

JAMES HUBERT CAIN III

Court, Stage, and Legend: The Threefold Heritage of *King Lear*'s Fool
(Under the Direction of FRANCES N. TEAGUE)

The Fool in *King Lear* is an unusual character for several reasons. First, he is the only named fool in Shakespeare's four major tragedies (*Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*). Second, his role is uncharacteristically large. Finally, the form that his foolish behavior takes may illuminate much about "real" fooling in the early modern period. This paper explores the heritage of *Lear*'s Fool, specifically the character's debt to stage fools like Tarlton, Kempe, and Armin; to the prototypical fools of Shakespeare's early plays; and to historical fools such as William Somer, Henry VIII's fool, and Archy Armstrong, court fool to James I.

INDEX WORDS: Fool, Jester, Archy Armstrong, James I, Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Folly, Elizabethan

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THE THREEFOLD HERITAGE OF *KING LEAR'S* FOOL

by

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Fools, or clowns, have enjoyed a privileged place in western European culture and, as John Southworth notes, “nowhere more so than in England.”¹ While fools were generally well loved, the vast majority gained identity only in an extended relationship with a nobleman or monarch. And while that relationship might become surprisingly intimate, the fool was completely dependent on retaining his master’s favor. Southworth observes that the fool “was someone on whom the king could bestow his favour without giving rise to any of the jealousies or counter-claims . . . that normally accompanied the exercise of royal patronage.”²

Natural fools—simple-minded men or (less frequently) women—enjoyed a more complete indulgence than did their artificial kin. Welsford defines a fool as “a man who falls below the average human standard, but whose defects have been transformed into a source of delight, a mainspring of comedy.”³ In the case of natural fools, the person fell short of a physical or mental standard. Their wits and witticisms were regarded as innocent. In fact, naturals are also called innocents. They found their way into the care of the nobility and the monarchy, and they were dependent on their masters for food, shelter, and clothing. In return they provided a (mostly) loyal ear and tongue for their masters.

Artificial fools, on the other hand, were (almost exclusively) men who *chose* the office of fool, pretending foolishness for employment. They became, in other words, *actors*. Their “routines” were as varied as their identities. Some fools were minstrels, and

some were jugglers. There were tumblers/acrobats and musicians. Some were simply “extemporaneous wits;” they could turn a phrase in a memorable way. Because of their pretension, they were generally trusted less—indeed, sometimes they fell below a moral standard—but some managed to make more than a name for themselves. They retired as wealthy landowners on the strength of their performance of folly.

Fools enjoyed an unequalled freedom of speech in the court. They alone could speak the truth in the king or queen’s presence and (most of the time) fear no reprisal. Who but a fool could, when asked to tell Queen Elizabeth I of her faults, reply, “I do not use to talk of that that all the town talks of”? True, John Pace did not again appear before Elizabeth, but he was not formally punished.⁴

Such a privilege is intriguing, so we may little wonder that fools found their way into literature, drama, and popular culture. Indeed, at the end of the sixteenth century, artificial court fools began to move their acts onto the stage.

When *King Lear*’s Fool enters, saying “Let me hire him too; here’s my coxcomb,” Shakespeare’s audience surely understood his offer (1.4.93-94).⁵ The exchange that follows—fraught with tension, accompanied by forced smiles and uncertainty—typifies the relationship of fool to master. Kept, or allowed, fools were licensed to speak in the monarch’s presence. It was the king’s part to discern the kernel of truth that was often cloaked in his fool’s *double entendres* and dissembling. In a sense, the modern reader, too, must sort truth from fiction where fools are concerned. A fool’s popularity bred legends, and while the names of fools appear on books or jest-books, they are often spurious. This is not to say that truth is unavailable or even that fools were less prominent than is sometimes supposed. In fact, they so penetrated the common

consciousness that their jests were on everyone's lips. In addition, unscrupulous booksellers could rely on a popular fool's name to help him sell books.⁶

Because so little reliable, contemporary evidence exists for fools, Shakespeare's plays could be valuable sources of information about the kinds of things fools said. While the connections are unclear, Shakespeare may have seen Richard Tarlton (see chapter two) when the Queen's Men visited Stratford in 0000. He could, therefore, have had firsthand knowledge of a legendary stage clown/court fool. In addition, the clown for whom Shakespeare wrote his most fully developed fools was Robert Armin (see chapter four). Armin's interest in the phenomena of fooling, as well as in foolish literature (i.e., jestbooks) led him to write *Foole upon Foole*, a collection of anecdotes about natural fools. Further, Enid Welsford observes that, apart from Shakespeare, the court-fool was poorly represented in Elizabethan drama.⁷ Shakespeare alone of the Elizabethan dramatists devotes a great deal of space to both natural and artificial fools, creating several characters who were specifically designated fools in his plays; indeed, as we shall see, two sharers in the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men) were prominent fools. His early "experiments" with fools share more with the traditional foolish characters sometimes called vices in medieval drama. As he became more settled into partnership with William Kempe, however, his clowns became more distinct. With the arrival of Robert Armin, Shakespeare employed the traditional court-fool in a manner unlike other dramatists.⁸

It is at this stage of Shakespeare's career (1603-1604) that *Lear's Fool* appears. He is a shrewd and witty entertainer whose wisdom is instinctive. As we shall see, characters of his type begin to appear in Shakespeare's plays around 1600. Where does

he come from? What are the factors that produced a character that “breaks out of every category in which he might be fixed.”⁹ In this project, I will argue that Fool has a threefold ancestry. I will explore the branches of Fool’s family tree, identifying the role’s debt to each. He is first a product of the historical fools’ legacy—William Somer, Richard Tarlton, and William Kempe. All served Elizabeth for some period of time, and all developed larger-than-life reputations. Their careers provide a foundation for understanding court fooling in its heyday for, with one exception, they represent a process of transition that ended court fooling.

Second, Fool was born of Shakespeare’s professional relationship with another professional fool Robert Armin.¹⁰ Most scholars agree that Armin, the company clown from 1599 until about 1611,¹¹ played Fool. As a result, Fool more closely resembles the natural fools that Armin wrote about in *Foole upon Foole* (1600) than buffoons like Dogberry, Bottom, or Peter, which were Kempe’s roles. Fool, Touchstone (*AYL*), and Feste (*TN*), are court-fools, although they differ in their degrees of independence.

Third, Fool is a product of his time. Archibald Armstrong was fool to King James I. While he did not directly influence Fool’s character, his presence at court may account for some of the textual variants of *King Lear*. In addition, he may have helped to define Fool’s boundaries, even his costume, in the Quarto (said to be the version played before the King).

