian redemption and forgiveness. L.C. Knights writes that for “what takes place in *King Lear* we can find no other word than renewal” (187). A.C. Bradley

asserts that it would even be appropriate to include the word

"redemption" in the play's title:

Should we not be at least as near the truth if we called this poem *The Redemption of King Lear*, and declared that the business of 'the gods' with him was neither to torment him, nor to teach him a 'noble anger,' but to lead him to attain through apparently hopeless failure the very end and aim of life? (285)

What is the reader supposed to make of this clash of religious systems in *King Lear*, a play which is, Snyder points out, "about religion in the making" (178)? To resolve this question, one may consider an analogy, namely the Tarot as a symbolically disclosing source of knowledge of the fool. This project would benefit from consideration of the Tarot, especially since both *Lear* and the Tarot are highly charged with symbolic content. Moreover, our understanding of the fool would benefit from knowledge of his position in the Arcana, for his unique placement illuminates much of the problem of spiritual complexities in *Lear*.

What are the Major Arcana of the Tarot? The word arcana is derived from the Latin word *arcanum* meaning secret. However, the Major Arcana of the Tarot are neither "allegories nor secrets, because allegories are, in fact, only figurative representations of abstract notions, and secrets are only facts, procedures, practices, or whatever doctrines that one keeps to oneself for a personal motive" (*Meditations* 4). In contrast with these, the Arcana are "authentic *symbols* [which] . . . conceal and reveal their sense at one and the same time" (4 emphasis

added). There are moreover twenty-two such symbols upon which to meditate: the Magician; the High Priestess; the Empress; the Emperor; the Pope; the Lover; the Chariot; Justice; the Hermit; the Wheel of Fortune; Force; the Hanged Man; Death; Temperance; the Devil; the Tower of Destruction; the Star; the Moon; the Sun; the Judgement; the Fool; and the World. The purpose in meditating on these authentic symbols that are "magic, mental, psychic and moral operations" is to awaken "new notions, ideas, sentiments and aspirations" (4). The application of the symbolic texture of the Tarot to *Lear*, a play rich with symbolic suggestion, can be fruitful. There is no threat that a symbolic interpretation will somehow reduce the characters to ideas or to abstractions; as John M. Lothian, a former professor of English at the University of Saskatchewan, asserted some time ago, "[p]art of the greatness of this play . . . is that so many of the characters, without becoming abstractions, are charged with symbolic significance" (38). In this way, characters and objects can take on symbolic, conceptual, and imagistic significance without reducing the character or thing itself to abstraction. Moreover, the plays of the Shakespearean corpus can be seen as analogous to individual Arcana insofar as they have the power to awaken "new notions, ideas, sentiments, and aspirations" on the mental, psychic, and moral levels of the reader.

The most well-known Tarot deck is the Marseilles deck dated to sixteenth-century France. In this deck, the fool is depicted as a poor

man, who walks from left to right with a small sack slung over his right shoulder; on his journey, he does not even notice that a small dog that is biting his heels and has even ripped a sizable hole in his trousers. This emphasis on the “right” (i.e. the direction in which he walks, and the shoulder over which his bag is slung) indicates that he is a fool of the good:

The Fool is walking from left to right. He holds his staff with his right hand, and with his left hand he balances on his right shoulder the staff from which the bag is hanging. His head is turned three-quarters to the right. So it is the Fool who has a tendency to the right . . . the Fool of the good, not of evil, which is also evident from the fact that he does not defend himself against the dog—which he could easily chase away by means of the staff. (*Meditations* 592)

The fool of the good walks trustingly through the day, apparently unconcerned for earthly needs. By focusing on the sky, he might demonstrate how to elevate the mind to things that are not of the earth, but to that which is possibly transcendent. Another popular image of the Arcanum of the Fool from the Rider-Waite deck (early twentieth century England) consists of a man gazing, again, into the sky, even though he is nearing the edge of cliff, and is perhaps about to take a plunge. While these images signify many things, one can immediately see, especially in the fool who is about to walk off the cliff’s edge, the reality of childlike trust, and the proclivity for an elevated consciousness. How do these depictions of the fool correspond to what can be observed of Lear’s Fool and of other fools in *Lear*?

Indeed, with the Fool's constant appeals to common objects of the concrete world—he speaks of eggs, dogs, crusts, combs, school masters, cuckoos, horses, asses, foxes, snails, and more—one might conclude that Lear's Fool is certainly not like the elevatedly concentrating fool of the Tarot. Lear's Fool, it seems, is focused on the world, not on a possibly transcendent reality. This conclusion is apt until we realize that it is in and through these apparently mundane objects that the Fool finds and conveys meaning beyond the scope of the superficial. The Fool is like Bakhtin, as posited by Clark and Holquist, who finds God in the things of the world, and also in the dynamic and animated connection of language between people:

Bakhtin sought God not in what John of the Cross called "the flight of the alone to the alone" but in the exact opposite, the space between men that can be bridged by the word, by utterance. Instead of seeking God's place in stasis and silence, Bakhtin sought it in energy and communication. In seeking a connection between God and men, Bakhtin concentrated on the forces enabling connections, in society and in language, between men. (62)

Whether or not Clark and Holquist are apt in their suggestion that St. John's was a static experience is debatable. There is no reason to believe either that Clark and Holquist's dichotomy is mutually exclusive—that is, the same spiritual experience can occur whether in solitude or surrounded by community and the world's plurality. There is no way of knowing whether the Fool actually experiences some kind of mystical union as St. John depicts in his *Dark Night of the Soul*, for the Fool's experience does not manifest itself as religious poetry, but

into talk of combs and crusts and snails. Yet that the Fool's words are loaded with meaning is unquestionable. Also unquestionable is that the fool is in and of the world. He does his contemplation, as it were, not in solitude in the heights of mountains, but among the people and the bustle. For the Fool, the world is brimming with significance and meaning.

Additionally, the number given to the Tarot card "The Fool" reveals much—not only about his nature, but also about the spiritual complexities he embodies. The numerical designation assigned to the fool is, in fact, zero, which is perhaps surprising considering that it was just posited that the fool lives in the diversity and multiplicity of the world. But the relationship between zero, or nothing, and everything, though, soon explains the numerical designation zero given to the fool:

The Fool is the Spirit of God about to descend into the nothing . . . at the beginning of creation. And the Fool is also the spirit of man approaching the One. The One pervades all things and is free of limitations. It contains all qualities and yet has no qualities . . . The Fool is the 0 which contains all things but is nothing. (Cavendish 114)⁵

Cavendish's insight reveals much about the Fool's role in *Lear*. The Fool is nothing himself, but he *contains* within himself the entire

⁵ Borges' sketch "Everything and Nothing" depicts a Shakespeare who has intimately experienced the reality of being every character he penned, and none, of being every person in the world, and no one :

The story goes that, before or after he died, he found himself before God and he said: "I, who have been so many men in vain, want to be one man: myself." The voice of God replied from a whirlwind: "Neither am I one self; I dreamed the world as you dreamed your work, my Shakespeare, and among the shapes of my dream are you, who, like me, are many persons—and none." (47)

peopled world with its multiplicity of things and objects. The language of the Fool demonstrates that he does indeed symbolically contain the world within, for he speaks only of things of the world, of everyday objects, but loads them with meaning and significance. The Fool uses the apparently mundane objects as a way of speaking of deeper truths. The word *contains* here is central to this concept. The fool, as we have just seen, is nothing, but nothing or no thing could not itself function as a container; *nothing* could not hold anything, let alone the *everything* of the fool. Therefore, *something* must function as a container of the All; this *something* is the *mask* of the fool, and the Silenus mask of Socrates that holds the universe within itself. The fool's mask is the boundary between the All that he contains and the everyday exterior reality. It is in wearing a mask, particularly the mask of madness, that the fool is able to contact a meaningful reality. Madness plays no small part in any study of *Lear*. In this play that shatters boundaries on countless fronts, madness is no exception, and the margins of fatuity and perfect senselessness are pushed to new extremes.

The fool, the mask, madness, spirituality—all of these soon gain an exceedingly close proximity, so close that they even, at times, become synonymous. To equate a place or a character with a concept, that is, to suggest that the hovel on the heath in Act Three, with its juxtaposition of inner/outer dimensions, *is* the mask, or to say that the

fool *is* the mask: is this symbolic? The former example is symbolic; the hovel, as we shall see, does come to signify the mask, and thus will inform the nature of masking. The latter example concerning the fool is symbolism also, but a particular kind of symbolism pertaining only to fools. The hovel on its own does not necessarily take on additional meaning. The shelter is just that. Also, any character can gain symbolic stature (i.e. Cordelia can potentially symbolize all goodness and virtue, Gonerill can potentially symbolize one-sided evil), and yet stripped of these qualities, they are who they are, no more, no less. With the fool, though, the case is different. *Fool* here refers to one who is a permanent fool, and not to those who enter into his sphere for a time and then leave it—namely all the fools in *Lear* besides *the Fool*. Even without any additional signification, the fool is *more* than who he is. In other words, by nature, the fool is more than real, almost ideal:

Clown fools represented a certain form of life which was *real* and *ideal* at the same time. They stood borderline and life and art, in a peculiar midzone, as it were; they were neither eccentrics nor dolts, neither were they comedic actors. (Bakhtin *Rabelais* 8 emphasis added).

The treatment of the fool and symbolism is unique since he is archetypal or ideal and real simultaneously. Thus to say that the fool embodies the mask, or, rather, *is* the mask, carries a different meaning than if the analogy were made with any other character. Yet the ideal nature allows for, even demands, such equations; the nature of such ideality can only be hinted at, and these hints consist of various

images, topics and analogies. An increasing intimacy of topics related to the fool to the point of equality is, therefore, to be expected, and strict distinction is not only unnecessary, but also impracticable. Just as Bergson prefers a subtle and imperceptible gradation of the comic to a strict definition of comedy, so shall we for the fool:

Our excuse of attacking the problem [of the comic] in our turn must lie in the fact that we shall not aim at imprisoning the comic spirit within a definition. We regard it, above all, as a living thing. However trite it may be, we shall treat it with the respect due to life. We shall confine ourselves to watching it grow and expand. Passing by imperceptible gradations from one form to another, it will be seen to achieve the strangest metamorphosis. (12)

In the spirit of Bergson, we shall also treat the fool "with the respect due to life," and allow the issues that surround him to take full form.

In the ensuing chapters, we shall explore the relationship, the equivalence rather, of the fool and the mask: whatever is associated with the mask becomes equally relevant for the fool. A simple algebraic formula may suffice to clarify relationships between images and concepts in some cases: if $a = b$ and $b = c$, then $a = c$. We shall see how one of the play's most thematically rich spaces—namely the hovel with its inner/outer orientation, its rough, frail, paltry exterior containing a fantastic, ever-expanding wealth of possibilities—locates the topics associated with the mask at centre stage. What takes place within the hovel (a), now mask (b), illuminates the fool (c) and makes the topic of folly central to the play. Similarly, madness and the satyr chorus will also be treated analogically with folly. By allowing several

authors and topics to enter into the problem of the fool, we shall attempt to expand the boundary of what is generally known about him, and in doing so, understand more deeply the nature of this mysterious figure and the reason for his kaleidoscopic presence in *King Lear*.

“All germens spill at once”

When Frye makes his striking observation (that the “word ‘fool’ is in course of time applied to practically every decent character in the play” [Sandler 110]), he qualifies the statement by adding that those “who are not fools are people like Goneril and Regan and Edmund, who live according to the conditions of the lower or savage nature they do so well in” (110). In this way, Frye creates distinctions between the characters: those who are fools, who have been already identified, and those who are not. Shakespearean criticism has long divided the *Lear* characters into two collectives. This critical process of division does not limit any interpretation of character or text, as it may seem, but actually fulfils what the text itself demands: “[the characters] fall into two distinct groups, which are strongly, even violently, contrasted” (Bradley 263). Whether it is true or not, as Bradley writes, that none of the *Lear* characters “strikes us as psychologically a *wonderful* creation, like Hamlet or Iago or even Macbeth; one or two seem even to be somewhat faint and thin” (263), the reader certainly seems to witness

in the lines of the *Lear* drama, not something individual, but rather something universal:

[There] comes that feeling, which haunts us in *King Lear*, as though we were witnessing something universal,—a conflict not so much of particular persons as of the powers of good and evil in the world. (263)

Among the two alliances there seems to be “one spirit breathing through” each group (263). And this “one spirit” in each group, Bradley holds, aligns itself with either force, Love or Strife, identified by Empedocles:

[T]he radical differences of the two species are emphasized in broad hard strokes; and the two are set in conflict, almost as if Shakespeare, like Empedocles, were regarding Love and Hate as the two ultimate forces in the universe. (263)¹

And while these two species, which we have hitherto designated as fools and non-fools, and which are “emphasized in broad hard strokes” are critically noticed, their formal designations change with every critic.

