

Witty Fools and Foolish Wits:  
Performing Cognitive Disability in English Literature, c. 1380–c. 1602

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(English Language and Literature)  
in the University of Michigan  
2014

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## Acknowledgments

This dissertation was written with countless people's thoughtful support. I thank my committee members—Mike Schoenfeldt, Cathy Sanok, Valerie Traub, and George Hoffmann—for their many hours of generous reading, conversation, and intellectual support. In an institution that is already known for its intellectual generosity, they stand out. I especially wish to thank my chair, Mike, for being everything a chair should be and then some: flexible with the changing shape of a developing project, ready to talk, willing to read. The University of Michigan's English Department and Rackham Graduate School have amply funded my graduate career, for which I am grateful. I thank Jan Burgess, Senia Vasquez, and Karly Mitchell for their tireless omniscience.

I thank Katie Larson and Leslie Dunn for their excellent suggestions concerning the *Twelfth Night* essay that evolved into my first publication and part of this dissertation's fourth chapter, as well as for their continuing collegiality in all things related to early modern music and literature.

Several of my undergraduate mentors—especially Christina Bieber Lake, Brett Foster, and Alan Jacobs—have continued to offer generous conversational support of my graduate work over the years. Many of the ideas that have fueled my subsequent development as a scholar were formed in their classes. I think especially of Christina

Bieber Lake's work, which – although it concerns a different topic, region, and period than my own – has helped to develop the lines of inquiry for much of my own research.

I thank my many wonderful fellow graduate students in the University of Michigan's English Department for their outstanding intellectual contributions to this project, and for always offering me a place to stay in Ann Arbor. I thank Leila Watkins, Cordelia Zukerman, and Amrita Dhar for their hospitality and scholarly input across many conferences in many states. May we all go a-conferencing together for years to come. I thank Sarah Linwick and Jessica Morton for their enthusiastic support, keen readerly eyes, long conversations, and night-owling. I thank my writing-group colleagues, Melody Pugh and Kya Mangrum, for hours of encouragement, pushing, reading, re-reading, and helping me figure out the smarter versions of formerly embryonic arguments. I thank Kya, especially, for the many sessions of writing boot camp and for telling me I could do it.

My work has been improved by countless other colleagues who took interest in me and my work out of sheer goodness. I thank Sarah Gerk for friendship, motivation, and tea. I thank my peerless writing buddy, Jenny Emery-Peck, for being a crazy-awesome reader and for making me plunk my derrière in my chair every day until I got the thing done. I thank Mary Price for always asking how my work was going, for getting me to articulate what I was trying to do, and for helping me to get outside and lose my computer tan. I thank Kelly Bezio, Wendy Hyman, and Jen Bryan for friendship and professional support.

I will be everlastingly grateful to my family members, who have aided my work on this project in countless ways. I thank Kathy Heetderks, Bill Heetderks, Paul McClain, and Madeline McClain for always asking how things were going and for putting up with all the deadlines I somehow wound up pushing at their houses. I thank Laura McClain, Sheri McClain, David McClain, and David Heetderks for repeatedly offering to read my drafts and for giving me timely, honest feedback—especially on the unclear sentences. Clunkers still left in the project are doubtless among the materials they didn't read. I am particularly grateful to my mom, Sheri McClain, for teaching me how to read and procuring thousands of books for me to devour. I thank my dad, David McClain, for the hours we spent sitting on the couch with our noses in our books. I thank Asher Heetderks for joy, for laughter, and for loving scatological humor just as much as Chaucer ever did.

I am deeply grateful to David Heetderks for listening to ideas, reading innumerable drafts, helping me sharpen my arguments, lathering, rinsing, and repeating. I thank him for everything.