At this point, however, it is necessary to identify the terms used in this project. A number of terms are applied to the fool’s profession, office, and function. William Kempe, for example, was called *jester*, *jesting plaier*, *instrumentist*, and *jest-monger*, in addition to the more common appellations *fool* and *clown*. In this project, I generally use

clown to refer to a specific type of role—the rough-and-tumble buffoons originated by Tarlton and carried on by Kempe. In Shakespeare’s plays Dogberry in *Much Ado about Nothing* and *Romeo and Juliet*’s Peter are clowns. In rare cases, I will refer to a *company*’s clown—that is, the actor in the company generally cast as fool-ish characters.

A *fool*, on the other hand, is a character (or person) “identified by an iconographic costume, a costume containing the insignia of folly.”¹² *Lear*’s Fool (in one version, at least; see below) wore a costume that was crucial to some of the puns and jokes and instantly recognizable by Shakespeare’s audience. It is interesting to note that Fool is the only fool in Shakespeare’s plays who is called *fool* in the stage directions. All others are designated *clowns*.¹³

CHAPTER TWO: FOOLING IN SOMER'S SHADOW

William Somer

William Somer¹⁴ was exclusively a court fool; he served two English kings (Henry VIII and Edward VI) and two English queens (Mary and Elizabeth I). While it is uncertain when he came to court, he is first mentioned in Henry's records on 28 June 1535. In that year, Southworth notes, "a royal mandate had gone to the Keeper of the Great Wardrobe for a long list of new clothes." Some of the clothes, including two wool doublets and two green coats—one with a cap, one with a hood—were for "William Somer, oure foole."¹⁵

While later jest-books (like *A Pleasant History of the Life and Death of Will Summers*, 1676) bear his name and purport to contain his words, they are probably unreliable; in fact, we know little about Will Somer. The few contemporary sources reveal him to have been more the wise innocent than the witty, artificial jester he became in English popular legend. At the same time, he appears to have been more than a common natural of the court. His sayings were quoted in correspondence between courtiers and the King (though one may conjecture that they understood and took advantage of his privileged position at court).¹⁶ Other literature of the time recorded his wit as well. Thomas Wilson's *The Arte of Rhetorique* (1553) contains an example of Will's simple-minded mangling of the language. When the King complained of being short of money, Will remarked, "You have so many Frauditours [auditors], so many

Conveighers [surveyors], and so many Deceivers [receivers] that they get all to themselves.”¹⁷

One of the more reliable sources, and one which is particularly interesting in light of Lear’s Fool, is Robert Armin’s *Foole upon Foole* (1600; revised and republished in 1608 as *A Nest of Ninnies*). Armin presents the stories of six natural fools of England. The preamble to Armin’s section on Somer may be a fair summary of Armin’s knowledge (and as such, I have included it in its entirety).

Will Sommers borne in Shropshire, as some say,
 Was brought to Greenwich on a holly day:
 Presented to the King, which foole disdain’d
 To shake him by the hand, or else asham’d.
 How ere it was, as auncient people say,
 With much a doe was wonne to it that day.

Leane he was, hollow eyde as all report,
 And stoop he did too, yet in all the Court
 Few men were more belov’d then was this foole,
 Whose merry prate, kept with the King much rule.
 When he was sad, the King and he would rime,
 Thus Will exiled sadnes many a time.

I could describe him as I did the rest,
 But in my minde I doe not think it best:
 My reason this, how ere I do descry him,
 So many knew him that I may belye him.
 Therefore to please all people one by one,
 I holde it best to let that paines alone.

Only thus much, he was a poore man’s friend,
 And helpt the widdow often in the ende:

The King would ever graunt, what he did crave,
 For well he knew, Will no exacting knave,
 But wisht the King to doe good deeds great store,
 Which caus'd the court to love him more and more.¹⁸

I suggest that Somer (more specifically, Somer's *legacy*) had a more profound, more direct influence on the role of Fool than is usually mentioned. Such a possibility is, of course, greater if Robert Armin played a collaborative role in the invention of Fool's character. In popular memory, Somer was "belov'd" at court, and he commanded a great deal of the King's time. Not surprisingly, he had the King's ear in social matters, and he is remembered to have been an intercessor for widows and the poor. In that sense, he is presented as both a "good" Christian¹⁹ and as deeply interested in the well-being of both the king and his kingdom. It is this strength of character that prompts the King to "ever graunt" his petitions. According to Armin, Will's intercession caused Henry to restore common lands to Will's uncle.²⁰

He was not, however, universally liked. Although Southworth suggests that fools' favor with kings escaped "the jealousies or counter-claims . . . that normally accompanied the exercise of royal patronage," Somer managed to make several enemies at court.²¹ John Heywood, playwright and competitor for the King's attentions, called Somer a "sott" and "Master Somer of sots not the best." He further noted Somer's standing "all day yn slomber."²² In addition, Will feuded with Cardinal Wolsey. As Armin notes in *Foole upon Foole* (see above), King Henry and Will were fond of capping one another's rhymes. On one occasion, when Henry and Will rhymed about one of the Henry's mistresses, Will's rhyme was so bawdy that the source did not record it. The pamphlet did, however, record Wolsey's response: "A rod in the School / And a whip for the fool /

Are always in season.” “A halter and a rope / For him that would be Pope / Against all right and reason,” retorted Will. The Cardinal did not reply, and the King only laughed.²³

Somer was what Southworth calls a “wise innocent”—simple-minded, good-hearted, and able to see life and its situations with eyes unclouded with ambition. He was the last of the famous natural fools, and he remained a dramatic figure even after his death. Southworth observes, however, a “fundamental twist” of Will’s character “from wise innocent to witty jester.”²⁴ He appears in Thomas Nashe’s *Summers Last Will and Testament* (1592) and Samuel Rowley’s *When you see me, You know me*. Curiously, he does *not* appear in Shakespeare and Fletcher’s *Henry VIII* (1611?), though some scholars attribute his absence to Robert Armin’s retirement (see the section on Robert Armin below). Over a century after his death (1676), a jest-book was published called *A pleasant history of the life and death of Will Summers. How he came first to be known at court, and by what means he got to be King Henry the Eight’s Jester. With the entertainment that his cousin Patch Cardinal Wolsey’s Fool gave him at the Lord’s house, and how the Hogsheads of Gold were known*. This rather lengthy title reveals the popular tradition that Somer discovered some barrels filled with treasure at Wolsey’s house and, by telling his King, contributed to Wolsey’s disgrace. Truth or not, the stories about Will reveal the mingling of truth and falsehood evident in popular tradition.²⁵

Richard Tarlton

Will Somer secured his place in popular legend without mounting the stage. Richard Tarlton was the first fool to venture successfully beyond the court, and he achieved so definitive a place in popular consciousness that public house signs bore his image.