While Bradley deems the forces Love and Strife, Susan Snyder uses different terms, which she borrows from F.M. Cornford’s discussion of

¹ Fragment seventeen of Empedocles states that Love is the binding force in the universe, and Hate, the dividing force:

I shall tell of a double (*process*): at one time it increased so as to be a single One out of Many; at another time again it grew apart so as to be Many out of One. There is a double creation of mortals and a double decline: the union of all things causes the birth and destruction of the one (*race of mortals*), the other is reared as the elements grow apart, and then flies asunder. And these (*elements*) never cease their continuous exchange, sometimes uniting under the influence of Love, so that all become One, at other times again each moving apart through the hostile force of Hate. Thus in so far as they have the power to grow into One out of Many, and again, when the One grows apart and Many are formed, in this sense they come into being and have no stable life; but in so far as they never cease their continuous exchange, in this sense they remain always unmoved (*unaltered*) as they follow the cyclic process. (53)

Old Comedy. Cornford, who himself draws from Aristotle, provides Snyder with the relevant taxonomies. The first type, the Ironic type (*eiron*) applies to the fools, while the second type, the Impostor type (*alazon*), applies to the non-fools. The term *eiron* in the "fifth century appears to mean 'cunning' or (more exactly) 'sly'" (Cornford 137). The most significant aspect of the *eiron* character is that he "masks his cleverness under a show of clownish dullness" (138). This character is clever, understated, and his "'buffoonery' (*βωμολοχία*) is only the outer wear of 'irony'" (138). The parallels to Socrates are apparent, for he, who is known for his ironical speeches, wears such a mask of clownish buffoonery. The *alazon* character, on the other hand, makes himself out to be more than he is:

[*Alazon* characters] are in general imprudent and absurd pretenders, and that in two ways. In the first place, they put up a claim to share in advantages and delights which they have done nothing to deserve. In the writings of the philosophers '*Alazon*' is almost synonymous with 'liar.' The two words are constantly coupled in Plato; and in Aristotle the vice of imposture or swaggering occupies one extreme in opposition to the mean of 'truthfulness.' (140)

To put these definitions together we learn that the fool is an understated, ironical (*eiron*) character who has concern not for himself, but for the *other*. On the other hand, the non-fools are overstated, dishonest (*alazon*) figures who are not concerned for others, but for themselves. The tension between the groups is certain, and their characteristics, distinct. The study of the nature of the *eiron* group will

be the subject of this chapter, and the significantly dissimilar nature of the *alazon* faction will be discussed in the following chapter.

The group of fools is excessive in emotion, desire, and manner, as we shall see. It is understandable, moreover, that the fools behave so excessively, given their partly comic heritage with its emphasis on multiplicity:

Comic conventions, for all their diversity, do reveal common assumptions. The mode is too rich to enclose in any one formula, but the most pervasive principle is surely *the rejection of singleness*. The single self is seen as deficient, in more sense than one . . . And the conventional plot movement [of a Shakespearean comedy] itself, toward marriage, or, more usually, marriages, implies that twoness is better than oneness. (Snyder 51)

“Twoness is better than oneness”—one could hardly find a better definition of the comic. This emphasis on the plurality of comedy is exactly why Bergson writes in *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1913), a chapter entitled the “Expansive Force of Comic.” This force is not restricted only to literal multiplicity in marriage and then children, but applies to emotional growth as well. Romeo, the tragic lover, celebrates the phenomenon of the emotional expansion of joy:

Ah, Juliet, if the measure of joy
Be heap'd like mine, and that thy skill be more
To blazon it, then sweeten with thy breath
This neighbor air, and let rich [music's] tongue
Unfold the imagin'd happiness that both
Receive in either by this dear encounter. (*Romeo and Juliet* 2.6.24-29)*

And for Juliet, it is her love that grows and exceeds her
comprehension:

Conceit, more rich in matter than in words,
Braggs of his substance, not of ornament;
They are but beggars that can count their worth,
But my true love is grown to such excess
I cannot sum up sum of half my wealth. (2.6.30-34)*

Emotional states, friendships, and virtues (the Greeks' Courage, Fortitude, Prudence, Temperance, as well the Christians' Faith, Hope, and Charity), are all potentially expansive, irreducible, and limitless. This is not to say that limitations and boundaries are not in any way useful, even fundamental, to the condition of the latter virtues. Limit (i.e. Temperance) is seen as the virtue upon which all others are built, and Aristotle has limit (i.e. the mean)² as the ultimate goal of the life of the soul. Nevertheless, it would follow that if in this insistent dichotomization one group is expansive, the other group would be constrictive. Hate, jealousy, and violence are also limitless, but they, nevertheless, impose restrictions on their neighbours. If the fools embody plurality, the non-fools would embody singleness and isolation, which has yet to be proven. Nevertheless, the plurality of the fools and the restrictive singleness of the non-fools might reveal the deep tension at the foundations of *King Lear*.

² Aristotle holds that moral virtues are ruined by excess and defect. The ideal, therefore, of the moral life is the mean, and virtuous action must become habitual. Virtuous actions are performed "at the right time, toward the right objects, toward the right people, for the right reason, and in the right manner—that is the median and the best course, the course that is a mark of virtue" (*Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 6).

No one can help us understand this apparently inherent tension between singular and plural spheres better than Bakhtin, whose philosophical and linguistic contributions on laughter, on the carnival, and on the nature of the word are renowned. Bakhtin believed ardently in the “pluralism of thought and culture, and what he called ‘unfinalizability’ – the open-endedness of things – as if all forms of life were part of a huge, on-going ‘dialogue’” (Knowles 3). This ‘unfinalizability’ of things is what we have hitherto deemed limitless and irreducible. What has been referred to as singular and plural, Bakhtin calls monologic and dialogic. While Bakhtin, a linguist, is concerned with the nature of the word, his insight into monologic and dialogic words applies to more than speech and poetry in *Lear*, but also reflects the actions, movements, and motivations of the *eirōn* and *alazōn* companies. The individuals who embody the *eirōnic* principles, the fools, have a deeply dialogic and, thus, expansive nature, while those with the *alazōnic* disposition, the self-styled non-fools, have a monologic nature, and are interested in fixing, limiting, and binding those who oppose them.

The dialogic word, in which hope for newness may be found, is open-ended, undetermined, and responsive. With its tendency towards multiplicity, the dialogic word is, unsurprisingly, communal and egalitarian, while the monologic word seeks isolation, height, and distance. Indeed, while the monologic tendency is a source of

distancing both from the other and from oneself, the dialogic inclination “draws nigh not only the other but oneself as well” (Patterson 9). Bakhtin’s notions on laughter contribute to the understanding of the dialogic word, for laughter has an open-ended and irrepressible nature. For Bakhtin, laughter is not just the specific physical response to something humorous, but—like the dialogic word—is the gateway to freedom, becoming, and openness: “laughter opens the gate to freedom”; “laughter is essential to the process of becoming”; “laughter launches us into the open and thus carries us into the depths” (Patterson 7-8).

The fool is dialogic foremost, though, because of his inseparable connectedness to the mask, for behind the mask, several voices and identities may coexist. What Snyder writes about comedy applies to the mask as well:

Comedy’s [or the mask’s] penchant for alternatives and multiple possibilities points naturally toward a flexible identity that may change in response to new situations, a self that is not fixed but alterable and even potentially plural. (Snyder 48)

Fool and *mask* are even etymologically connected. According to Skeat, the Arabic word *maskharat* means “a buffoon, a fool, a jester, droll wag” (“Mask”). It is impossible for the fool to separate himself from the mask. And while the other fool characters like Edgar and Kent, for example, play the fool or wear the mask for a time, the Fool wears the mask permanently; he is the mask he wears, insofar as any consideration of the fool involves a recollection that the fool is not

what he seems to be. Everything about the Fool affirms his union with the mask: in appearance, he wears motley, and in speech, he uses enigmatic phrases and jingles. The Fool's relationship with the mask is persistent in *Lear*. The mask manifests the dialogic nature of the fools, but there are other ways in which this plural nature is perceived. Many fools in *Lear* demonstrate the fool's dialogic nature as a precondition for a potential metamorphosis of conditions, of persons, and of environments.

Examples of the tendency towards the dialogic can be seen throughout *King Lear*, and even in its ending. After Lear's death, the survivors mournfully set about arranging the new authority of the kingdom. One expects that only a single character will assume or be offered the late king's power, but here—in a moment not repeated in Shakespeare—Albany proposes that the government be shared. Each king has always enjoyed total monarchical power, but now the dialogic spirit attempts to break that tradition for the sake of community when Albany suggests that Kent and Edgar share the power and authority of the kingdom:

EDGAR. He [Lear] is gone indeed.

KENT. The wonder is he hath endured so long.
He but usurped his life.

ALBANY. Bear them from hence. Our present business
Is general woe. [To Kent and Edgar] Friends of my soul, you
twain
Rule in this realm and the gored state sustain. (5.3.289-294)

Kent declines the proposal (“I have a journey, sir, shortly to go: / My master calls me; I must not say no” [5.3.295-6]), but the inclination for multiplicity remains.

Earlier, Cordelia demonstrates her own capacity for change, a sign of dialogism insofar as change allows for multiple options. Cordelia allows Kent to do as he wishes after she lightly commands him to remove his mask; she thinks he no longer needs its protection. Kent, however, does not think that the time is right and implores Cordelia to reconsider:

Pardon, dear madam.
Yet to be known shortens my made intent.
My boon I make it that you know me not
Till time and I think meet. (4.6.8-11)

Cordelia does not press the matter, nor does she try to enforce her will: without thinking, she forfeits her initial request and quickly moves on to another matter: “Then be’t so, my good lord. — How does the king?” (4.6.12). Cordelia’s word is not fixed and hardened, and moves beyond the self; it is relational and expansive.

One of the most surprising dialogic sequences in *King Lear* involves the interplay of *nothing* and *nothingness* that is so central to the text; this interplay complements the nothing/everything union within the fool. While nothingness has been a major focus of critical attention, rarely has it been viewed in the light of a dialogic pattern. First, the word “nothing” is passed—almost playfully—from character to character, and becomes, strangely enough, something that connects

them. Cordelia, of course, initiates the dialogue centred on nothingness, but Lear instantly joins in:

LEAR. What can you say to draw
 A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.
CORDELIA. Nothing, my lord.
LEAR. Nothing?
CORDELIA. Nothing.
LEAR. Nothing will come of nothing, speak again. (1.1.80-85)

Lear continues the theme when he refuses to give Burgundy any dowry for marrying Cordelia: "Nothing, I have sworn; I am firm" (1.1.240).

This dialogue of nothingness is resumed by Gloucester and Edmond when Edmond pretends to try to hide a letter supposedly written by Edgar, which Edmond has himself written:

GLOUCESTER. Edmond, how now? What news?
EDMOND. So please your lordship, none. [*Putting up the letter*]

GLOUCESTER. Why so earnestly seek you to put up that letter?
EDMOND. I know no news, my lord.
GLOUCESTER. What paper were you reading?
EDMOND. Nothing, my lord.
GLOUCESTER. No? What needed then that terrible dispatch of it into your
 pocket? The quality of nothing hath not such need to hide itself.
Let's
 see. Come, if it be nothing, I shall not need spectacles. (1.2.26-35)

The first dialogue between Cordelia and Lear certainly has profound and unforeseeable consequences, but in any other context this dialogue, and especially its sequel between Edmond and Gloucester, contains the pattern of banter found in almost any comedy show. Abbott and Costello's classic comedy routine *Who's On First?*

epitomizes the generative interplay of repetition and misunderstanding.

While there are many more instances in which characters speak of nothing, it is the equivalence of nothingness between Cordelia and the Fool that is most striking. Critics have often noticed the connection between Cordelia and the Fool, a relationship that stands out even though they are never scripted on stage together. Whether or not it is true, as some critics have asserted, that both characters were played by the same actor, they are complementary and have a unified structural force: "so far as this balance is concerned, Cordelia and the Fool function as one character. Never in the struggle at the same time, they serve really as one component force" (Stroup 129). And the Fool's "identification with Cordelia . . . is suggested in the play even before his initial appearance on stage, when his absence (from the king's presence) is linked to Cordelia's absence (from Britain)" (Doloff 19):

LEAR. But where's my Fool? I have not seen him these two days.

KNIGHT. Since my young lady's going into France, sir, the fool hath much
 pined away. (1.4.60-63)

There are many other connections between Cordelia and the Fool:

Wronged and hurt, the innocent Fool, nevertheless, remains faithful to his master, seeing beyond the old man's folly and unhesitatingly suffering with him. Likewise Cordelia, having heard of Lear's plight, returns only to save her father and for no other reason. . . . Her whole interest centres on his redemption. (Stroup 130)

Both Cordelia and the Fool, not just Cordelia alone, are centred on Lear's redemption; the Fool's bitter criticism, which some critics interpret as plain meanness, is as important to the king's eventual healing as Cordelia's soothing presence is in the end. Each fool does his or her part in this "dialogue of healing" for Lear. But no connection is quite as striking between Cordelia and the Fool as nothingness. Rarely has the Fool's apparently abrupt and unforeseeable departure halfway through the play been connected to Cordelia's initial response to her father. But these two characters that "function as one component force" are so unified that the spoken word of one becomes the action of the other: Cordelia *speaks* nothing; and the Fool *becomes* nothing.

The Fool's disappearance halfway through the dramatic action has been much debated. Mark Berge, for example, holds that the Fool's last line that signals his departure ("And I'll go to bed at noon" [3.6.41]) "expresses his despair in watching his master succumb to the seeming madness of the heath" (220). Other critics hold that the Fool leaves not out of despair, but out of selfishness; either he does not wish to subject himself to the harsh conditions on the heath or he does not care any more for his master and so departs. Gareth Lloyd Evans, for example, holds that Lear's Fool is the coldest of Shakespeare's fools and that his spontaneous disappearances and reappearances are inexcusable:

Lear's Fool is the most removed of all. He darts in and out of the play with his wry comments, his unremarked wisdom and warnings, his saws and jingles which seem to come from a time before clock-time began. When he is no longer dramatically needed he disappears from the action with utter finality. (149)

Evans sees the Fool first as a flighty eccentric, and then as simply a primitive instrument of the drama. Other critics hold that the Fool's emotional *involvement* is, in fact, his most outstanding quality. Bente A. Videbæk writes that the clown shares similar qualities, like truth-telling, with other fools, but his emotional sensitivity is new: "the clown as truth-teller is no new thing in Shakespeare, but a genuinely sad clown is" (124). On one hand, the Fool is seen as "most removed of all," and on the other, as "genuinely sad." This latter discovery of emotional involvement makes it possible to see that the Fool's departure is not a distant or a selfish act at all but one of the greatest acts of courage—a Kierkegaardian leap of faith—in the whole play. The Fool's departure is thus connected with the word of Cordelia, and much more.