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## Abstract

*Witty Fools and Foolish Wits: Performing Cognitive Disability in English Literature, c. 1380–c. 1602* argues that the figure of the premodern literary fool serves as an avatar for cultural concerns about the frailty of cognitive ability. The performances of even the wittiest fools are best contextualized within the full range of the premodern literary tradition, which often depicts fools as morally suspect representatives of cognitive alterity and agents of social disruption. Fools' performances of songs and verbal wit position them as figures who are both cognitively disabled *and* hyper-abled – that is, extraordinarily gifted. Literary texts regularly portray fools as figures who are either cognitively disabled by their own moral fault or counterfeiterers of hyper-ability.

Chapter 1 examines the pseudo-Chaucerian *Tale of Beryn's* two theoretical models of cognitive disability. The early-fifteenth-century poem's employment of the medieval topos of the "five wits," or five senses, proffers a theory of fully embodied cognition. The poem also adduces a pervasive, societal model of cognitive disability – rather than a model aimed at pointing out the cognitive difference of the individual from a societal norm. Chapter 2 shows how the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century romance *Robert of Cisyle* frames a king's folly as a form of cognitive disability that imperils the institution of the monarchy itself. Chapter 3 examines the morality play *The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art* (1569), demonstrating how the fool's singing of solfège and nonsense syllables registers as "bable" – that is, "bauble" / "babble" – and

arguing that the play identifies such foolish “babe” as the cause of cognitive, linguistic, and educational failure. Chapter 4 argues that in *Twelfth Night* (c. 1602), Feste’s performance of songs and wordplay register as non-rational counterpoints to the forms of rational discourse valorized by handbooks on early modern masculinity and aesthetic creation.

In the texts I examine, audiences attempt to read fooling as either the cause of fools’ own cognitive disability or the evidence of fools’ counterfeiting of hyper-ability. Premodern attempts to insist on these categories reveal deep social concerns about the impossibility of managing – or mending – cognitive difference. Yet fools themselves challenge such simplistic categories: their performances of fooling gesture toward a conceptual landscape that provides ample room for many forms of cognitive variation and expression.

## Introduction

I had rather be any kind of thing than a fool; and yet I would not be thee, nuncle. Thou hast pared thy wit o' both sides and left nothing in the middle.

—Lear's Fool (to Lear), *King Lear*, 1.4.164–6<sup>1</sup>

I saw him put down the other day with an ordinary fool that has no more brain than a stone.

—Malvolio (on Feste), *Twelfth Night*, 1.5.72–73

Fools are witty, provocative, gifted in wordplay. Uniquely positioned to tell the truths that no one else around them dare speak, fools speak truth to power. — This is the predominant scholarly view of the performing fool in medieval and early modern English literature.<sup>2</sup> This view is buttressed by English literary scholarship's long tradition of reading Shakespeare's fools as the exemplars of English literary fooling: Malvolio's insult, for instance, clearly implies that Feste is performing as the kind of witty fool who *ought* to be able to "put down" an "ordinary fool," rather than the reverse. Scholars have generally adopted the same view of fooling that Malvolio displays: that is, a view of witty fooling's superior contradistinction to ordinary, or less able, fooling.

This predominant view relies on such displays of wit as the one by Lear's Fool, quoted in the epigraph above. Lear's Fool both disparages his own role as fool and boldly tells his king that he, Lear, is even worse off: "Thou has pared thy wit o' both

sides and left nothing in the middle.”<sup>3</sup> The skewering effect of the fool’s second-person address to his monarch is indeed typical of many premodern literary fools’ speech. These iconic, Shakespearean representations of fools themselves reveal a hidden – but crucial – conceptual scaffolding beneath the view of the fool as an exceptionally witty spokesman of the truth.<sup>4</sup> When Malvolio insinuates that Feste is not actually as witty as he should be by comparing Feste unfavorably with a “fool that has no more brain than a stone,” he disparages both fools’ cognitive abilities. Although Malvolio’s words are clearly hyperbolic, they participate in a larger literary tradition that portrays both fools and their performances as disabled. It is this literary backdrop against which fools’ performances of wordplay and song register as manifestations of cognitive difference.<sup>5</sup> Literary fools serve not to reify cognitive difference but to relativize audiences’ awareness of what cognition, in all its variability, might entail.