By all accounts, Tarlton was well rounded, “a man of many parts,” and he began to make the transition from court to stage when he joined the Queen’s Men in 1583. As a member of that company, he became an Ordinary Groom of the Queen’s Chamber. While the office was more ceremonial than political, the increased social standing it provided became a precedent for later actors (including Shakespeare, who would also be named an Ordinary Groom).²⁶ It is difficult, however, to determine his financial success from the jest-books’ anecdotes. Tarlton the comedian gave his audience the impression of poverty; Tarlton the man may in fact have lived comfortably. His mother apparently contested the distribution of £700 in his will.²⁷ It is important to remember that he was a Groom of the Chamber and a Master of Fence, both gentleman’s distinctives.

The influence of Tarlton’s fooling can scarcely be overestimated. His face, according to several sources, was enough to set a room to laughing.²⁸ In *Wits Bedlam* (1617), the epigrammatist John Davies said of Tarlton:

Here within this sullen earth
Lies Dick Tarlton, lord of mirth,
Who in his grave—still laughing—gapes,
Sith all clowns since have been his apes.
Erst he of clowns to learn still sought,
But now they learn of him they taught.
By art far past the principal,
The counterfeit is now worth all.²⁹

Tarlton’s legacy was this: he learned to imitate the “clowns” (country folk). In addition, he merged the threads of medieval clowning-- into his own style.³⁰ His successors, Davies says, learned from the counterfeit, i.e., Tarlton, who had become better than the original. The successors, however, were copies of a copy of originals.

William Kempe

One of those successors, William Kempe, was considered by some to be Tarlton's rightful heir. Kempe certainly succeeded Tarlton in straddling the two worlds of court and stage. He began his career as "jesting plaier" to the Earl of Leicester. During that service, Kempe traveled with Leicester to the Netherlands and eventually represented his master to the king of Denmark.³¹ Upon Leicester's death in 1588, Kempe and his fellow players secured new patronage with Lord Strange. Kempe's subsequent rise to prominence as a stage clown and jig-maker would continue through his sharing in the Lord Chamberlain's Men. So secure was Kempe's reputation that Thomas Nashe dedicated *Almond for a Parrat* (1590) to him, calling him "jest-monger and vice-gerent [sic] to the ghost of Dick Tarlton."³² In Nashe's estimation, at least, Kempe was Tarlton's heir.

As a member of Strange's company, and later of the Chamberlain's Men, Kempe engaged in an incomplete transition from solo comedy to ensemble comedy—incomplete because his style demanded near-domination of the stage. (By contrast, his successor, Armin, had a talent for blending his clowning into the action of a play.) Kempe's companies apparently accommodated his particular skill, even if the resulting composition was incompatible with the play in which it appeared. *A Knack to Know a Knave* (1592), for example, a play produced by Strange's Men, includes an independent sketch called 'Kemp's applauded merryments of the men of Gotham in receiving the King into Gotham'. The piece is, notes David Wiles, characteristic of Kempe: the sketch itself and its actors are disengaged from the play proper. Wiles further conjectures that a similar scene in *Titus Andronicus* was inserted for Kempe.³³ If so, the scene's inclusion

illustrates one way that a dramatist might have collaborated with his company's clown to develop a mutually appreciated entertainment.

While Kempe's dancing was the heart of his acting, he perfected one of the established clichés of Tudor drama: Tarlton's country clown. Shakespeare's sense of setting often placed such characters firmly in an alien environment, thus heightening the comic tension. *Romeo and Juliet*'s Peter, for example, appears "comically out of place among the passionate young blades of Verona."³⁴ The resulting conflict of worlds would not have escaped the original audience's sense of humor.

Kempe left the Chamberlain's Men in 1599, and it was ultimately his dancing that would secure his place in England's popular history. During Lent of the following year, he danced a morris dance from London to Norwich. In the published account of his feat, *Kemps Nine Daies Wonder*, "he presents himself as the common Englishman, and makes it clear that he is no gentleman, nor would wish to be."³⁵ Kempe made the jig his own art form. His jigs, four of which survive, are ribald sketches that present opportunities for dancing and sexual humor.³⁶

Robert Armin

Upon Kempe's departure, Robert Armin joined the Chamberlain's Men. Very little is known of his life, apart from his status as an heir to Tarlton. He published the aforementioned *Foole upon Foole* in 1600. Like Kempe, Armin expanded the traditional role of the company clown, eventually writing at least one play of his own, *Two Maids of More-Clacke*. Like Kempe's jigs, *Two Maids* (1609) essentially provides a vehicle for Armin's abilities, and Armin likely doubled the fools' roles: John I' the Hospital, a natural fool, and Tutch, an artificial fool.³⁷

Armin inherited the roles of Dogberry and Peter, roles originated by Kempe. His skills, indeed, his knowledge (evidenced by *Foole upon Foole*) may have suggested to Shakespeare a departure from his previous clowns. Both Welsford and Wiles (and, to a lesser degree, Gurr) note the appearance of fools in Shakespeare's plays at about the time of Armin's arrival. Their "sudden appearance," Wiles says, "has always, and rightly, been linked to Armin's arrival in the company."³⁸ Welsford, in particular, notes that Armin was an able narrator and, further, that he himself gathered the material for *Foole upon Foole*.³⁹ It is possible, then, as I earlier suggested, that Armin collaborated in some way with Shakespeare and that the fools are the product of that collaboration.

Wiles identifies three types of clown/fool parts from this period. First, the licensed fools—Touchstone, Feste, and *Lear's Fool*—appear as named characters for the first time in Shakespeare's plays. Second, Shakespeare continued to produce the clown roles such as those made famous by Kempe. Hamlet's gravediggers fit rather nicely into this category. They are country folk, rustic clowns of the type first represented by Tarlton. Finally, several of the clownish characters are variants of the formula; they "undermine previously established conventions." Into this category we may certainly insert Caliban (especially because of Armin's small stature), Apemantus of *Timon of Athens*, and Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale*. Wiles notes Armin's ability to play opposite a "straight" man, or foil, and the audience's recognition of Armin as the company's clown. If such a recognition existed, it is easier to accept Hotson's reading of *Henry VIII's* prologue. He suggests (in *Shakespeare's Motley*) that the prologue contains an implicit apology for Armin's absence in the role of Will Somer: "Only they / That come .

. . to see a fellow / In a long motley coat guarded with yellow, / Will be deceived”
(Prol.13, 15-17).