The Fool is governed by his own inner laws that are much different from those for the non-fool; this unique standing is all the more understandable when we recall that the fool represents "a certain form of life which was real and ideal at the same time" (Bakhtin *Rabelais* 8; see page 24 above). In a statement that contradicts his original judgment on the Fool, Evans writes that "[i]nside the Fool there lies a mystery about which all we can instinctively say . . . is that it has

something to do with a knowledge and sometimes a purpose which is *exclusive to the Fool*" (153 emphasis added). The Fool's motivations are perfectly exclusive, and difficult, therefore, to understand. One thing that is clear is that a certain quality of *tracelessness* surrounds him; the Fool's steps leave no footprints. After the Fool departs conclusively, he is hardly mentioned again. He thus seems to come and go according to wind-like inner impulses. Actually, the word "fool" is usually derived from the Latin word *follis*, which means "a pair of bellows, wind-bag; pl. *folles*, puffed cheeks; whence the term was easily transferred to a jester" (Skeat "Fool"). The image of the puffed cheeks emphasizes the fool's connection with the wind and, thus, with all that is carefree, spontaneous, and spirited. But the connection also carries another, more sexually charged meaning:

Ernest Weekley . . . carries further the derivation of "fool" from the Latin *follis*, which he defines as "bellows, windbag, but probably here in the specific sense of *scrotum*; cf. It. *coglione*, 'a noddie, a foole, a patch, a dolt, a meacock' (Florio), lit. testicle; also L. *gerro*, fool, from a Sicilian name for pudendum." One could also compare the obscene oath "ballocks!" or "balls!"—testicles—meaning "nonsense!" or "silly pretension!" Weekley's derivation is in keeping with the exaggerated sexuality of many clowns and fools throughout history. (Willeford 11)

The fool, therefore, is linked directly with that which is of the spirit—for the wind "which 'bloweth where it listeth' (John 3:8), is one of the most archaic representations of spirit"—and that which is of the flesh (10). The latter sexually-laden qualities are not foreign to the Fool: many of his comments are charged with sexual innuendo. The Fool's

song of advice to Lear, Danby comments, is a condensed *Rake's Progress* (111). The Fool uses apparently benign images to warn of sexual license:

The codpiece that will house
Before the head has any,
The head and he shall louse;
So beggars marry many.
The man that makes his toe
What he his heart should make,
Shall of a corn cry woe,
And turn his sleep to wake. (3.2.25-32)

Again and again, the Fool refers to the foot as the place of humiliation and repudiation. Halio interprets the passage as warning against sexual licentiousness:

In the first quatrain the Fool comments on the danger of the sexual appetite overcoming prudence; i.e. reckless fornication leads to forced marriages, beggary, and disease. The second quatrain comments on another foolish inversion of values that eventually leads to misery. . . . The Fool alludes to Lear's favouring of Gonerill and Regan over Cordelia, but he also continues the theme of sexual license contrasted with real love. (176)

At the same time, the Fool's nature is filled with a spirituality that is manifested in the gusty unpredictability of his movements. This tempestuous nature of the fool fulfills what Jaques, who longs to be a fool ("O that I were a fool!" [2.7.42]), declares to the Duke when he says that he desires freedom like the wind: "I must have liberty / Withal, as large a charter as the wind, / To blow on whom I please, for so fools have" (*As You Like It* 2.7.47-9).³ Jaques identifies the fool's

³ *As You Like It* offers an illuminating precedent for *Lear*, with striking similarities to be found between the texts: "[d]ifferent as it is from *As You Like It* in tone, *Lear* is more like that comedy in the way it suspends the urgencies of plot, at least for the

need for wind-like liberty, and Lear's Fool embodies that liberty. The Fool's breezy appearances and disappearances are certainly unpredictable, but this does not mean they are manifestations of selfish motivations.

It is as likely to suppose that the Fool does not wish to leave his tormented master, but something tells him he must go; if the Fool resisted this impulse, the situation would be worse for it. This disruptive figure who seems to break every rule may actually be under the *greatest* obedience. Many verses addressed to Orpheus in Rilke's *Sonnets for Orpheus* apply also to the Fool on this topic of obedience and can help us to understand the Fool's motivation to leave. In this sonnet, the pronoun *he* (er) refers of course to Orpheus, but if we change the antecedent to *the Fool*, the new application is fruitful:

O wie er schwinden muß, da ihrs begriffst!
Und wenn ihm selbst auch bangte, da er schwände.
Indem sein Wort das Hiersein übertrifft,

ist er schon dort, wohin ihrs nicht begleitet.
Der Leier Gitter zwingt ihm nicht die Hände.
Und er gehorcht, indem er überschreitet. (1.5.9-14)⁴

Only in breaking the rules, or in overstepping the bounds is the Fool obedient. The Fool does not overstep the torn landscape out of

protagonist, and allows time for philosophical discussion, role-playing, and the expanding of perspectives" (Snyder 143).

⁴ Though he himself is afraid to disappear,
he *has* to vanish: don't you understand?
The moment his word moves out beyond our life here,

he has gone where you will never find his trace.
The lyre's strings do not constrict his hands.
And it is in overstepping that he obeys. (1.5.9-14)

selfishness or refusal, but rather in obedience to the obscure impulses that govern his world.

There are more ways in which knowledge of Orpheus helps us to understand not only the Fool's strange and seemingly erratic behaviour, but also his intricate nature. In addition to their shared and characteristic obedience, both Orpheus and the Fool are lyricists, poets, and singers. Orpheus of course is famously depicted with his lyre, but the Fool—like all Robert Armin's fools—is known also for his song. In the film version of *Lear* directed by Grigori Kozintsev, the Fool is "associated . . . with music, specifically with playing a small wooden flute" (Johnston). And it is the Fool's music heard above the torn landscape, as opposed to the stark, desolate wasteland of Peter Brook's production, that ends the play:

In the closing moments of the play, we hear the Fool playing his music above the desolation, and as he plays, we see the crowds of people . . . slowly and tentatively start to pick up things and move towards the beginning of some reconstruction. (Johnston)

Even though the Fool does not speak the last words of the play, the sound of his music is what endures every event and every word. Sustaining the linkage between the Fool and music, as Kozintsev does, strengthens the connection between the Fool and Cordelia. In the scene in which Lear awakes to newness of mind in the presence of his beloved fool Cordelia, music is given an especial function. The music, softly playing, comes to prominence when the Doctor instructs, "[I]ouder the music there!" (4.7.24).^{*} Music is thus associated with

healing, and specifically the healing powers of the fool, signified by Cordelia's presence and her medicinal words:

O my dear father, restoration hang
Thy medicine on my lips, and let this kiss
Repair those violent harms that my two sisters
Have in thy reverence made. (4.7.25-8)*

Such fond hopes and gestures make an imperfect attempt to salve the abused world and its inmates.

It is Orpheus' descent into the underworld that is particularly relevant to the Fool. Actually the notion of the journey manifested for Orpheus as a descent and return is relevant to the Fool. This journey down and back is a "movement promulgated in madness" (Patterson 17). And it is "madness [that] announces the need to set out, even though we know not where to go" (17). The inextricable position of madness in the journey pattern is more than slightly relevant to *Lear*, the centre of which—the hovel scene—features the ultimate locus of madness in Shakespeare. Lear remains for a time in this underworld; the Fool departs perforce alone. While space is limited for the study of the hero, the journey and all they entail, what is needed here, on a purely symbolic level, are the two mentioned movements of descent or departure and return, and also the change that accompanies them, for inevitably any character who ventures on a journey or adventure changes in some form, however subtle.

On a deeper level, though, Orpheus and the Fool do not *go on a journey*, as it were, and return changed. They, unlike most characters,

actually *live* in change. This is why the Fool's departure, like Orpheus', as Rilke tells us, is not something to be mourned, for the Fool, like Orpheus, *lives in transformation*, and whenever there is change, there is the Fool (or Orpheus):

Errichtet keinen Denkstein. Laßt die Rose
nur jedes Jahr zu seinen Gunsten blühen.
Denn Orpheus *ists*. Seine Metamorphose
in dem und dem. Wir sollen uns nicht mühen

um andre Namen. Ein für alle Male
ists Orpheus, wenn es singt. Er kommt und geht.
Ists nicht schon viel, wenn er die Rosenschale
um ein paar Tage manchmal übersteht? (1.5.1-8 emphasis added)⁵

Rilke tells us that Orpheus is metamorphosis, and this insight applies to the Fool—he too is metamorphosis. With this connection between the Fool and change, as with the earlier connection between the fool and the container or mask, two different states are equated: a character and an abstract notion. But the Fool does not cease to be the Fool even when he takes on abstract meanings, a development which, as Lothian once declared, is part of “the greatness of this play” (see page 19 above). And the ideal aspect of the fool allows for, even demands, a symbolic interpretation.

5

Erect no gravestone for him. Only this:
let the rose blossom each year for his sake.
For it *is* the god. His metamorphosis
in this and that. We do not need to look

for other names. It is Orpheus once for all
whenever there is song. He comes and goes.
Isn't it enough if sometimes he can dwell
with us a few days longer than a rose? (1.5.1-8)

The Fool, who is the mask, is also transformation, for the “mask is connected with the joy of change and reincarnation” (Bakhtin *Rabelais* 38). The mask is also “related to transition, metamorphosis, and familiar nicknames. It contains the playful element of life” (38). And *King Lear*, if anything, is a drama about the transformation of a “majesty [who] falls to folly” (1.1.143). The king’s metamorphosis from mighty ruler to stripped madman to redeemed and repentant father is *the* central development in the play. It is not surprising, therefore, that the image of the mask, which represents the fool’s journey into the unknown, gains central prominence in this play.

The Fool departs at the height of madness from the hovel, which will soon gain symbolic significance: in leaving, the Fool, who embodies transformation, demonstrates the *movement* central to this reality (Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan). The movement is literal and symbolic, for the Fool who literally whisks in and out of the play also symbolizes the hidden movement of inner change that is played out in his ailing master, as we shall see. The Fool’s connectedness to journeying or traveling is why he, like Foucault’s madman, can be called “the Passenger *par excellence*” (Foucault 11). The fool’s life is, for better or for worse, just that—a passage or journey. He lives only in the travelling, and belongs neither to the land from which he departs nor the land to which he is navigating: “[h]e has his truth and his

homeland only in that fruitless expanse between two countries that cannot belong to him" (11).

The image of the journey, and the fool's journey specifically, is manifested in *Lear* in the image of the sea-venture or sailing. Fittingly, in the Renaissance, one of the most popular vehicles that emphasized this movement of the fool's voyage was the ship:

Something new appears in the imaginary landscape of the Renaissance; soon it will occupy a privileged place there: the Ship of Fools, a strange "drunken boat" that glides along the calm rivers of the Rhineland and the Flemish canals. (Foucault 7)

There actually existed these ships in Renaissance Europe that gathered onto their decks all the wandering madmen who had been driven beyond the city limits, even though it is "not easy to discover the exact meaning of this custom" (8-9). It is plausible, and even likely, that this method of ridding cities of unwanted deranged men was the inspiration for a host of literary works in which the main setting was a sea vessel:

Symphorien Champier composes a *Ship of Princes and Battles of Nobility* in 1502, then a *Ship of Virtuous Ladies* in 1503; there is also a *Ship of Health*, alongside the *Blauwe Schute* of Jacob van Oestvoren in 1413, Sebastian Brandt's *Narrenschiff* (1494), and the work of Josse Bade: *Stultiferae naviculae scaphae fatuarum mulierum* (1498). (8)

These works portrayed a "great symbolic voyage which would bring them [the voyagers], if not fortune, then at least the figure of their destiny or their truth" (8). The destiny or the truth for the fool is found in the symbolic image of travelling, which epitomizes his interior

landscape, and exterior action. The imagery of sailing and sea-faring is significant for *Lear*: Caroline F. E. Spurgeon notes that three of the most-used images in Shakespeare “under [the category of] ‘nature’ [are] the sea, ships, and seafaring” (47). And thus, the image that will represent this “great symbolic journey” towards a truth that is found in transformation and passage is the sea-vessel that captured the imagination of Renaissance thinkers.

The image of sea-faring with all of its symbolic implications in *Lear* comes in an unexpected place—not on the sea, but within the hovel. The hovel becomes connected, therefore, with the symbolic image of the journey. But one wants to ask: how are these two notions connected? There are many levels of meanings surrounding the image of the small refuge from the storm. On its most superficial level, the hovel serves as a protective barrier from the raging tempest. Second, on a metaphoric level, the nonsense that reigns within the hovel expresses Lear’s own dementia. Every character within is connected to madness. The Fool, who does not obey the standard set of social codes of behaviour, is often seen as mad by nature, even though the reader knows that there is genius behind the Fool’s words; Edgar and Kent have assumed the disguises of madmen named Poor Tom and Caius respectively; and Lear is mad through and through. Also, the dialogues, or simultaneous monologues, reflect Lear’s fragmented mind. As nowhere else in Shakespeare, when the characters finally

reside within the shelter, for over forty lines articulation and response do not meet, and all coherent communication seems shattered. The utterances within the hovel, instead of meeting their mark, seem rather to ricochet in chaos' abyss:

EDGAR. Frateretto calls me, and tells me Nero is an angler in the lake of
darkness. Pray, innocent, and beware the foul fiend.
FOOL. Prithee, nuncle, tell me whether a madman be a gentleman
or a
yeoman.
LEAR. A king, a king!
FOOL. No, he's a yeoman that has a gentleman to his son; for he's
a mad
yeoman that sees his son a gentleman before him.
LEAR. To have a thousand with red burning spits
Come hissing in upon 'em!
EDGAR. Bless thy five wits. (3.6.6-15)

Lear is mad through and through, which not even he denies, for he declares that a madman is none other than "a king, a king!" (3.6.10). And the miscommunication can be seen, from one perspective, to represent Lear's misfiring brain. The hovel scene is often seen as the climax of the play, its status as the centre of perfect chaos and madness noted by G. Wilson Knight:

The core of the play is an absurdity, and indignity, an incongruity. In no tragedy of Shakespeare do incident and dialogue so recklessly and miraculously walk the tight-rope of our pity over the depths of bathos and absurdity." (92)

The madness that is structurally central to the play, infuses the play with meaning, as we shall see.