The more traditional, predominant reading of the premodern English literary fool depends heavily on reading backward through Shakespeare and, in particular, focusing selectively on the seemingly hyper-witty fools of Shakespeare’s later plays.<sup>6</sup> This project looks at the vast body of premodern anti-fool literature – that is, literature that represents *and condemns* fools – and discovers the anti-fool echoes of that literature even in apparent celebrations of witty fools. While the scholarly tendency to use a Shakespearean lens is understandable, it need not be the only lens through which we look at English literary fooling.<sup>7</sup> In focusing on late medieval and early modern fool literature, this project enables a recovery of the full complexity of both Shakespearean and pre-Shakespearean literary representations of fools and their cognition.

*Witty Fools and Foolish Wits* argues that the figure of the fool serves both as a category of social identity and as an avatar for cultural concerns about the frailty of cognitive ability. It demonstrates that fools' performances of songs and verbal wit position fools as agents of social disruption who are both cognitively disabled *and* hyper-abled – that is, extraordinarily gifted. Literary fools exhibit cognitive alterity: some display less ability than other literary characters, whereas others display *excess* ability. For example, some fools are noted for their malapropisms and lack of judgment, while others are praised for their verbal wordplay, songs, wit, and insight. Premodern literary culture subsumes both kinds of fools under the conceptual umbrella of cognitive alterity. Furthermore, these categories themselves are often muddled: many fools are said to have both enhanced *and* impaired abilities. Several of the texts I examine in this project advance a notion of literature itself as performed hyper-ability. Even when those texts fail the standards they set themselves – for example, the *Tale of Beryn* aspires to more literary hyper-ability than it achieves – these texts show fools performing, and failing to perform, the forms of hyper-able wit to which premodern English literature itself often aspires.

This project situates four texts – two from the long fifteenth century and two from the long sixteenth century – within their literary, historical, and social contexts. This kind of contextual analysis uncovers how such texts represent fools and their varying cognitive abilities. The performances of even the wittiest fools are best contextualized within the full range of the premodern literary tradition, which often represents fools as both cognitively disabled and morally suspect. Whereas modern-day

discussions of disability are likely to touch on medical discourses – even if they are critical of such discourses – medieval and early modern literary representations of disability typically intertwine the cognitive with the moral demesnes. For the purposes of this study, I am examining literary evidence on fools and their folly. In medieval and early modern England, literary fools are always read by their contemporary audiences in the tradition of the cognitively and morally disabled fool.

The precise definition and uses of the term “disability” are debated within the field of disability studies. Disability studies has long endeavored to push back against what is often called either “medicalization” or the “medical model” of disability – that is, the conceptualization of bodily differences from medical norms as problems to be diagnosed, treated, and corrected.<sup>8</sup> As part of this endeavor, scholars of disability studies have advanced various constructionist models that seek to define and discuss disability in a more comprehensive manner. A prominent constructionist model, the “social model,” suggests that “impairment” is the physical fact of bodily variation, whereas “disability” is the phenomenon that occurs when people’s impairments affect their roles and functioning in their particular societies.<sup>9</sup> This model has the advantage of proffering a vocabulary that allows scholars and students of disability studies to identify and critique societies’ roles in the conditions that surround bodily variation. A salient disadvantage of this model for my project is that the vocabulary of “impairment” fails to acknowledge either the fact of hyper-ability or the experience of “twice-exceptional” individuals – that is, people whose traits and experiences fall on divergent points of a spectrum of relative ability. The social model has elsewhere been

critiqued by proponents of the “cultural model,” resists over-emphasis on the social construction of disability in favor of showing the mutually influencing relationship between bodily experience and environment.<sup>10</sup> Debates over such models in disability studies evince a tension that will be familiar to scholars of, for instance, transgender studies; both fields require constant careful negotiation between discourses of embodiment and discourses of social construction. My project on fools’ cognitive differences is likewise located at the tension between these discourses.