If *Henry VIII* (or *All is True*) is dated 1610, Armin may have departed the company in 1609 or 1610. We know little of his life post-Shakespeare. He had published *Two Maids of More-clacke* in 1609 and, while the Stationer’s Register does not record any further plays by Armin. It is reasonable to assume that he continued working. He died shortly after applying for patronage in 1616. He had, however, infused three of Shakespeare’s characters with such life that we still think they are great. In the next chapter I will examine those fools in depth.

CHAPTER THREE: THE BITTER FOOL AND HIS BRETHREN

We may be *relatively* certain that Robert Armin played three prominent fools as a member of the Lord Chamberlain's / King's Men: Touchstone, Feste, and the unnamed Fool of *King Lear*. A cursory glance at the roles of Kempe, his predecessor, shows that the role often fit the player. Whereas Kempe's fools and clowns rely on dance and buffoonery, Armin's fools are more contemplative; they are men of wit and "foolish" wisdom. Touchstone begins a tradition for Shakespeare that holds true for Feste and *Lear's* Fool—the "privileged truth-teller" (Welsford 249).

Touchstone

Shakespeare, in general practice, did not name clowns or fools. David Wiles believes that the generic use of "clown" in stage directions referred to the *company's* clown: either William Kempe or Robert Armin.⁴⁰ According to Shakespeare's convention, then, the clown of *As You Like It* appears in stage directions as "clowne" until 2.4, when the disguised Rosalind and Celia enter with "Touchstone [the] clowne." In 2.4.15, Rosalind/Ganymede calls him Touchstone, the only other instance of his name. Touchstone is, as his name implies, is "a test of the quality of men and manners."⁴¹ Celia identifies him as a natural fool, a "whetstone of the wits" (*AYL* 1.2.45-46). Indeed, his first witticism, an explanation of the oath "by mine honour," demonstrates his ability to scrutinize the language of the court. He reveals a startling command of human nature and a sharp eye for reality. These skills enable him to stand apart from the characters, to act

as a touchstone for the audience. Welsford calls him the “*punctum indifferens*, or point of rest, which . . . is particularly necessary for the enjoyment of a complicated work of art.”⁴²

While Touchstone bears the title and functions as the play’s fool, Jaques provides crucial information about Touchstone and about fooling in general in 2.7. First, he calls Touchstone “deep-contemplative” (31). Touchstone is a philosopher fool or, as Jaques later testifies, a “material fool” (a fool with substantive things to say; 3.3.26). He longs for the fool’s liberty of speech and for his ability to “anatomize,” or dissect, a wise man’s folly. He repeatedly tells Duke Senior of his desire for the fool’s motley coat. His real desire, however, is for the privilege, the license, that the motley yielded its wearer. He recognized the fool’s freedom to speak what he will about whom he will: “I must have liberty / . . . To blow on whom I please, for so fools have” (2.5.47, 49). His assessment of this attribute of fooling bears a striking resemblance to Fool’s comment to Kent, and a measure of insensitivity to the real state of affairs: “As thou canst not smile as the wind sits, thou’lt catch cold shortly” (1.4.99-100). The fool blows on whom he will, true, but he must always be certain of his object’s disposition.

Touchstone’s discernment, the discernment necessary to a fool’s security, is not overlooked by Duke Senior, who calls Touchstone “swift and sententious.”⁴³ Following Touchstone’s explanation of the absurd rules governing a duel, Senior observes that Touchstone “uses his folly like a stalking-horse, and under the presentation of that he shoots his wit” (5.4.95-96). To the duke, then, wit is a weapon and, as much as any weapon, it may be used to disarm an opponent or target.

Feste

Feste, too, has the fool's liberty to speak, and his fooling is likened to hunting.

Viola (disguised as Cesario) observes that Feste

Is wise enough to play the fool,
And to do that well craves a kind of wit.
He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
The quality of persons, and the time,
And, like the haggard, check at every feather
That comes before his eye. This a practice
As full of labour as wise man's art,
For folly that he wisely shows is fit,
But wise men, folly fall'n, quite taint their wit." (*TN* 3.1.60-68)

Viola's allusion to "the haggard," the hawk, bears a slight resemblance to Duke Senior's assessment of Touchstone. Fooling, they say, is similar to hunting. Both require a clear understanding of the "prey," and both require a good deal of cunning. Just as the hunter hopes he will shoot accurately, the fool aims his barbs carefully, hoping to lay open the folly of his master. He need not, however, be a sharpshooter. As Jaques initially remarks, "The wise man's folly is anatomized / Even by the squandering glances [random hits] of the fool" (2.7.56-57).

'Boy' and 'Nuncle': Fool and King

Lear's Fool proves to be a sharpshooter, so to speak. Because he has a specific purpose—to reveal Lear's folly, not to the world, but to himself—his jesting is more meticulously, more relentlessly, directed at King Lear. His means and methods, however, differ in the two extant versions of the play. Therein lies the chief difficulty in examining *Lear's Fool*: the existence of two distinct texts, the Quarto (1607?) and the Folio (1623).

Most scholars considered them to be two versions of the same play until the late 1970s, when some scholars, beginning with Michael Warren, began to suggest that Q and F are distinct plays.⁴⁴ They are different enough to warrant different interpretations, and no character is more affected by the changes than Fool. Of his 225 lines, nearly a quarter (54) are changed in F. As Foakes points out in his introduction to the *Arden* edition, the result is a wide range of characterizations. In interpretation and production, he has been

half-witted, a natural whose wisdom is instinctive clairvoyance, or as a sage rationalist, shrewd and thoughtful; he can be thought of as a boy (Lear so addresses him, and he calls Lear ‘nuncle’), as a mature, even elderly man (after all, he calls Lear ‘boy’ too in Q [but see discussion of Fool’s properties below]; . . .), or as an androgynous youth, perhaps a kind of *alter ego* of Cordelia. . . . He has been portrayed as embodying the conscience of the King, as a voice of social protest, and [finally] as a court fool who ‘shrivels into a wretched little human being on the soaking heath.’⁴⁵

No other of Shakespeare’s characters has been so widely interpreted, yet the two texts differ so sharply in their presentation of him that broad interpretation is almost a necessity. The complexity of the character is not *introduced* in either version—it is redirected.⁴⁶ Fool remains, however, one side of *King Lear*’s central paradox, what Leslie Hotson explains as “the crossing of the folly in the wisdom of Lear by wisdom in the folly of the Fool.”⁴⁷ Fool continues the tradition of Touchstone and Feste, both of whom note the frequent juxtaposition of wisdom and folly. A king foolish enough to surrender his kingdom while he lives deserves to be mocked. Fool must do that mocking, taking care to stay in the King’s good graces. He must, in other words, adhere to the unspoken rule, discerned by Viola (see above).