Finally, in a way that does not discount the other two interpretations, the hovel takes on symbolic implications by the

striking contrast between the internal and external atmospheres. Indeed, if one were to define a mask, one might do so not by focusing on the border or mask itself, but by describing the mask's effect on space: it creates distinct spheres of space, an outer sphere and an inner. In this regard, many ordinary things are like masks: an emptied egg shell, a snail shell, a cave—the list, redolent of the Fool's discourses, is endless. Many of these images that emphasize inner and outer spaces are found in *Lear*. While not every image or object of such definition gains symbolic meaning, the hovel does gain greater significance by its prominent position in the play; the hovel is at the very centre of one of the most intensely charged and symbolic scenes in all of Shakespeare. Every character in the meaningful scene that enters the shelter wears a mask. Thus the hovel image that also juxtaposes interior and exterior space ripens with meaning. While darkness, rain, and violent winds dominate outdoors, warmth and dryness are at least anticipated, if not provided, indoors. Within the refuge, Kent hopes that Lear will find respite, even though we know no benign rest is found here. Nevertheless, the tension between inner and outer realms places the image of the hovel directly in the domain of the mask, the Silenus figure, and the Fool, all of which open to reveal a very different inner landscape than what might be assumed from their external presentation. If one sees the hovel as symbolic of the mask, the occurrences within the mask will reveal the actual mechanics, as it

were, of the mask, an opportunity for revelation that is not repeated in *King Lear*.

Edgar reveals the most important clue about these mechanics in the first line he utters. When Edgar stumbles out of the hovel as if in a panic, he yells out: "Fathom and half, fathom and half" (3.4.37). While this at first seems like a meaningless line, it quickly gains significance when we realize that "fathom and half" is a "sailor's cry; the hovel is shipping water" (*Riverside* 1324). If Edgar utters a sailor's cry, the hovel, therefore, to follow the image through, becomes a capsizing ship. And since we have already stated that the hovel symbolizes the mask, the mask and the ship, therefore, become comparable. One could conclude that going into the mask is equivalent to going on a journey, a journey that is interior. For Orpheus the journey pattern manifests in a descent into the underworld. The fool's descent into this refuge is analogous to Orpheus' or Aeneas'—or Clarence's—trip into Hades, although what is gained from each descent is strikingly different.

In this way, the hovel becomes Shakespeare's version of *The Ship of Fools*, exploding with folly. And since the pattern of the journey involves transformation, so would descending into madness involve this inevitable change. Lear does enter into madness. Lear is quite far gone when he is shown without his kingly robes, but wearing only what nature can provide; he is "*fantastically dressed with flowers*"

(4.6.80 s.d.). Earlier Lear recognizes that he is succumbing to the madness: "My wits begin to turn," (3.2.65). But, this recognition seems to produce a new concern for the other. After he asserts that his "wits begin to turn," Lear focuses for the first time not only on himself, but on others too, and thus, Lear's word, to use Bakhtin's vocabulary, becomes dialogic. Right after Lear tells us that there has been some shift within himself, he immediately enquires into the condition of the Fool: "Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy? Art cold?" (3.2.66). And when the group finally enters the hovel, Lear is not concerned about precedence. As king, Lear would certainly assume first position, but he is content to go in last. Now he places the well-being of others before his own:

KENT. Good my lord, enter here.
LEAR. Prithee, go in thyself, seek thine own ease.
 This tempest will not give me leave to ponder
 On things would hurt me more; but I'll go in.
 In, boy, go first. You houseless poverty —
 Nay, get thee in; I'll pray, and then I'll sleep. (3.4.23-7)

The image of Lear entering last recalls the Gospel: "many who are first will be last, and the last will be first" (Matt. 19:30). Lear wants his surrounding kin to be comforted from the storm, and to "seek [their] own ease." Even Lear's relationship with the gods has changed. In his fury at the beginning, Lear calls upon the gods only to seal an oath against Cordelia, or to curse his unforgiving daughters. Now, on the heath, Lear is calm with and generous to his crew, and it would follow that he calls upon the gods for reasons other than negative ones: "Nay,

get thee in; I'll pray, and then I'll sleep" (3.4.27). Lear has been preserved from his own anger, and he is simply able to release himself from all that previously caused his rage.

Lear does finally wake to total sanity in Cordelia's presence, having purged his mind's chaos. Lear, in his speech to Cordelia, becomes the prototype of the gentle and repentant man who recognizes his foolishness:

Pray do not mock me:
I am a very foolish, fond old man,
Fourscore and upward,
Not an hour more nor less; and to deal plainly,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
Methinks I should know you and know this man;
Yet I am doubtful: for I am mainly ignorant
What place this is, and all the skill I have
Remembers not these garments, nor I know not
Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me,
For, as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia. (4.6.56-67)

Lear enters into madness and temporarily becomes a fool. With the aid of other masked fools and madness, he embarks on the fool's journey into the unknown. It is not literally that Lear's entrance into the hovel changes him, for the hovel is only symbolic of a deeper process: the entrance into the madness and the change that took place because of this entrance. The aspect of travelling involved with the mask and with madness is why Lear's "madness becomes, in fact, his *route* to sanity" (Ryans 257 emphasis added). A brief look at the signification of water, which is inseparable from the image of sailing, will clarify this process. Water has infinite symbolic possibilities. Water is often

symbolic of madness: "water and madness have long been linked in the dreams of European man" (Foucault 12). Thus, the madness in the hovel scene is additionally stressed by the references to water. As mentioned above, the first reference is Edgar's "Fathom and half, fathom and half" (3.4.37). Later, the image of water with its implications of madness is emphasized again when Edgar announces that "Nero is an angler in the lake of darkness" (3.6.6-7). The Emperor Nero "fiddled while Rome burned and is imagined condemned to hell for many crimes against his family and the Empire," and is, therefore, associated with extreme degrees of guilt (Halio 193). The magnitude of this guilt is revealed in the waters that have grown black with blame. Lear's own dark waters of bitterness and remorse are in great need of purification. While water has a destructive side which manifests intensely in the storm that breaks down the mind, it also connotes baptism, initiation, purity and renewal. Water can be a means of purification: "water is the face of the deep that summons the deep within, the medium and passage of purification" (Foucault 18). Entering into the hovel's symbolic landscape with its purgative water has a renewing and purifying effect on Lear. After journeying into the madness and going through it, Lear returns to newness on the other side: "like Christ going into and emerging from the wilderness, the madman embarks for and returns on the other side" (Patterson 16). And after his passage through madness, Lear too meets forgiveness,

health, and renewal. Thus the static image of the container or mask, gains dynamism and movement, and becomes the actual vehicle for change. And insofar as the Fool, a character or being, embodies the mask and enacts, Orpheus-like, metamorphosis, he initiates transformation—a rite of passage even. Characters who enter into the mask, who embark on an inner journey, manifest change eventually; the real movement, therefore, happens behind the mask; the real movement happens within.

Thus the space within the fool and within madness becomes the actual space where change happens. In this way, the mask becomes the alchemical oven in which change can occur. Characters enter into this sphere of dialogism behind the mask and become “potentially plural” (see page 33 above). Thus, the state behind the mask is one of potentiality, in which lies the possibility for newness, and the freedom found in possibility itself. In donning the mask, and particularly the mask of madness, characters provide themselves with the greatest possibilities, at least within, and avoid being fixed or trapped by the alazon figures. Lear of course does not wear the mask of madness, but is totally nonsensical. Madness, with its unpredictable, responsive, and changeable nature, is the greatest state of potentiality, and the state which allows, therefore, for the possibility for change:

In an overflow of meaning by nonsense, madness penetrates the horizon of what is defined by common discourse to open up a realm of unlimited possibility. Here lies its power of revelation: it is the power of possibility. When madness introduces its alien

discourse, truth is cast in terms of possibility—and therefore of freedom—rather than necessity. (Patterson 14)

The mask of madness also offers Kent and Edgar this freedom; unlike Lear, they do not need or desire transformation. Edgar and Kent assume the mask first for self-preservation, and second to save father and master respectively. It is important to remember that the power of change may be found within the mask. Lear's madness signals the need for freedom from fixedness, which is possibility, and for change.

Moreover, Lear confirms the necessity of potentiality for change. After Lear roars the charged line, "Crack nature's moulds" (3.2.8), what follows immediately explains what happens when these molds, dramatic and otherwise, are cracked: "all germens spill at once" (3.2.8). "Germen" means a seed, a hope, a possibility. And the chaos in the hovel—and in the mask—indicates that here, at this climactic point of madness, all germens are, indeed, spilling at once without restraint. Thus, in terms of genre, one consequence of the union of tragedy and comedy is infinite potentiality. This point of change, the space of potentiality within the mask is an undefined, nameless space, a turning point:

Wolle die Wandlung. O sei für die Flamme begeistert,
drin sich ein Ding dir entzieht, das mit Verwandlungen prunkt;
jener entwerfende Geist, welcher das Irdische meistert,
liebt in dem Schwung der Figur nichts wie den *wendenden Punkt*.
(Rilke 2.12.1-4 emphasis added)⁶

⁶ Will transformation. Oh be inspired for the flame
in which a Thing disappears and bursts into something else;
the spirit of re-creation which masters this earthly form

Lear must move to this *wendenden Punkt* or “pivoting point.” Lear enters upon the madness, the pivoting point where he is “no longer [himself]” and only after this entrance can he burst “into something else.” The Fool occupies this turning point, this sphere of possibilities perpetually, which is why he is so responsive and changeable. This point of change is an undefined, nameless space; hence Fool lacks a name.

Lear, of course, in entering into the madness, does not know where he is going, or if he will ever return. He enters into this metaphorical darkness, and is, therefore, *blind* to the future. He does not determine the direction of his future, but he is, rather, *led* by madness to life and redemption. The notion that Lear who is blind to his future is led to safety by madness is fulfilled by the scene where Edgar, disguised in madness, leads his father, Gloucester, literally blind, whose mind, like Lear’s, is overgone by monologic despair:

GLOUCESTER. Come hither, fellow.

EDGAR. . . . — Bless thy sweet eyes, they bleed.

GLOUCESTER. Know’st thou the way to Dover?

.....

EDGAR. Ay, master.

GLOUCESTER. There is a cliff whose high and bending head

Looks fearfully in the confinèd deep.

Bring me but to the very brim of it,

And I’ll repair the misery thou dost bear

With something rich about me. From that place

I shall no leading need.

EDGAR. Give me thy arm.

loves most the *pivoting point* where you are no longer yourself. (2.12.1-4; emphasis added)

Poor Tom shall lead thee. (4.1.53-5, 67-74)

In this symbolically charged scene of leading and following, assuming a mask—the madness assumed by Edgar—leads to safety and health, for Gloucester, who is also mad, but in a different way, is in need of protection. Gloucester's madness is not shammed like Edgar's, but is instead a despairing one. In this scene, by contrasting the madness of Gloucester and Edgar, Shakespeare shows the varying kinds of madness.

As Erasmus had recognized almost a century earlier, frenzy and folly are near allied in their double aspect (Corti). The influence of Desiderius Erasmus (1467?-1536) on the Renaissance conception of folly is profound and deeply learned. His *Moriae Encomium* or *The Praise of Folly* (1509) focuses on the question of religious ecstasy and draws upon Plato, Philo, the gospels, the Pauline epistles, Origen, St. Ambrose and Theophylact. M.A. Screech writes that, in the end, *The Praise of Folly* is a "witty, erudite, sustained, and moving praise of a form of religious ecstasy which is indistinguishable from madness" (xvii). This type of madness, called here religious ecstasy, is different from the madness in the present discussion; it is nevertheless important to keep in mind that such a kind of madness brought on by a religious experience exists. Moreover, even Rabelais, whose *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, a novel of unprecedented folly, is known to

have written a letter "to Erasmus in 1532, calling him his intellectual father and his intellectual mother" (Screech xiv).

For Erasmus, writes Corti, folly "represents the utmost, rarest relationship that everybody can retain with himself *qua homo*" (15). Thus, the uniqueness and idealness of Socrates comes from folly. There are two kinds of folly: foolish and wise: "[s]o on the one hand, we find the 'foolish folly' of folly which rejects the 'wise folly' of reason, and a wise folly which, in being rejected by a nonsensical folly, finds itself redoubled" (15). Corti's distinction between "foolish folly" and "wise folly" reflects Erasmus' "foolish madness" and "wise madness," a reflection that shows that no distinctions need to be made in this regard between madness and folly, it being far more necessary to identify whether the madness/folly be foolish or wise. Erasmus in *The Praise of Folly* distinguishes these:

But ye must understande, that there be two kyndes of madnesse. One is that rage, whiche the Furies of hell, beyng punishers of the wicked, doe bringe with them, as often as thei graffe, and fasten inn the mindes of mortall men, either feruente desire of an uniuert reuengement, or unsaciate couettousnesse of golde, or cursed and unleefull loue, or parentslaughter, or treason, with suche other plages sent by the iust iudgment of the gods, for the punisshyng of misdooers. Or whan those Furies do trouble, and vexe the gilty conscience of a man, with the pricke of dredefull furiousnesse. But there is an other kynde of madnesse, farre unlike the former, which procedeth from me wholly, and most is to be embraced. As often as a certaine pleasant rauing, or error of the mynde, deliuereth the herte of that man, whom it possesseth, from all wonted carefulnesse, and rendreth it dyuers waies, muche recreated with new delection. (52)

Erasmus distinguishes between Edgar and Gloucester's madness: Gloucester's is foolish, while Edgar's is wise. Gloucester wants to be led to the heights of Dover, or, to the isolated heights of madness, one could say. From this peak, Gloucester wants to commit the ultimate vainglorious act, the apex of monologic madness. With a crucial difference, Gloucester's blind climb upon the cliff recalls the Arcanum of the trusting fool about to step off the edge in perfect faith that he will not be harmed. The dissimilarities of this situation to Gloucester's are obvious. Unlike the fool, Gloucester mounts the precipice with heaviness of heart and spirit, from which he must be rescued by the redemptive mask of wise madness donned by his son Edgar as Poor Tom. Wise madness is what saves the foolishly despairing madman from death by his own hands. Wise folly leads Gloucester to safety and to life.