Whether *Lear* is an instance of censorship or authorial revision is still a matter of conjecture, but it may likely be both. The question of censorship, or of revision for that matter, is directly related to Archie Armstrong, who was James I's fool. As I shall shortly explain, Archie had great influence in James's court. Fool's jests, even his appearance (see below), may have been calculated to differentiate him from Archie. Q was acted at court in December 1606, and it may be that Archie's influence was not as great as it would become, for it is in F that some of his songs are eliminated. On the other hand, the simplest explanation for his "lesser" role in F may be the departure of Robert Armin from the company.

Rosenberg offers some insight into Armin's practice that may answer some textual concerns.⁴⁸ Wiles notes that Armin used a bauble; in fact, Armin mentioned his bauble by *name*—Sir Timothy Truncheon—in the preface to *Quips upon Questions* (1600). Fool, therefore, may have carried a bauble (a stick which often bore a fool's head) using its ornament as the object of his most insolent remarks.⁴⁹ Such a practice distances the fool from the king or master, providing the fool with a dialogic partner (like the ventriloquist's dummy) and a measure of protection from his master's wrath. It also distances Lear's Fool from Archie Armstrong, James's fool, because Wiles notes that baubles were not in general use at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The use of a bauble might further explain Fool's insolent use of "my boy" and "thou" in his song of the bitter/sweet fool (1.4.134-140).⁵⁰ Hotson also discerns a pun on "departure" in 1.5.49. The French *deporter* (which would have rhymed with the following line's "shorter") means "bauble." In addition, Fool might have put the bauble between his legs to demonstrate which "things" must "be cut shorter" (1.5.50).

As Rosenberg notes, the audience knows three things about Fool when he enters the scene explicitly: He has privileges that no other courtier has, and he has those privileges by virtue of his motley coat; Lear is deeply attached to the Fool, for whatever reason—he calls for his fool repeatedly, even though his appearance brings ridicule for Lear; and he has pined away. Some critics have made much of Fool’s pining, connecting him to Cordelia. And while the courtier who mentions it explicitly dates Fool’s “pining” to Cordelia’s departure, the reader would do well to remember that Cordelia’s departure also marks Lear’s abdication to Regan and Goneril. Fool’s resulting disenfranchisement mirrors Lear’s own. Lear travels from court to court with his dwindling retinue, and Fool follows, though Lear is destitute (and does not know it). Fool is threatened by Lear’s abdication on two levels:

- 1) *Financial*—Lear provides for Fool—his food, shelter, and clothing.

We need not look far in the annals of the English court to discover that fools were well provided for. Elizabeth, for example, kept a number of fools.

- 2) *Political*—The absence of the king, of a centralized government, plunges the country into chaos. Fool depends on the power of his patron for protection. His coat and its privileges are only as good as the master who gives them.

Fool makes Lear’s position clear in one of his first speeches. First, he tells the disguised Kent that Lear is “out of favour” (4.86). He then calls Lear twice the fool: the king is not only a fool to *his* Fool, but also to Goneril and Regan, two of his daughters, who have benefited from his foolishness.⁵¹ He is not, however, the first to call Lear fool.

Kent, just after Cordelia's banishment, is compelled to speak because, he says, "To plainness honour's bound when majesty stoops to folly" (1.136-138). It is his duty, he says, to speak against divinely inherited power bowing to human flattery. Kent also performs the fool's function in his absence from the first scene. For a fool's responsibility is to tell the truth (but to tell it slant, to make it palatable). Gloucester calls Kent's offense "honesty" (2.103). So Lear may be a fool from the beginning. After all, Goneril suggests later in scene one that Lear in "poor judgement . . . hath now cast [Cordelia] off." Regan replies: "'Tis the infirmity of his age; yet he hath ever but slenderly known himself" (276-279). Dotage brings with it folly, she says, but Lear has never been in full command of himself. She charges him with long-standing foolishness, and this incident is merely the latest in the long line of her father's foolish actions. Whether she is here overcome by her growing impudence and the frustration of her father's visit, it is clear that thoughts ascribing foolishness to *Lear* are in the open, so to speak.

The following line of the fool's is particularly telling: "Truth is a dog that must to kennel. He must be whipped out when Lady the brach may stand by the fire and stink.". Fool's wise folly is unwelcome truth, while Goneril ("the Lady Brach" or "Lady the brach") and her speech, however disrespectful, is accepted. Here, in particular, is Fool's ambition (and, perhaps, purpose) laid out in full. He speaks the unwelcome truth, and hopes to open his master's eyes to what is obvious to all but him.

Fool's subsequent speech ("Have more than thou showest...") is also meant to draw Lear onto a gallows of words built for him. Lear calls the doggerel "nothing," which point Fool concedes as he draws the noose tighter: "Can you make no use of

nothing, nuncle?” Lear, oblivious to his peril, replies, “Why no, boy. Nothing can be made out of nothing.”

The Fool drops the floor, and his master/fool is hanged by his own admission. To Kent, Fool says, “Prithee, tell him so much the rent of his land comes to. He will not believe a fool.”

No truer statement does the fool make, though it is robed in the “nothing” of his speech. Here, perhaps, is Lear’s error in the eyes of Fool. He is used to license and privilege with the king as his audience. Now, however, Lear is determined to blind himself to his poor judgment, and Fool seemingly senses Lear’s growing madness. He will not believe his fool, formerly a trusted adviser, so he must believe a stranger (though the stranger is, in fact, a former “fool”). The truth that Fool speaks has grown “bitter” (4.119).

The Folio here omits, for whatever reason, the following song, in which Fool explains the difference between sweet and bitter fools. The sweet fool is “That lord that counselled thee / To give away thy land;” in the case of Fool’s demonstration, the bitter fool is Lear himself, for he has lost a kingdom. Lear is unbearably slow here, and only begins to see his meaning (“Dost thou call me fool, boy?”). All men are born fools, Fool says next. You have given the titles you acquired away, leaving you only “fool.” Fool’s jest is clearly connected to the idea, commonplace since Erasmus’s *In Praise of Folly* (1509), that folly is universal and inescapable. *Foole upon Foole (Nest of Ninnies)* demonstrated Armin’s particular interest in the commonality of folly.⁵²

Fool’s insistent barrage might have accomplished Fool’s goal (Lear’s recovery and reinstatement) had Lear himself been willing to see. Kent recognizes that in Fool’s

foolishness lies a deeper wisdom (“This is not altogether fool”). Fool, however, continues his assault, suggesting in another song that professional fools have lost their audience since “wise” men “are grown foppish.” Wise men, in other words, have become fools. On the other hand, the wisest men, as Socrates believed, were those men who knew all their wisdom to be foolishness. Thomas Heywood, when questioned about John Pace, a scholar of King’s College called “the bitter fool,” wearing the fool’s coat, replied, “It is lesse hurtfull to the common-weal, when wisemen goe in fooles coates, than when fooles goe in wise mens gownes.”⁵³

Fool sings so frequently that Lear wonders when Fool sang so often. Fool replies that he sang for sorrow, while the daughters wept for joy, at Lear’s abdication (when his king became a child and a fool). The king had become a fool in his own kingdom.