And yet there are characters in *Lear* who are not so fortunate as to be connected to the saving power of folly: Gonerill, for instance, whose situation is the antithesis of Gloucester's. Gonerill, who represents the extreme form of the non-fool, is cut off from all that is life-giving, just as a tree that has become separated from its life-force, sap:

ALBANY. I fear your disposition;
That nature which contemns it[s] origin
Cannot be bordered certain in itself.
She that herself will sliver and disbranch
From her material sap, perforce must wither,
And come to deadly use. (4.2.31-6)*

Folly, then, is at least one component, perhaps even a major one, of the “material sap” of existence, and without which fluid aspect, it follows, the tree, or character would eventually dry up and harden. The symptoms of this petrification are prevalent, for Gonerill and other non-fools are given stone-like qualities. Gloucester first illustrates this rock-like image in the storm scene when he tells Lear to enter the shelter: “Go in with me. My duty cannot suffer / T’obey in all your daughters’ hard commands” (3.4.132-3). The daughters’ words are likened to stones, which shows their separation from folly’s life-force. The image is pushed further when, as Lear states, not only are Regan and Gonerill’s words hard, but so are their hearts: “Then let them anatomize Regan; see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?” (3.6.33-4). This emblematic rigidity of the non-fools, and the sisters, is the force opposite of the expansive and multiplying movement of the fools. The stiff and unchanging disposition of the sisters is more closely linked to what Bakhtin would call monologic. This monologic tendency of the sisters, though, surpasses even Bakhtin’s definition, as we shall see, for the movement that opposes expansion or explosion, is not fixedness, but implosion. And it is Gonerill who performs the act of the extreme form of implosion: suicide. Gonerill, who is cut off from the “material sap” has no connection to the saving power of wise folly, as Gloucester does. Both Lear and Gloucester certainly manifest “foolish folly,” but

they are aided by or *connected to* the “material sap” of those who embody “wise folly,” like Kent, the Fool, and Edgar; Gonerill, though, is not connected to any character who embodies the life-saving wise folly. Madness disconnected from wisdom, therefore, is total madness.⁷ Gonerill, Regan, Cornwall, and Oswald too, therefore, are the only really mad characters in *Lear*.

⁷ The madness, or wise folly, of the fool, is described by St. Paul, who is himself referred to as a fool for Christ, when he writes of the folly of the cross, which folly is applicable to the fool on many levels:

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the learning of the learned I will set aside” . . .

Has not God made the wisdom of the world foolish? For since in the wisdom of God the world did not come to know God through wisdom, it was the will of God through foolishness of the proclamation of save those who have faith . . . For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

There are many other Fools of Christ: Gregory the Great, Scotus Erigena, Francis of Assisi, Thomas à Kempis with his *Imitatio Christi*, and Nicholas of Cusa who writes of the coincidence of knowledge and ignorance.

“A house to put 's head in”

The two movements that correspond with *Lear's* divided and opposed companies proceed as follows. The first is one of increasingly outward manifestation that is both changeable and considerate of the other—this movement has been called expansion. The second, the topic of the present discussion, is characterized not by multiplicity, increase, and growth, but by singleness, reduction, and contraction—this movement will be called implosion. The in-turning nature of the second movement is not to be confused with interiority or introspection, for it is rather a movement towards self-annihilation. While the fools have been called dialogic, the non-fools are monologic, and an image from the myth of Demeter captures the nature of the monologic word.

Persephone, daughter of Demeter the god of fertility and the seasons, is abducted by the god of the underworld and made to remain in Hades. Persephone's captivity grieves Demeter so greatly that she neglects one of her greatest responsibilities: the transformation of the seasons. The land soon becomes barren and

unfruitful, a wasteland. This grief-stricken landscape needs rejuvenation. In *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, such renewal is triggered when Demeter in her sorrow travels to Eleusis and is unexpectedly made to laugh by a servant girl, lambe:

Unsmiling, tasting neither food nor drink,
she sat wasting with desire for her deep-girt daughter,
until knowing lambe jested with her and
mocking with many a joke moved the holy goddess
to smile and laugh and keep a gracious heart —
lambe, who later pleased her moods as well. (qtd. in Sælid Gilhus
34)

The two landscapes, one of fertility and one of barrenness, are clearly contrasted, and the gateway between them, as lambe demonstrates, is laughter. Significantly, lambe is referred to as "*athyroisin*, 'doorless', and in a hymn to Demeter composed by the poet Philikos (3c BCE), lambe says to Demeter, 'If you are willing to loosen the bonds of your mourning, I can set you free'" (35). Thus the opening, freeing, and dialogic, that is, expansive, power of laughter is emphasized (35).

The connection between laughter and fertility is brought to the forefront in another version of the Demeter myth, rendered by Clement of Alexandria in *The Exhortation to the Greeks*. In this version, it is Baubo, "not lambe, who manage[s] to get the mourning Demeter to laugh" (Sælid Gilhus 34). Baubo's strategy is more broadly stated than lambe's, and the connection between laughter and generation made more explicit, for, instead of telling a joke to make Demeter laugh, Baubo bares herself:

This said, she drew aside her robes, and showed
A sight of shame; child Iacchus was there,
And laughing, plunged his hand below her breasts.
Then smiled the goddess, in her heart she smiled,
And drank the draught from out the glancing cup. (qtd in Sælid
Gilhus 34)

Baubo's name, like Iambe's is significant, for it means vagina (34). The fool of course is akin to Iambe or Baubo, not only with his closeness to sexuality and to the body, but also with his dialogism and his tendency to break open situations and environments. The fool is, after all, the Lord of Misrule, who can shatter every border or convention for the sake of openness and freedom, even though Lear's Fool has a more difficult time shattering Lear's despair that threatens to destroy the king. This typically open and fertile aspect of the fool is contrasted with the closed and barren nature of the sisters.

The sterile and closed (laughter-less) landscape of the sisters is easily detectable. One of Lear's curses to Gonerill sums up all of the language of her barrenness. Even though the nature of a curse describes what is prospect and not what is present, the distance between this wish for barrenness and the reality of such a sterility might not be great—the corrupt and violent acts of the sisters are certainly not manifestations of a healthy inner world, but of an exceedingly damaged one. Although the curse is directed at Gonerill, it applies to Regan as well:

Hear, Nature, hear, dear goddess, hear:
Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
To make this creature fruitful.

Into her womb convey sterility,
Dry up in her the organs of increase,
And from her derogate body never spring
A babe to honour her. If she must teem,
Create her child of spleen, that it may live
And be a thwart disnatured torment to her.
Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth,
With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks,
Turn all her mother's pains and benefits
To laughter and contempt, that she may feel
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child. (1.4.230-244)

Thus, the daughters become the image of the anti-Demeter who has not only failed to produce life, but may yet create that which is a distortion of life, a "child of spleen." The sisters are the antithesis of any feminine abundance or fruits of laughter. With their hard natures, they are absolutely without laughter. The location of the weeping Demeter helps us understand the daughters' natures, for Demeter "who was *agelastos*, 'without laughter'. . . 'is sitting by the Agelastos Petras, 'the rock without laughter'" (Sælid Gilhus 35). Those disconnected from the opening and life-giving force of folly become like the Agelastos Petras: frigid, hard, and humourless.

There is hardly a better image than the Agelastos Petras to describe what Bakhtin means when he speaks of that which is monologic. The monologic word is often found in the mouths of those with authority, because it manifests frequently in the form of a command, which seeks only one response—obedience (Patterson 9). The sisters possess this rigid word of authority once Lear imparts his power and wealth to them; he makes his daughters his mothers

(1.4.133-4), and, even though he did not wish it, gave them authority (i.e. power) over him. Such authority, though, soon becomes as “cold, intractable, and unresponsive as an idol of stone” (Patterson 9). The fool’s capacity to counteract, or at least to save themselves from this movement towards solidification, as we shall see, is why Welsford declares that “one perennial function of the fool [is] the power of melting the solidity of the world” (223).

The inflexibility of the daughters’ word is epitomized in the scene in which they strip Lear of his one hundred attendants, the last trappings of his former wealth and kingship. Whereas Cordelia is willing to let go of her initial request to Kent to remove his disguise, the sisters will not forfeit their request that Lear come to their houses unattended, even though Lear himself desperately wishes otherwise. Though Lear is obviously suffering at the hardness of the sisters, who pare away at his wealth and his mind, (“O sides, you are too *tough!*” [2.4.190 emphasis added]), they do not yield even slightly to their father:

LEAR. I can be patient, I can stay with Regan,
I and my hundred knights.

REGAN. Not altogether so.
I looked not for you yet, nor am provided
For your fit welcome. Give ear, sir, to my sister,
For those that mingle reason with your passion
Must be content to think you old, and so —
But she knows what she does.

LEAR. Is this well spoken?

REGAN. I dare avouch it, sir. What, fifty followers?
Is it not well? What should you need of more?

.....

GONERILL. Why might not you, my lord, receive attendance
From those that she calls servants, or from mine?

REGAN. Why not, my lord? If then they chanced to slack ye,
We could control them. If you will come to me
(For now I spy a danger) I entreat you
To bring but five and twenty; to no more
Will I give place or notice.

.....
LEAR. Those wicked creatures yet do look well-favoured
When others are more wicked. Not being the worst
Stands in some rank of praise. [*To Gonerill*] I'll go with thee;
Thy fifty yet doth double five and twenty,
And thou art twice her love.

GONERILL. Hear me, my lord:
What need you five and twenty? ten? or five?
To follow in a house where twice so many
Have a command to tend you?

REGAN. What need one? (2.4.223-31, 236-42,
249-56)

The sisters will not change their word; they are intractable. The image here is one of diminishment or paring down. According to the OED, "to pare" means "to reduce (a thing) by cutting or shaving away; hence to reduce to diminish little by little; to bring down to size or amount," which is exactly what Gonerill and Regan do to Lear. The Fool actually calls the sisters "parings" (1.4.148). The monologic characters contribute an element of reduction rather than one of increase to the drama, and their acts of diminution derive from their limited perspective of the world.

The sisters view the world as an object, and not as living subject—a perspective that, consequently, materializes everything. Thus, the sisters are likely not even conscious of their father's suffering, for they are focused only on their own wills and desires. Because they cannot

see the world beyond their own perspectives, their universe, like the monologic word, becomes an objectified, and thus materialized, reality:

Monologism, at its extreme form, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, and I with equal rights (thou). With a monologic approach (in its extreme or pure form) another person remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness, and not another consciousness . . . Monologue manages without the other, and therefore to some degree materializes reality . . . It *closes down* the represented world and represented people. (*Dostoevsky* 293-4 emphasis added)

The monologue closes down the world by its narrow and confining perspective. And, in a presentiment of Martin Buber's *Ich and Du*, Bakhtin shows that those who embody the monologic tendency do not even see others as human beings. For Buber, the *I* is irretrievably relational, that is, two-fold; the *I* cannot exist without the other. The other, though, can be approached as a living subject worthy of reverence (Thou) or as a material object (It):

The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary word which he speaks.

The primary words are not isolated words, but combined words.

The one primary word is the combination *I-Thou*.

The other primary word is the combination *I-It*; wherein, without a change in the primary word, one of the words *He* and *She* can replace *It*. (Buber 3)

A person, therefore, may be referred to as an object, *It*, with the *I-It* or monologic perspective. The sisters hardly approach the world with the *I-Thou* structure or even with a typical *I-It* perspective, which is cold certainly, but not aggressive. There is nothing passive about the way

they wish to “[h]ang [Gloucester] instantly,” and “[p]luck out his eyes” (3.7.4-5) for his supposed crime of treason. Nor is there anything passive about the way they surround Lear and whittle away his fortune. Firmness and objectivity do not connote aggression; but the sisters are certainly more than these—they attack. In this way, we might change or rather intensify Bakhtin’s definition for Regan and Gonerill, who do not close *down*, but close *in on* “the represented world and represented people.” As illustrated by Regan and Gonerill’s incremental reduction to Lear’s attendants, this intensified monologic behavior contracts. In this way, not only do the sisters reject Buber’s *I-Thou* relationship, but in a monstrous exaggeration of the *I-It* connection, they attack the world.

Through various tricks of language—forgeries, lies, manipulations—this reductively monologic nature aims to entrap the other: “[in the] life of the personality, monologue divides, while dialogue makes whole; monologue enslaves, while dialogue liberates” (Patterson 52). We have seen the contrasting tendency of the dialogue to seek freedom in the dialogic or multiple possibilities in the mask. This entrapping tendency of the monologue is clearly expressed throughout the *Lear* text. Moreover, the image of entrapment is certainly not suggestive and abstract—a mere notion of monologic constriction—but is blatant and concrete. Its images are pushed to the very forefront of the text and, from this apparently superficial position,

take on particular meaning. One must pay attention, then, to the surface of the drama for, paradoxically, what the text may conceal. Indeed, like the mask, the text hides everything on the surface. Thus, in the very literal images of constriction and enslavement, the deeper issues of inner entrapment are revealed. The image of constriction is made plain, and is first seen when Cornwall and Regan, monologic counterparts, order Kent, the masked dialogist, to be bound in the stocks:

CORNWALL. Fetch forth the stocks!
 You stubborn, ancient knave, you reverend braggart,
 We'll teach you.

KENT. Sir, I am too old to learn;
 Call not your stocks for me. I serve the king,
 On whose employment I was sent to you.
 You shall do small respects, show too bold malice
 Against the grace and person of my master,
 Stocking his messenger.

CORNWALL. Fetch forth the stocks!

.....
 [*Kent is put in the stocks*] (2.2.114-121)

Having trapped Kent in the stocks, the paring monologists repeat the pattern with Gloucester. Interestingly, these aggressive characters always work together as a team in seeking out the isolated. This predatory behavior reflects human perceptions of wolves hunting in a pack. Among the many animal names he calls Gonerill, Lear accuses her of having a “wolvish visage” (1.4.263). Thus, it is no surprise that Gloucester, alone, is cornered by Regan, Cornwall, and their servants, who seek to capture him:

Enter GLOUCESTER and Servants

CORNWALL. Who's there — the traitor?
 REGAN. Ingrateful fox! 'tis he.
 CORNWALL. *Bind fast* his corky arms.
 GLOUCESTER. What means your graces? Good my friends, consider
 You are my guests. Do me no foul play, friends.
 CORNWALL. *Bind him*, I say.
 REGAN. Hard, hard! O filthy traitor!
 GLOUCESTER. Unmerciful lady as you are, I'm none.
 CORNWALL. To this chair *bind him*. (3.7.27-34 emphasis added)

The enslaving tendencies of the monologists are patent in the *Lear* text in which stocking and binding are prominent events. In an illuminating transference, Regan uses the pejorative term *hard* to insult Gloucester. Only the non-fools, though, manifest this quality in their actions that entrap, bind, and maim.

But this type of enslavement cannot stop at the original victim, and in the end the monologue enslaves itself. Indeed, from the evidence of Regan's murder and then Gonerill's suicide, the pattern of constriction intensifies to the point of implosion or self-annihilation:

Losing contact with word of the other, which is indispensable to dialogue, the character reaches a position where he cannot do other than what the monologic voice requires; thus becoming the plaything of compulsion, he dies in one form or another. The I-for-myself loses the I-for-the-other, loses the dialogical relation, and finally loses itself. (Patterson 52).

Gonerill and Regan in the end "lose themselves." And while these sisters at no point live for the other, in the beginning of the play they at least support each other, even if the alliance is strategically contingent. Eventually, though, they must turn on each other, each vying for the favour of Edmond, who deceives and uses them both.

When Edmond hears of the sisters' deaths, he admits that he "was contracted to them both" (5.3.202). And with their deaths, Edmond articulates, "all three / Now marry in an instant" (5.3.202-3).

Gonerill's suicide is rarely regretted by critics, if at all. Yet, as a significant action in the play, her death deserves reflection. There is no avoiding Gonerill's wretched attacks on her own kin, but she is certainly one of, if not *the*, most abused character, for she is abused from within, to the point that she kills herself. And, in a play that seems to be so interiorly focused, suicide is the darkest manifestation of a damaged inner world:

EDGAR. What means this bloody knife?

GENTLEMAN. 'Tis hot, it smokes.

It came even from the heart of — O, she's dead.

ALBANY. Who dead? Speak, man.

GENTLEMAN. Your lady, sir, your lady; and her sister
By her is poisoned: she confesses it. (5.3.197-201)

Gonerill's suicide, not Cordelia's or any other death, is arguably the most regrettable event in the whole play. There is no mitigation in this death, even though Gonerill has been anything but just to her father and youngest sister. While no one can deny the drama's painful ending with the deaths of Gloucester, Lear, and Cordelia, the state in which these characters die is significant. Cordelia dies in innocence and full of gratitude for her father's transformation. Lear dies redeemed, having changed from a hot-tempered compulsive tyrant to a repentant man of sobriety with moral courage enough to ask for forgiveness. Gloucester dies in full knowledge that his repudiated, apparently lost

son lives and loves him. These characters die, but not in suicidal darkness, the ultimate manifestation of madness, like Gonerill. Gloucester has Edgar to save him from his own destruction, and Lear has everyone else to help him face his folly. Gonerill, though, is more affected by madness than any other character, but has no way of realizing or escaping from it. Gonerill endures the greatest degree of confinement, therefore, for she has no folly to break open her madness.

The acts of enslavement performed on Kent, on Gloucester, and finally on Gonerill herself in suicide, are manifestations of an underlying claustrophobia pervading the *Lear* text. Susan Snyder notes this claustrophobic atmosphere. For Snyder, constriction epitomizes the structure of the play, especially in Shakespeare's unique use of the double plot. Usually the double plot, a distinctly comic device, permits the "audience to escape confinement within a single set of problems and relationships by shifting from one world to another—court to country, nobles to common folk" (141). In contrast, the plot of *Lear* raises one set of problems that would be confining in itself, but becomes all the more so for its emphasis on constriction. One would expect the Gloucester plot, then, to offer the much-needed escape from the prison of the Lear plot. Indeed, while the reader thinks that the Gloucester plot will "promise just this sort of variety . . . events

bring the two plots into closer and closer symmetry," and the freedom that typically results from the double plot is utterly diminished (141):

[The similarities between the plots] is not to deny the differences of scale and emphasis between the Lear plot and the Gloucester one, but rather to recognize that the promise of escape was a trick. There is no contrasting realm of action which operates by rules different from Lear's. By introducing a potential contrast and then dissolving it in dreadful parallelism, Shakespeare converts the double plot from its usual freeing function to the service of tragic claustrophobia. (141)

The Gloucester plot closes a trap, and no freedom is offered there to the audience. This illusory attempt at freedom affirms the claustrophobia that lowers throughout. Indeed, the challenge of the fools, then, is to find freedom and breath within this foreshortened, toxic landscape. The fools must seek refuge in this imploding or coagulating landscape that would crush every character in monologic aggression; they need a barrier to prevent them from being compacted. It is the mask, in fact, that is this exact barrier, this refuge, this frustration of the in-turning world. The refuge of the mask serves not only as a space for any needed change and as an escape from the paring, but functions also like a pocket of oxygen in an otherwise breathless and uninhabitable landscape. The fools cannot merely escape from the converging world, for this is their country and their world. The fools cannot leave; they need to find freedom within it, which freedom is exactly what Kent points out.

Freedom within the mask is what Kent alludes to when he discloses his plans to enter into a disguise. After Kent is banished, he

tells everyone that he will leave England and travel to a new country: "Thus, Kent, O princes, bids you all adieu, / He'll shape his old course in a country new" (1.1.180-1). We know, however, that Kent does not, in fact, travel to another country. Instead, he stays where he is, but assumes the disguise of a madman, Caius. Putting on a disguise is thus equated to travelling to a new country, which association reaffirms the notion of the mask as journey. Kent contributes to this notion by adding the attribute of freedom within the mask: "Freedom lives hence [in the new country—inside the mask], and banishment is here [without the mask]" (1.1.175). For Kent, the mask is important not as a means of transformation, but as a means of keeping company with Lear, who had banished him from his company and from the country. Snyder disagrees: she argues that the mask does not provide Kent with freedom. He maintains the same role of servant instead of assuming a new one: "Kent becomes Caius in order to go on doing what he has been before. His servant role represents no radical change of outlook, and its freeing powers are correspondingly limited" (150). Kent, however, does not seek a "radical change of outlook," but wishes simply to continue to "shape his old course." The mask offers Kent the freedom he needs to fulfill his desire to serve. This freedom and breath is found, in fact, within the fool and within the mask, which uses its inner nothingness or emptiness or breath or potentiality, paradoxically, to withstand the pressure of the converging world.

Despite external restriction, the mask provides the bearer with openness and inner freedom. Thus, Welsford's romantic observation that the fool has the power to "melt the solidity of the world" (223; see page 65 above), needs to be clarified by *Lear*. The fools hardly succeed in melting the hard hearts of Regan and Gonerill. To prevent themselves from being crushed by their world, the fools must slip into the mask.

If indeed an oppressive atmosphere dominates the *Lear* world and if the mask does function as an open space that hinders a total collapse, one would expect there to be an emphasis on security in interior spaces like the hovel. Indeed Shakespeare does stress the notion of *moving inside*, and becoming interior is an increasingly repeated theme. Pertinently, it is the Fool, the wielder and perpetual bearer of the mask, who introduces this motif in the first Act. After Lear has blundered all he could, the Fool chides him for giving away his possessions. Lear turns out to be worse off than a snail, who at least has his shell in which to lay his head. Lear has given away even his shell, as it were, and has no outer barrier of protection:

FOOL. Canst tell how an oyster makes his shell?

LEAR. No.

FOOL. Nor I either; but I can tell why a snail has a house.

LEAR. Why?

FOOL. Why, to put 's head in, not to give it away to his daughters, and leave

his horns without a case. (1.5.21-6)

Sharing, by imputation the cuckold's horns with the soft shell, Lear is unprotected and humiliated both physically and mentally, and is, thus, the greatest target of oppression. As one who has found freedom within the mask, Kent also stresses Lear's need for a means of survival in the slowly collapsing landscape—a "case" or "house" in which to put his head. On the heath, Kent implores Lear repeatedly to find protection:

Alack, bare-headed?
Gracious my lord, hard by here is a hovel.
Some friendship will it lend you 'gainst the tempest.
Repose you there, while I to this hard house —
More harder than the stones whereof 'tis raised,
Which even but now, demanding after you,
Denied me to come in — return and force
Their scanted courtesy. (3.2.58-65)

Kent persists with this theme of entering, even when Lear either disregards or does not hear him:

Here is the place, my lord. Good my lord, enter.
The tyranny of the open night's too rough
For nature to endure. (3.4.1-3)

Lear does not respond affirmatively, and so Kent repeats himself: "Good my lord, enter here" (3.4.4). Lear does not respond to Kent's request but says pensively, "Wilt break my heart" (3.4.4), to which Edgar replies, "I had rather break mine own. Good my lord, enter" (3.4.5). Lear then releases his thoughts in a long speech directed to no one, and when he finally finishes, Kent repeats the familiar line: "Good my lord, enter here" (3.4.22). And, over one hundred and fifty lines later, after meeting with Edgar disguised as Poor Tom, Kent is still

repeating the same plea: "Good my lord, take this offer; go into th'house" (3.4.140). The levels of meaning behind Kent's simple command "go in" are numerous indeed and this command takes on a more loaded significance with every repetition. The imperative embodies all that has been discussed concerning the mask above. By commanding Lear to "go in," Kent also tells Lear to change, to seek protection, and to let his heart, the centre of the inner world, heal. This emphasis on interiority symbolizes the need to participate in a spiritual dimensions in life found "within."

The repeated "go in" speaks of the value of the inner life, which is accessible at any point in time. This perspective of interiority, moreover, helps us even to understand the deaths at the end that many critics find difficult to deal with. Issues of injustice besiege Cordelia's death. We find her death so incomprehensible because her purity, innocence, and goodness do not merit such a harsh end that could have easily been prevented. The contrast between the horrible outward event and Cordelia's inner world is immense, a contrast that forces one to look at the inner/outer dichotomy:

The force of the impression [of Cordelia's death] . . . depends on the very violence of the contrast between the outward and the inward, Cordelia's death and Cordelia's soul. The more unmotivated, unmerited, senseless, monstrous, her fate, the more do we feel that it does not concern her. The extremity of the disproportion between propensity and goodness first shocks us, and then flashes on us the conviction that our whole attitude is asking or expecting that goodness should be prosperous is wrong; that, if only we could see things as they are, we should see that

the *outward is nothing* and the *inward is all*. (Bradley 325-6
emphasis added)

Bradley adds that "some such thought as this . . . is really present through the whole play" (326). Here we find the great contrast between the real and the ideal, which ideal reality, Bradley seems to imply, might be more real and more meaningful than reality itself. The critical focus, therefore, determines one's stance on the play's final events. John Reibetanz notes that part of our reaction to the play stems from our preference for either reality or ideality:

We protest so strongly against Cordelia's death because we are not of her world (nor is Lear, try as he does to reach it): we cannot, in fact, value virtue more than life, although we can look up to such a value as an ideal. We are more like Edgar, who compromises and clings to life. (122)

In the tension between real and ideal worlds, Reibetanz holds that most readers and critics identify with reality over ideality. Samuel Johnson's well-known opinion might be said to arise from a predisposition for real or external events over the ideal or inner ones:

And, if my sensations could add anything to the general suffrage, I might relate that I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia's death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor. (3)

Like Johnson, Nahum Tate focuses on the play's exterior. Tate's inspiration to change the ending is derived from reflection on outward events, although not even he can restore Lear to the throne. Bradley, on the contrary, focuses on the interior events, and goes so far as to say that the "inward is all." But the inward bounty of the play is

understated, to say the least, beside the much more accessible darkness. *Lear's* inner richness and virtue has to be sought by the reader. In this way, *King Lear* itself becomes a Silenus figure that renders its inner beauty difficult of access within the harsh presentation of the events.

An inner ideal that is maintained behind a rough surface returns us to Socrates and Silenus. Yet, Alcibiades compares Socrates not just to Silenus but also to a satyr, Marsyas. It is worthwhile, therefore, to consider this specific satyr, as well as the nature of the satyr in general. According to myth, Marsyas was a talented satyr who found a flute discarded by Athena. After experimenting with the instrument, he discovered that he had talent enough to play, even excellently. Marsyas could play so well, in fact, that he challenged Apollo, the god of music, to a competition. Not surprisingly, Marsyas lost the competition, and, for his presumption, he was flayed to death. It is easy to see how Alcibiades might use the myth to accuse Socrates of excess or *hubris*, “[p]resumption, orig. towards the gods; pride, excessive self-confidence” (OED). The fool as we have seen does overstep or exceed limits on every level—religious, political, social—yet he does not do this out of pride, but out of obedience. In the myth of Marsyas, the connection between the fool and music is again reaffirmed. Marsyas, or Socrates the fool, like Lear’s Fool in Kozintsev’s film version of *Lear*, is a musician. But Socrates surpasses even Marsyas’ abilities, because

Marsyas needs an instrument to charm people, whereas Socrates, Alcibiades tells us, needs only words:

And you're quite a flute-player, aren't you? In fact, you're much more marvelous than Marsyas, who needed instruments to cast his spells on people . . . The only difference between you and Marsyas is that you need no instruments; you do exactly what he does, but with words alone. (215C-215D)

While the Fool does not necessarily have the same spellbinding effect on his company as Socrates, he nevertheless possesses the same gift of doubled language. Both Socrates and the Fool speak about apparently insignificant things and topics, but their words are loaded with meaning. The meaning, intensity, and charge behind these similar façades of banality infuse their words with a sense of musicality. The potency of their speech shines through the commonplace talk, and seems to issue from an ideal source within.