This truth is bitter, and not only to Lear. Fool wishes he might learn to lie, and Lear promises the whip for anything but the truth (see the quote attributed to Wolsey above). His statement illustrates the precarious nature of his office. He must walk the fine line, speaking the truth, cloaking it in jest if need be, hiding himself behind his motley coat. The office is a burden for the Fool, and yet not so much that he would trade places with his now displaced master: “I had rather be any kind of thing than a fool; and yet I would not be thee, nuncle” (4.164-65). Lear has divided his wit, his sense, between the daughters, leaving none for himself or those who care for him (“nothing in the middle,” line 166).

When Goneril enters, and the tension between them is made plain, she calls Fool “all-licens’d,” illustrating the animosity that a fool’s privilege excited in those who were most often his victims.

It is *certainly* significant that Lear's question ("Who is it that can tell me who I am?") is answered in Q by Lear, sarcastically, but in F by Fool, almost sadly.⁵⁴ The Folio heightens the audience's sense of Lear's descent into madness. It is not difficult to imagine the lines spoken aside to the audience, or put in the mouth of Fool's bauble.

And then, in Q, Fool is silent until he leaves with Lear and Kent. He returns with Lear to say nothing until his song when driven off by Goneril, in which he suggests that she should be hanged for being "such a daughter." But he does not leave in F; he is apparently on stage to hear Goneril speak of Lear's "dotage." Then, when Lear returns, he waits and sings the same song when he, "more knave than fool," is driven off by Goneril (4.293).

With the appearance of Edgar as Poor Tom, the intimacy between Lear and his Fool fades in both Q and F. Significantly, though, Fool is emphasized briefly in F at 3.2.79-96. His prophecy, a Merlinesque promise of "confusion" and the downfall of Albion, has been much debated, but it is consistent with Fool's role in F—that of a "general satirical commentator," the *punctum indifferens* mentioned by Welsford.

Fool uses his folly to bait and barb Lear. He taunts Lear, risking the whip and worse in his cajolery. He uses his wit as a weapon, as does Touchstone. He aims, as Kent does, to improve Lear's vision, so he does not always entertain. If he elicits laughter, it must be strained as Lear sees Fool's witty blade extended underneath the "stalking-horse" of folly.

Lear's Fool is instrumental in explaining Lear's situation. R. A. Foakes, in his introduction to the Arden edition of *Lear*, calls Fool "a connector between the audience and the titanic figure of the old King. . . . The Fool may be thought of as a lightning

conductor, earthing the power of majesty, and humanizing Lear” (58). His jibes help the audience to understand what is at stake for Lear, for his kingdom, and for his people. The country, Fool says, is without a king to its peril; when one body is ill, the other is necessarily ill, too. Even more perilous is the folly of her king, for chaos in the kingdom must follow. It is Fool who unpacks Lear’s abdication, making it plain for the audience. Lear has divided his kingdom and has “left nothing in the middle” (4.165-66). He has left the kingdom in the hands of lesser people and has grown “old before [his] time” (5.35). The land cannot but suffer.

Just as Will Somer’s primary interest is in his loyalty to Henry, so Fool “will tarry, the fool will stay, / And let the wise man [Kent] fly” (2.2.271-72). In all the cases, Fool’s aims to expose folly, and no character is safe. Nearly *all* of Lear’s principal characters are charged with folly so that, in the end, Fool’s prophecy of general madness and folly comes true (3.4.77). In Lear’s case, Fool hopes to “anatomize,” dissect, his master’s folly, facilitating Lear’s reinstatement and the restoration of kingdom order. Fool’s attacks on Goneril and Regan, on the other hand, are attempts to expose their selfishness and self-serving flattery.

The Fool poses a persistent problem for critics. His character—nameless, even ageless—is too easy to allegorize. To compensate, critics might try to particularize Fool, to root him in a specific social and historical context. Some critics have dismissed Fool entirely as a needless addition to the play; Nahum Tate, for example, excised Fool’s role entirely (and changed *King Lear*’s ending to a happy one). Fool was not restored until 1838, when William Macready cast a young woman in the role to provide a “visual link” with Cordelia, further marginalizing or minimizing Fool.⁵⁵ Rosenberg, however, notes

Fool's off-centrality and transcendence; he is "a kind of microcosm of the play's turbulent dialectic" and "Lear's looking-glass."⁵⁶ With that perspective, the critic cautiously turns to a looking glass for Fool himself: the historical person who acted as king's fool in Shakespeare's time.

CHAPTER FOUR: SALT WITHOUT SAVOR

Archibald Armstrong, or Archie, traveled south with the court of Britain's ascending king, James VI of Scotland, who would become James I. While direct correlation of Armstrong to Fool is inadvisable, we may examine their similarities and conclude that Armstrong is an analogue to Fool. As Marvin Rosenberg says, Archie's "role and some of his jests resonate with those of Lear's Fool."⁵⁷ I want to suggest that the "resonance" is not coincidental. In fact, the movement of fools from courts and semi-private audiences to the very public stage affected the way Archie was expected to behave and, by extension, affected the performance of *Lear's Fool*.

Archie came to London with the king in 1603, apparently having served the king for some time. He was not well liked (like Fool), he mocked the family tensions and the king's relationships (like Fool), and he challenged the authority that threatened the king (like Fool). In each case, he managed to escape unscathed, until his encounter with Archbishop William Laud led to his dismissal. In a further parallel, Bishop Corbett called Archie "Salt Archie," which echoes Lear's "bitter" Fool.⁵⁸ While these parallels do not mean that Shakespeare had Archie in mind when he created Lear's Fool, they do suggest that the power relationship between a licensed fool and his patron/master had conventional, even formulaic, pitfalls and outcomes. For example, Archie was not the first court fool to challenge the church or her officials (see "William Somer" in chapter two). In fact, such conflict had become standard behavior in Elizabethan England,

especially as the church became increasingly hostile to available sources of public entertainment.

By the time Archie involuntarily left the Court, he had acquired a pension that would allow him to live comfortably, further supplemental income from a patent for manufacturing tobacco pipes (1618), and a thousand acres in Ireland.⁵⁹ He had secured a retirement and become a landowner on the strength of his relationship with the king. While at court, he had insinuated himself in affairs of state; he had positioned himself as an intermediary to present petitions to the king. He tried to use his position to accumulate personal wealth, peddling his considerable influence with James I. He had succeeded. He had made the role of the court fool as lucrative as that of the stage fool.

In addition, Welsford points out that he changed the climate of the court. During his tenure, the lines between fool, courtier, and king blurred considerably. In fact, she says, James “plunged into . . . undignified revelry in which his courtiers and his fool . . . met on equal terms.”⁶⁰ Archie’s status changed dramatically to one of, as I have said, unprecedented influence.

Unlike Somer, however, Archie did not receive everything he asked (“what he would crave”); indeed, Archie asked for nothing unless it was to benefit him. Perhaps for this reason, that he reflected James’s “less admirable side . . . his favouritism, self-indulgence and conceit,” Archie made more formidable enemies than Somer did. Southworth goes so far as to label Archie “generally resented.” He managed, for instance, to come between King James and one of his heirs. Archie alienated Prince Henry following a public event at Newmarket. When the royal company parted ways, most of the courtiers followed the prince. Archie called James’s attention to the fact, suggesting

that the prince had become more popular than the king had. Archie suggested, as Lear's Fool did, that the kingdom was passing from the king's hand prematurely. The implication was that the prince considered himself all too ready for leadership—he seemed prepared to displace his father. The parallel to Goneril and Regan's clutching at their newfound power is unmistakable. James was understandably troubled; Henry and his friends, in retaliation, tossed Archie in a blanket whenever they saw him. We can only assume that this happened on more than one occasion.

In addition to instigating and falling prey to family tensions, Archie found himself navigating the turbulent waters of international relations. As Kempe had done, Archie represented his master at a foreign court—he accompanied Henry during negotiations for the Spanish match. The reader is again reminded of the almost universal privilege accompanying a "licens'd fool," for no diplomat could remind the Spanish court of the Armada's defeat without seriously insulting them. Archie did so, and still managed to be better received than any of the king's emissaries.⁶¹

Archie defied the authority of the church as well, as personified in the Archbishop of Canterbury William Laud. The root, it seems, of Archie's hostility toward the Church in general and Laud in particular was Laud's policy of forcing English liturgy upon Scottish congregations. Though the king hoped to unify Britain wholly, the king's fool was first a Scot. As a result, Archie and Laud confronted one another a number of times, and there was little love lost between them.

Dating Archie's so-called church jests is impossible, primarily because some historians question their veracity.⁶² Their progression, though, seems clear. For example, the king is said to have been worried about the health of his horse, the horse having

grown lean. Archie recommends that the king make the horse a bishop, and then he need not worry.⁶³ Perhaps Archie's most famous jest was a grace said in the Archbishop's presence: "Great praise be given to God, and little laud to the devil." In one stroke, Archie mocked Laud's physical stature and his position.⁶⁴

From "harmless" jests, however, Archie fell to serious insult, and his sparring with Archbishop Laud led to his dismissal. While in a tavern in Westminster in March 1637, Archie called Laud "a Monk, a Rogue, and a Traitor." Later, when Archie heard of the hostile reception the Scots had given the Book of Common Prayer, he said to Laud, "Whea's feule now? [Who's the fool now?]." When Laud complained, Archie was publicly humiliated ("his Coat pulled over his ears") and thrown out of court, and he narrowly avoided further prosecution in the Star Chamber thanks to the intercession of Laud himself.

Though Laud's intervention saved Archie's life, it did not cure either Archie's wit or his dislike for Laud. Shortly after Archie's demise, a man met Archie robed in black at Westminster Abbey. Thinking Archie was mourning for Scotland, the man asked where his motley coat had gone. Archie replied

My Lord of Canterbury hath taken it from me, because either he or some of the Scots bishops may have use for it themselves, but he hath given me a black coat for it, to colour my knavery with; and now I may speak what I please, so it be not against the prelates, for this coat hath a far greater privilege than the other had.⁶⁵

The coat Archie had lost, the motley coat usually worn by fools and jesters, yielded its wearer certain privileges of speech. Archie had pleaded unsuccessfully the privilege of his coat when he was thrown out of court. The coat identified Archie's position as clearly as the black robe identified the clergy. Perhaps, though, Archie correctly observed that

his privilege, as well as the influence of fooling upon the English monarchy, had passed. After his retirement we hear of few fools at the English court and of none so financially successful. His fall, remarks Welsford, “marks the ending of an epoch in the history of English folly.”⁶⁶

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

*The innocent speaks the truth because he can do no other.*⁶⁷

What, then, is *Lear's Fool*? A privileged truth-teller, certainly. A witty entertainer, definitely. An influential retainer, possibly; we have little textual evidence to support such a theory. These roles are the legacy of Fool's three "parents:" the court and stage fools; the player fool Robert Armin; and James's influential fool Archie Armstrong. The first and second causes (the fools and Robert Armin) are closely linked. Robert Armin wrote of Will Somer in *Foole upon Foole*, and Armin was said to be Richard Tarlton's "adopted son" and heir.⁶⁸ Archie Armstrong was a part of the societal milieu that produced fool. While Armstrong did not *directly* influence Shakespeare's invention of Fool, Archie is inextricable from the tradition that provided Fool's dramatic foundation.

While I initially believed that Archie Armstrong most closely resembled Fool, my research has changed my mind. The natural fool William Somer resonates more completely with *Lear's Fool* as I interpret him. As Southworth points out, "Somer reflected a humane [sic] streak in the otherwise ruthlessly egotistical [sic] character of Henry VIII."⁶⁹ Fool, too, mirrors and defends Lear's innocence, as well as those who seek Lear's good—Cordelia and Kent—hoping to reconcile his King to those whom he has wrongfully exiled. Conversely, he attacks the self-indulgence of those who would deprive Lear of his kingdom before the proper time—Lear himself, Goneril, and Regan.

The subject of Fool—identifying his character, especially—is inexhaustible. His performance history is as varied, perhaps more so, than any other of Shakespeare’s characters. It is perhaps fitting that the role’s history, like the character himself, is “made of contraries.”⁷⁰ Those contradictions, those paradoxes that surround critical interpretation of Fool’s role will continue, cannot *but* continue. The critic, like Fool, “must make content with his fortunes fit” (3.2.76). It is not rain, however, that he or she must endure—it is lack of the kind of “facts” that are irrecoverable.