There is hardly a more concise or influential rendering of the nature and continuance of this inner ideal than Friedrich Nietzsche's study of the satyr chorus in his first major work, *The Birth of Tragedy*. Nietzsche's study of the satyr chorus is important, even necessary for any study of the fool, for as Thelma Niklaus states, it "seems probable that all mimes, clowns, drolls, and mummers known to Europe were engendered by the Satyr of the Greek Old Comedy" (qtd. in Willeford 11). Like the "idyllic shepherd of more recent times," the satyr is the "offspring of a longing for the primitive and the natural" (Nietzsche 61). He thus embodied this ideal reality:

It is indeed an "ideal" domain, as Schiller correctly perceived, in which the Greek satyr chorus, the chorus of primitive tragedy, was wont to dwell. It is a domain raised high above the actual paths of mortals. (58)

Fictitious as they were, these wood-dwelling creatures still represented the archetype, that is, the ideal, of the human being, with its intensity and capacity for emotion and life in general. The satyr's closeness to nature was a source of his fervour, and he embraced even the terrible aspects of the forest, thus embodying the archetypal nature of the human:

The satyr was the archetype of man, the embodiment of his highest and most intense emotions, the ecstatic reveler enraptured by the proximity of his god, the sympathetic companion in whom the suffering of the god is repeated, one who proclaims wisdom from the very heart of nature. (61)

It is difficult at this point not to think of the Fool as indeed the "sympathetic companion in whom the suffering of [his master] is repeated," and of Lear as a distant echo of the god Dionysus, the satyr's god and the god of wine and nature who is depicted wearing a crown of laurels, especially when we see Lear "*crowned with weeds and flowers*" (4.6.80 s.d.).* Though this allusion remains authentic and present at a distance, it breaks down with a closer view. The analogy fails when Nietzsche resolves several common misunderstandings of the satyr chorus.

Nietzsche argues forcefully about the critical misinterpretation of the function of the chorus. While Nietzsche admits that it is popular to view the chorus as an "ideal spectator" of the tragic action, this view is

not consistent with the tradition of the chorus and with the origin of tragedy. Nietzsche states that this "tradition tells us quite unequivocally that tragedy *arose from the tragic chorus*, and was originally only chorus and nothing but chorus" (56 emphasis added). This emphasis changes the importance of the chorus and the perception of the tragedy, for the chorus that is commonly seen as taking a sideline role is now placed in the forefront. But what does Nietzsche mean when he claims that tragedy arose from the tragic chorus? He explains that the action proper of the tragedy was "basically and originally thought of merely as a vision; the chorus is the only 'reality' and generates the vision, speaking of it with the entire symbolism of dance, tone, and words" (65).¹ In other words, in the beginning of tragedy, the action proper *was* the satyr chorus, the fool's ancestor, envisioning the drama of Dionysus. For this reason, Nietzsche states, it does not make sense to claim that the chorus' main function is as spectator, for the "spectator without the spectacle is an absurd notion" (57). It is with this insight that the Fool/Lear—Chorus/Dionysus match dissolves, for to carry the relationship further would mean that Lear himself is a vision of the Fool, and that the fools are the only realities in the play; the whole play would then have been dreamed up by the fools.

¹ While Aristotle does not go so far as to say that the chorus envisions the tragedy, he holds that the chorus is nevertheless integral to the drama: "The chorus should be thought of as one of the actors; it should be a part of the whole and contribute its share to success" (*Poetics* 18 1456a 25-7).

Nevertheless, Nietzsche is equally dissatisfied with the other popularly-accepted statement that the chorus' main function was that of poetic license. It is not that Nietzsche denies the relevance of this characteristic, but suggests that it in no way encompasses the whole meaning of the chorus: it is "not sufficient that one merely tolerates as poetic license what is actually the essence of all poetry" (58). As the predecessor of the fool who is associated with the flute, the chorus is also associated with music—he is the "essence of all poetry." Also, one immediately sees the similarities between the description of the chorus, and the commonly-held statements about the fool, who is also seen as both the ideal spectator and the all-licensed critic. Gonerill sneers, as we have seen, that Lear's Fool is "all-licensed" (1.4.160). These notions contain pertinent insight. For example, the relevance of the all-licensed critic to *Lear* is great, especially in the context of its first recorded performance. *King Lear* was played for the first time in the English courts for King James I during the Christmas holidays, 1606. It is easy to see how some of the Fool's criticism directed at Lear could also have been aimed at the viewing King. The play indeed "touched on a number of sensitive issues" regarding British parliament (Halio 1), especially regarding the issue of the division of the kingdom. In his first parliament, King James "declared his intention of uniting the kingdoms of Scotland and England as one realm, Great Britain, restoring the ancient title and unity to the land" (1). Lear's line, "Know,

that we have divided / In three our kingdom," (1.1.32-3) would indeed have made King James sit up. The notion of the all-licensed critic to the king bears upon these circumstances of performance and reception. It is nevertheless important, though, not to make this the ultimate meaning of the fool, whose ancestor, the satyr chorus, Nietzsche insists, "is actually the essence of all poetry." One must include the notion of poetic license in one's conception of the fool, and then continue to seek out a more encompassing meaning.

Nietzsche finds this deeper meaning in Friedrich Schiller's preface to his play *The Bride to Messina*, and our understanding of the fool will benefit from Schiller's image of the chorus:

the chorus [is] a *living wall* that tragedy constructs around itself in order to close itself off from the world of reality and to *preserve its ideal domain* and poetical freedom. (58 emphasis added)

One can hardly find a better definition of Lear's Fool than Schiller's of the tragic chorus: he "is a living wall." And within this living wall exists an "ideal domain and poetical freedom." Now the reader might ask: "is the fool the wall, which seems to be like the mask, or is he the content within the wall or mask?" This question cuts to the heart of the problem, and we shall answer: both. The wall is the mask of the fool, and within its shell the domain of the ideal may exist; but the ideal domain and the mask depend on each other. Without the wall, the boundary, no ideal domain can exist. Insofar as these integral aspects of the fool are co-dependent and inextricably linked, he is both. But

the inner contents preserved behind this living border are both the fool and also that which transcends him. This is why Patterson declares that there is an “inner infinity behind the mask” (17). In asserting a definite border, the fool allows what is perhaps a transcendent reality to enter within. The Fool encourages one to dialogically “look inside” for an eternal world. *Lear*, so preoccupied with the fall, the division, and the collapse of the external kingdom, with its emphasis on “going in,” might indeed be pointing to an entirely new—inner—domain of sovereignty and government.

Moreover, this living wall does not imply any emotional remoteness from the world as is implied in Schiller’s definition, for the fool is involved in the world to a perfect degree (as *Lear*’s Fool demonstrates), while he maintains an inner domain of the ideal.² The Fool, like the chorus, suffers, and this wall does not isolate him from the emotional intensity of the world, but rather unites him to it. This wall—a mask really—does not create an illusory existence and does

² Compare this to Erikson’s research on inversion theory, in which theory upside-downings, carnival or otherwise, are interpreted as adult play. Erikson’s *Spielraum* emphasizes that during play a distinction is made between *reality* or that which is outside of play, and *actuality*, that which is inside of play:

Erik Erikson and others suggest that its [adult play’s] function . . . allow[s] us to engage in “reversible operations” symbolic inversions create *Spielraum*, a space in which to take chances with new roles and ideas. Or as Erikson says, it permits us to infuse reality with actuality. He defines the terms as follows: “If reality is the structure of facts consensually agreed upon in a given stage of knowledge, actuality must always resist reality to remain truly playful . . . In adulthood an individual gains leeway for himself, as he creates it for others; here is the soul of adult play.” (Babcock 25)

In his own context, Erikson describes perfectly the duty of the chorus, which is to keep, to Erikson’s terms, actuality in and reality out.

not diminish truth; on the contrary, Nietzsche goes so far as to say that “it—the satyr chorus—represents existence more truthfully” (61). This is why Patterson writes that “masked truth is truth signified; the masks of God are the images of God” (Patterson 16). Signified truth, not naked truth, is what the fool conveys, but, as Patterson asserts, these masked significations are revelations of a divine reality on earth. The question of naked versus signified truth is ancient, and every age seems to sanction signified over plain truth. Socrates wears a mask. Christ speaks in parables. Fools in every age prove that “the masks of God are the images of God.” Specifically the mask of madness, moreover, as opposed to any other type of mask, becomes the highest revelation of God within humankind as revealed by Christ:

Christ did not merely choose to be surrounded by lunatics; he himself chose to pass in their eyes for a madman, thus experiencing, in his incarnation, all the sufferings of human misfortune. Madness thus became the ultimate form, the final degree of God in man’s image, before the fulfillment and deliverance of the Cross. (Foucault 80)

The mask of madness is the disguise of choice for all masking characters in *Lear*—Edgar, Kent, and Edmond—although not every character who shams a madman falls under the same definition. Edmond—best known for the intensity of his malice, ambition, and resourcefulness—also briefly and jocularly plays an alternate identity, whom he names Tom o’Bedlam:

Pat: he [Edgar] comes, like the catastrophe of the old comedy. My cue is

villainous melancholy, with a sigh like Tom o'Bedlam. – O these eclipses do portend these divisions. Fa, so, la, me. (1.2.117-9)

Like a Vice of the earlier English stage, humming a tritone (*diabolus in musica*), Edmond dons the mask cynically, even diabolically, to harm and betray others. Benevolent or malicious: the intentions behind the character's assumption of a disguise are crucial. Edmond uses the mask to dupe his brother and father. Edgar uses it to save his father. Kent shams a madman to serve his master. Most characters in the play use the mask to serve not control. Madness then becomes a key aspect of the spiritual complexities in the play. For Foucault and Erasmus, it is the highest revelation of the divine on earth. Even in the Tarot, the madness embodied by the fool offers a key to comprehension: "it is with his madness, that of the Fool of God, that the cards are illuminated" (Bill Butler 110). The mask is important for two reasons: to signify truth; and, to protect the inner contents, life, and identity. To validate this mask or boundary Shakespeare repeatedly uses images of literal, material walls (i.e. egg shell, snail shell, hovel), which signify what is really an imperceptible (i.e. living) wall. That Shakespeare's images are frail—an egg shell, a scanty shelter—and on the point of collapse does not detract from their relevance, but only emphasizes human weakness and poverty, insofar as the fool is the archetype of the human.

The boundary of the mask becomes increasingly important when we realize that without it, the life-giving power of folly cannot succeed. When the sisters incrementally pare away Lear's fortune and mind, they leave him stripped of everything. The Fool reflects on the misfortune of this event, and notes that even he, a poor fool, is better off than Lear, for he at least has a "figure," a name, a role, in his case, a boundary or container that can include the entire universe:

FOOL. now thou art an O without a figure. I am better than
thou
 art now; I am a fool, thou art nothing. (1.4.152-153)

The Fool is, therefore, not nothing, but something, which something, again, is the limit or boundary of the mask; however, within this something, the everything-nothing of the fool may exist. Lear does not even have this bound: his chaos matches the chaos in the external landscape; and without the mask, Lear is the antithesis of the Silenus figure in which beautiful forms reside behind a limit or mask. In the face of chaos upon chaos, the Fool is utterly disempowered. The fool needs an external boundary in order to introduce into this limit, the limitlessness of freedom, folly, and the ideal. The necessity of the boundary is rendered in an account of the role of the ancient Trickster figure:

According to [Karl] Kerényi, the Trickster's "function in an archaic society . . . is to add disorder to order so to make it whole, to render possible, within the fixed bounds of what is permitted, an experience of what is not permitted. (Willeford 132)

While the fool is often seen as the *spirit of disorder* itself, he is dependant upon boundaries and limits in order to be effective. This is why the Fool is incapacitated in the face of Lear's chaos, for how is the Fool supposed to create wholeness, to use Kerényi's words, by adding disorder, if there is no order in the first place? In a chaotic universe the fool is impotent, and thus the Fool cannot change Lear's upset spirit on the heath: try as he may, he cannot "out-jest / [Lear's] heart-struck injuries" (3.1.8-9). Yet it is Lear's reception and not the Fool's delivery that renders the Fool's labours ineffective. This landscape of chaos without boundaries is the heath, which is another reason why—in addition to symbolizing Lear's inner transformation—Kent and the Fool, who embody the boundaries of the mask perfectly, are bent on getting Lear inside the shelter, and within the boundary. The necessity of this boundary as a means of freedom is seemingly paradoxical, for one typically imagines freedom as a space without boundaries. Thus, the notion of imprisonment has come full circle; the characters who need to escape from the imprisonment of the monologic non-fools, also need the personal limit of the mask in order to maintain inner freedom and the realm of the ideal. The full meaning of Foucault's observations of the madman (the fool) is now apparent:

He is a prisoner in the midst of what is the freest, the openest of routes: bound fast at the infinite crossroads. He is the Passenger *par excellence*: that is, the prisoner of passage. (11)

The intimate relationship between boundary (prison), freedom, and the ideal, is brought to the forefront in Act Five, when the living wall of Schiller becomes the ultimate limit—prison walls.

In one of the most potent images in the play, the vision of Lear and Cordelia in prison, Shakespeare epitomizes not only the inner ideal, but also the necessity of the boundary. When Lear speaks of entering the cell within prison, he does not do so with anxiety, which seems the more likely response, but with anticipation, for within this limit, Lear is certain of the ideal reality that will open up. When he describes the life that he and Cordelia will share, Lear uses this language of the ideal that contains elements of a paradisaal reality. Lear speaks of many things in nature: butterflies; birds, the moon. He tells Cordelia that they will sing and converse joyously together:

CORDELIA. Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?

LEAR. No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison.

We two alone will sing like birds i'th'cage.