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NOTES

¹ Southworth, John. *Fools and Jesters in the English Court*. Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing, 1998, p. 1

² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³ Welsford, Enid. *The Fool: His Social and Literary History*. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1936. p. xi.

⁴ *Fools and Jesters*, p. 111.

⁵ Quotes from King Lear are from Foakes, R. A. *King Lear: The Arden Shakespeare*. 3rd series. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and David Scott Kastan. Gen. eds. Surrey: Thomas Nelson, 1997.

⁶ See Welsford, p. 165.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

⁸ The question of authorship is beyond the scope of this paper, but our understanding of unique authorship is changing, as Russ Macdonald points out in *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare* (p. 75). I shall not consider such issues in this project, although I certainly acknowledge their existence. I contend, however, that Shakespeare's knowledge of an actor's strengths, and his writing to support those strengths, is a type of collaboration. Wiles and Gurr, among others, recognize the fundamental differences between Shakespeare's early fools and those in his later plays.

⁹ Stephen Booth, quoted in Foakes, *King Lear*, p. 55.

¹⁰ See note 1 above.

¹¹ Wiles, David. *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. p. 140.

¹² Wiles, p. 69.

¹³ See, for example, *AYL* 1.2.36 and *TN* 1.5. Touchstone and Feste each are named only once in the text, Touchstone at *AYL* 2.4.15 and Feste at *TN* 2.4.11.

¹⁴ The spelling of Somer's name, like that of most contemporary names, was remarkably fluid. It is spelled variously "Somer," "Somers," "Summer," and "Summers."

¹⁵ *Fools and Jesters*, p. 70.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

¹⁹ The early Christian church was devoted to caring for widows and the poor. See, for example, Acts 6, where deacons are appointed to ensure equal treatment of widows; and Galatians 2:10, where Paul says he is "eager" to remember the poor.

²⁰ Southworth, *Fools and Jesters*, p. 79.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²² *Witty and Witless*, qtd. in Southworth (78). Incidentally, Somer may have had a sleeping disorder such as sleep apnea or narcolepsy. Several anecdotes mention his falling asleep at strange times and in strange places (see Welsford, pp. 168-69).

²³ Welsford, *The Fool*, p. 167.

²⁴ *Fools and Jesters*, p. 78.

²⁵ Welsford, *The Fool*, p. 165.

²⁶ Southworth, *Fools and Jesters*, p. 116.

²⁷ Nungezer, *Dictionary of Actors*, p. 352.

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²⁹ Nungezer, Edwin. *A Dictionary of Actors*. New Haven, 1929, p. 362.

³⁰ Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, p. 12.

³¹ Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, p. 31. The use of clowns or fools in diplomatic relations was commonplace, and it would continue in James's time with Archie Armstrong (see chapter 4).

³² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³³ Wiles, pp. 33-34.

³⁴ Southworth, p. 130.

³⁵ Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, p. 24.

³⁶ Wiles devotes a chapter to their study. See *Shakespeare's Clown*, pp. 43-60.

³⁷ Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, p. 142.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

³⁹ *The Fool*, p. 162.

⁴⁰ *Shakespeare's Clown*, p. 69.

⁴¹ Welsford, *The Fool*, p. 249. A *touchstone* was a black mineral used to test the purity of gold and silver. Modern English synonyms include *benchmark* and *yardstick*.

⁴² *The Fool*, p. 249.

⁴³ Glossed as “wise and witty” in *The Norton Shakespeare* and as “ready-witted and pithy” by *The Riverside Shakespeare*. 1st ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974.

⁴⁴ Foakes’s introduction to the Arden edition introduces the idea of Q and F’s distinctness, beginning with Michael Warren’s assertion in a 1978 essay that “the Q and F texts ‘must be treated as separate versions of the play’” (116).

⁴⁵ Foakes, *King Lear*, p. 133.

⁴⁶ See Foakes, *King Lear*, p. 135-137, for a more complete discussion of the changes in Fool’s role.

⁴⁷ *Shakespeare’s Motley*, p. 101.

⁴⁸ I have assumed with most scholars that Robert Armin played Fool, but the evidence is by no means certain. Southworth, for instance, suggests that Armin would have been too old to play Fool; he would have supervised a boy actor (who would then have doubled Cordelia). Owing to Armin’s penchant for changes in disguise and diction, Southworth suggest that Armin “is more likely to have been cast as Edgar—a more demanding role in which, for the greater part of the play, he is required to disguise himself as the madman Tom” (134).

⁴⁹ Rosenberg, p. 103.

⁵⁰ Rosenberg details the Fool’s further performance history in *Masks*, pp. 102-115.

- ⁵¹ By extension Lear is also a fool to the banished daughter, Cordelia.
- ⁵² Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown*, p. 159.
- ⁵³ Southworth, p. 110.
- ⁵⁴ Foakes finds in Fool's words "a mocking retort," a more bitter tone (Arden 134).
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 52.
- ⁵⁶ *Masks*, p. 105, 107.
- ⁵⁷ *Masks*, p. 104.
- ⁵⁸ John Pace, the fool who would not talk of Elizabeth I's faults (see chapter 1), was also called "the bitter fool" (Southworth, *Fools and Jesters*, p. 110).
- ⁵⁹ Welsford, *The Fool*, pp. 172, 179.
- ⁶⁰ *The Fool*, p. 171.
- ⁶¹ Southworth, *Fools and Jesters*, p. 144.
- ⁶² Quite a cottage industry grew up around jest-books, especially those connected to a specific fool. They included *Tarlton's Jest*s (1600), *Foole upon Foole* (1600; 1608 as *A Nest of Ninnies*), *Archie Armstrong's Banquet of Jest*s (1630, which had nothing to do with Archie himself). The aforementioned *Pleasant history of the life and death of Will Summers* appeared in 1676.
- ⁶³ Welsford, *The Fool*, p. 172.
- ⁶⁴ It may be worth returning here to Welsford's definition of a fool. By calling attention to Laud's short stature, Archie might have insinuated the mental deficiency of a natural or innocent fool.

⁶⁵ Welsford, *The Fool*, p. 178. This anecdote seems to contradict the theory that Fool's motley distances him from Armstrong, although the two contemporary portraits we have of Archie (from two versions of *Archy's Banquet of Jests*) picture him in fairly standard courtier's clothes.

⁶⁶ *The Fool*, p. 180.

⁶⁷ Southworth, *Fools and Jesters*, p. 8.

⁶⁸ Welsford, *The Fool*, p. 284.

⁶⁹ *Fools and Jesters*, p. 141.

⁷⁰ Rosenberg, *Masks*, p. 105.