When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down

And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,

And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh

At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues

Talk of court news, and we'll talk with them too—

Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out—

And take upon 's the mystery of things.

As if we were God's spies; and we'll wear out

In a walled prison packs and sects of great ones

That ebb and flow by th'moon. (5.3.7-19)

The language and images within Lear's vision correspond with Frye's green world, a realm or sphere in Shakespeare's plays that still recalls something of a paradisaal world:

The forest or the green world, then, is a symbol of natural society . . . the “golden world” he is trying to regain. This natural society is associated with things which in the context of the ordinary world seem unnatural, but which are in fact attributes of nature as a miraculous and irresistible reviving power. These associations include dream, magic, and chastity or spiritual energy as well as fertility and renewed natural energies. (*Natural* 142-3)

The “golden world” or the green world Frye describes also depicts the world within Lear’s vision of the prison, but with a difference—here the greenness flourishes in a walled prison.

This mask-like image of the sustaining, protecting prison depicts the invisible or living reality within the personal limit, even though from Edmond’s increasingly monologic perspective the cell is to be a place of execution. These notions must be separated when studying the scene, for otherwise a distorted interpretation of a real political prison will result. Present circumstances in the world, to say nothing of the events during the last century, are too close for the image of a political prison to provoke no response in the reader. It would be monstrous to argue that within the limits of the Gulag and other abominable human creations, a paradisaal landscape opened—far from it. Individuals of courage and spirit were able to convert this experience into testimonies from which humanity can forever benefit, but one would never seek these for a gateway to paradise. Indeed Lear and Cordelia never make it into this paradisaal cell, and Cordelia dies soon after Lear’s vision. Such reflection brings to the foreground one

of the main questions of the play: do the real circumstances negate the ideal?

Some critics certainly think so, and go so far as to say that *Lear* is anti-ideal, or an anti-pastoral. Ronald Miller believes that *Lear* is an anti-pastoral because the places in nature, the heath for example, are full of darkness and uncertainty and lack the light and hopeful atmosphere of the pastoral:

The pastoral landscape becomes the dark night on the heath, rustic simplicity becomes nakedness and squalor, the jokes of the fool become searing insights, and the evil children turn out to be not the petty, malicious stepdaughters of *Cinderella* nor such easily thwarted siblings as Oliver and Don John, but Goneril and Regan, who shut their father out to die in the storm, and Edmund, who for advancement gives his father over to torture before ordering his death. (15)

Maynard Mack certainly shares this view and even declares that *King Lear* is the "greatest anti-pastoral ever penned" (65). Mack and Miller's observations offer an accurate reading of the play's *exterior*; these critics, like Johnson and Tate, are looking on the outside of the play's Silenus mask. But the overreaching presence of this dark, corrupt world does not negate an alternate, ideal world; nothing is excluded—these worlds co-exist. Thus, *Lear*'s vision of the ideal world demonstrates that *Lear* is not an anti-pastoral, and that the green world still exists. Resituated, though, the green world is not at first recognizable. On the face of the *Lear* world, there is no Arden of brightly lit gardens, forests, or meadows; there are certainly no messages on trees. And the dramatic atmosphere is certainly not

benign, mysterious, or inviting. Yet there is a green world, but it is, for the first time, found only *within* the characters. Therefore, *Lear* cannot be seen as an *anti*-pastoral; but it is, rather, for the first time in Shakespeare, an *inner*-pastoral. And in order to find this *inner*-pastoral, the reader must approach *King Lear* like a Silenus statue, and not take it for what it seems to be, but for what it is behind the mask.

The Fool reads *King Lear*

The mask begins as a static image, a container in which the everything-nothing of the fool, who is analogous to the mask for etymological and conceptual reasons, may be encapsulated. The image of the mask quickly gains dynamism when we learn that entering into the mask may be akin to embarking on a journey, to descending into and returning from the underworld, like Orpheus with his descent. In *Lear*, the journey of the mask takes the form of sailing, which is appropriate considering the popularity of the image of the ship in the Renaissance imagination. Brant's *Narrenschiff* was published in 1494, and a host of other works in which the image of sailing took centre stage was also published around this time. No literal ship, however, appears in *Lear*, and the presence of the sailing/journey image is found actually in the storm scene in which the hovel itself becomes associated with a ship. Edgar's line, "Fathom and half" (3.4.37), a sailor's cry, connects the hovel to the ship. Its dimensions—its explicit inner and outer spheres—juxtaposed, the hovel becomes a hyperbolized image of the mask. Since the hovel takes on the image of

the mask, and since Edgar connects the small shelter with a ship, the mask, therefore, becomes associated with sailing, with the journey, which unites it to an enduring pattern in literature, that of movement and return. The outcome of the voyage is metamorphosis. That the mask entails metamorphosis is pertinent to *Lear* in which transformation, exemplified in Lear's conversion from wealthy king, to homeless madman, to repentant father, is the principal event.

Though Lear's madness is akin to entering into the mask, it is not just an assumption of a protective layer of signification, but is authentic through and through. The process of transformation, though, is one and the same for madness and the mask, but only under the correct conditions, for madness is two-fold. Erasmus has distinguished between foolish and wise madness. Those who are mad in the foolish sense need leadership and guidance from those who embody wise madness or folly. Lear's and Gloucester's connectedness to those who possess wise folly is what saves them from the ultimate act of madness, suicide, and leads them to safety, even redemption. Wisdom saves both desperate men from self-destruction. Gonerill, unlike Lear and Gloucester, is not connected to, or, rather, avidly rejects, those who might lead her to inner metamorphosis. Alone in her tent, Gonerill epitomizes the mad character in her suicidal act. This impulse of self-annihilation, which is really a movement of implosion, opposes the outward, expansive movement of the fools, the mask-

wearers. From the tyrannical Lear on down to the opportunistic Oswald, the non-fools limit and extinguish the freedom of the fools, an oppression that accounts for the claustrophobic atmosphere pervading the tragedy. To preserve the fragments and remnants of freedom in the collapsing dramatic landscape, the fools adopt the mask, behind which inner freedom is found. Thus, in addition to its potentially transformative effects, the mask also serves as a protective barrier from those who threaten the fools' freedom from the outside.

It has been suggested that a final reason for the mask in *Lear* is that behind it, an "inner infinity" (see page 84 above), or even a transcendent reality may open up. This inner sphere that touches an eternal reality has been compared to Frye's notion of the green world. *Lear*, therefore, is not an anti-pastoral, as Mack suggests, but an inner-pastoral. All of the attributes of the green world have shifted locations; that is, the green world no longer exists as an alternative external landscape, as is typical in Shakespearean comedy, but exists now solely within the characters. The combination of the complete devastation of *Lear's* external world, and the play's insistent motif of "going in" suggests that a new "kingdom" or dominion must be sought within. The image that most suggests the reality of the inner-pastoral is Lear's vision of a prison cell in which a paradisaal landscape flourishes. The prison wall suggests the boundary of the mask. The periphery that is the mask is related to Schiller's image of the satyr

chorus, which the Romantic poet depicts as a living wall in which an ideal reality is protected and maintained. But what exactly is this ideal reality within?

There is one thing more to say. Earlier in this discussion, the need for a “dialectical marriage between cognitive load and form” was asserted (see page 2 above). The fool, as we have seen, unites the comic and tragic forms in the most unique way, and thus creates a new genre that is mobile, dynamic, and transformative. And yet, the cognitive load, which refers to the spiritual complexities of the play, has been hinted at but not yet fully delineated. To do so necessitates a return to Plato and the *Symposium* for one response to the spiritual complexities in *Lear*.

Indeed, there is one vital thing more to be known about Socrates, the exemplar of our dialectical marriage. We know that foremost Socrates is a fool, but what else does Plato reveal about his personality? Socrates denies that he possesses any wisdom (he only knows that he knows nothing), and yet Plato shows how, of all the many areas in which one could gain expertise—medicine, rhetoric, philosophy—Socrates asserts knowledge only in a single area: love, or, rather, the *art* of love. When Eryximachus proposes that, instead of getting drunk, each guest “give as good a speech in praise of Love as he is capable of giving” (177D), Socrates cannot help but accede to the proposal, for love is all he knows:

"No one will vote against that, Eryximachus," said Socrates. "How could I vote 'No,' when the only thing I say I understand is the art of love? Could Agathon and Pausanias? Could Aristophanes, who thinks of nothing but Dionysus and Aphrodite? No one I can see here now could vote against your proposal." (177E)

Socrates is not only a fool, but he is a fool who loves. What is this strange connection between the fool and love? It is made again by the Anonymous Hermeticist, who discerns a striking esoteric union between love and the fool. That author recounts his affiliation in youth in pre-Revolutionary Russia with an intellectual group, from whom he learns that "the Arcanum 'The Fool' corresponds to the letter *Shin* and that consequently its number is twenty-one, and its esoteric name is Love" (591). The author outlines how this striking conclusion is reached:

For example, one meditated on the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, in order to derive their Cabbalistic meaning, in the light of the twenty-two Major Arcana of the Tarot. And one came to the conclusion that each letter of the Hebrew alphabet – understood Cabbalistically—corresponds to a particular Major Arcana of the Tarot. Now, it is the letter Shin . . . the twenty-first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which was attributed to the Arcanum "The Fool". It was said that this is the letter of the Arcanum "The Fool". And confidently it was added that the esoteric name of the Arcanum "The Fool" is AMOR (Love). (591)

This conclusion opposes most readings of the Tarot, for zero, not twenty-one commonly is attributed to the fool. But this author's preference deserves attention as an indicative insight: the fool bears the number zero insofar as he is the container in which nothing equals everything, or the ideal; and he is twenty-one insofar as love initiates, illuminates, and fulfils that ideal which he contains.

Could love that is found in the fool be the “cognitive load” of the dialectal marriage? Could the fools be deployed in such striking numbers in the play to compensate for its unparalleled hatefulness, since they are actually bearers of something just the opposite—love? The king certainly demonstrates this possibility. Once his “wits . . . turn” (3.2.65) and he enters into folly, he suddenly feels a poignant concern: “How dost, my boy? Art cold?” (3.2.66). This is a marked change, for Lear, upon becoming a fool, no longer reasons *his own* needs, but the needs of others. Cordelia’s unfailing loyalty to and compassion for her father despite any disgrace or hurt is indeed other-worldly in virtue, tenderness, and filial love. And Kent and Edgar’s equal dedication to those who have hurt them most and their unwavering commitment despite any harsh conditions provide a testament to the unbreakability of love and friendship. Even the final change in Edmond, who admits his wrongdoing, is striking. Edmond has never been considered among the company of fools, but he does in the end admit his crimes and wish to support those who he has for so long opposed. After hearing Edgar speak about his father’s death, Edmond softens: “This speech of yours hath moved me, / And shall perchance do good” (5.3.190-1). Indeed, after one recovers from the shock of the abrupt ending, the darkness is not what one remembers, for malice and treachery are not new; there is nothing novel about murder and betrayal. What are unfailingly novel and worthy of

remembrance are the forgiveness of Cordelia, the transformations of Lear, Albany, and even Edmond, and the love between Kent, Edgar, Gloucester, Lear, Cordelia, and the Fool. But how are we to understand this ideal in light of the multiple deaths that shape the ending?

The Anonymous Hermeticist reflects on the relationship between love and life/death, or *being*, when he asks himself: "Does love therefore surpass being?" (34). John Reibetanz insists that "we cannot, in fact, value virtue [love] more than life [being], although we can look up to such a value as an ideal" (122). But the fool does not look "to such virtue as an ideal" but lives this reality, which is love:

Does love therefore surpass being? How can one doubt this after the revelation of this truth through the nineteen centuries by the Mystery of Calvary? . . . and is not the sacrifice of His life, His terrestrial being, accomplished through love by God Incarnate, is this not the demonstration of the superiority of love over being? And is not the Resurrection the demonstration of the other aspect of the primacy of love over being, i.e. that love is not only superior to being but also that it engenders and restores it? (*Meditations* 34)

This conclusion is relevant to *Lear*, for in no other play is the tension between these realities so apparent. The awfulness of the crimes is juxtaposed with perfect sublimity. The play's abundant external darkness necessitates that the landscape, in order to prevent a total collapse and corruption, has to, to use M. Willson Disher's words, "hatch [more than one] clown from a clod" (34).

The priority of love over being is suggested also in the same pertinent scene in the *Symposium*. In the initial look at the scene in

question, Agathon and Aristophanes were, for obvious reasons, seen to represent their respective genres. How else, though, might we view these figures? First, if Aristophanes represents the comic genre, can we not also say *life*, for is not the comic concerned with the continuance and multiplication of a society and its growth? And if Agathon represents the tragedy genre, can we not also call this *death*, for does not the tragic genre perpetuate a pattern of downfall and eventual death of one or more figures? In their unresolvable balance, these figures might also be seen to represent *being* itself, and that which is temporal. And thus, when Socrates endures the night, while all others fall asleep, he shows more than just the unification of genres into the fool; he shows the endurance of love over being. The fool, who is love, unites what is best of all religions within his border or mask, and thus he contains, in a concentrated form, the highest ideal possible. Ideal existence in love is what is meant by the paradisaal or ideal world. The fool becomes the dialectical marriage between the conflicting components of genre and religious identification in *King Lear*. One might easily combine these notions and assert that the fool recreates the problems of genre and content, and makes the content into the form. The fool, then, embodies what might be called a genre of love. Love, therefore, is the final and most important reason for the fool's multitudinous presence in *King Lear*. With this in mind, the madness so central to the play is illuminated, for madness and love, and

madness caused by love, are found in literature in every age. At this point, one could easily turn from Plato's *Symposium* to the *Phaedrus* in order to illuminate the intimacy between madness and love in the fool: "in reality the greatest of blessings come to us through madness" (*Phaedrus* 244B). This greatest of blessings is what the fool possesses in his innermost forum: love, which Socrates and Christ tell us, survives death; this is what is worthy of remembrance in *King Lear*, and indeed, what survives every character who in death "falls asleep."

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