This tension must be elucidated carefully in a project like this one, which is not about the scientific realities or historical experiences of fools’ cognition, but about how premodern literature *represents* them as cognitively various. In other words, my project acknowledges that the only point of access to literary fools’ cognition is the premodern social construction of that embodied cognition. This study’s discussion of fools’ performances, then, suggest not that fools’ disability and hyper-ability *are* performed in some scientific-historical sense, but that fools’ disability and hyper-ability *are represented as* performances by the preponderance of premodern English fool literature. Each of this dissertation’s chapters indicates in its own way what this premodern English belief in cognitive disability-as-performance meant for the interpretation of fools’ songs and wordplay, as well as their broader social role. For my purposes, disability studies offers the conceptual tools for identifying how people have thought about bodily and cognitive difference. If twentieth-century studies of fools have often taken the fool as a stable historical category, the tools proffered by disability studies can provide the language needed to talk about where premodern notions of fooling are less stable – or

even differently stable – than many recent scholars have assumed. The theoretical framework of disability studies also makes it possible to ask: What models of cognitive variation matter across the premodern period? What premodern models, if any, still survive today? How do fools fit into premodern ideas of cognitive difference? How do fools challenge those ideas?

In the last half-century, the pervasive scholarly reputation of fools as witty entertainers has obscured the significance of anti-fool elements in premodern English literature. My work shows that instances of witty fooling serve not merely as celebrations of fools' antics but also as explorations of fools' social marginalization. While celebrations of holy fools from Erasmus' *In Praise of Folly*, medieval miracle stories, and Pauline writings in the New Testament are familiar to many scholars, my work sheds light on the anti-fool sentiments that pervade medieval and early modern literary texts. Such anti-fool texts – whose critiques of fools are additive, variable, yet consistently sharp – suggest that fools, lacking true cognitive and performative ability, feign their skills in jesting and singing merely to make quick money. Premodern fool literature, as this project shows, represents some fools as disabled, some as hyper-abled. In such premodern literary representations, when hyper-ability is present, it is always either simulated or *thought* to be simulated.<sup>11</sup> Even disabled fools are often accused of being in sufficient control of their folly to bear moral responsibility for not leaving that folly behind.<sup>12</sup> My project shows that this anti-fool tradition, which relies upon and reinforces fools' social marginality, suffuses even the seemingly pro-fool literature of medieval and early modern England.

The literary tradition that critiques fools' alleged feigning evinces a tension between the premodern acknowledgment that some people actually have cognitive disabilities that are beyond their power to control, and the premodern insistence on cognitive disability as a moral problem that ought to be ameliorated. Chapter 3, for example, considers Erasmus' suggestion that congenital fools are particularly *blessed* because, he says, they are exempted from the soteriological system that occupies the rest of humanity and do not have to worry about their salvation. The same chapter looks at a moment in tension with Erasmus' model: in *The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art*, the fool Moros is seen as congenitally foolish – perhaps even predestined to be foolish – yet he is simultaneously criticized for failing to improve himself and thereby escape his condition of folly. Chapter 1, in contrast, shows how Geoffrey is lauded for feigning a hyper-able folly: this feigned hyper-ability allows him to rescue the tale's eponymous delinquent from both his legal troubles and his moral and educational turpitude.

In these portrayals of folly, feigning and hyper-ability are coterminous but not logically related. When a fool demonstrates hyper-ability of wit, the accusation that he is *feigning* that hyper-ability always ensues. This illogical link shows how premodern English fool literature treats the specific kind of cognitive alterity that folly represents: the folly represented as cognitively deficient and the folly represented as cognitively extraordinary may represent two opposed poles, but only the latter – wittiness or hyper-ability – is always called into question. This literary proclivity shows that, while folly is thought to be performed, the forms of folly that are said to be performed *best* are

also regularly called into question; folly-*qua*-disability itself is thought to have a norm – that is, lack of ability – and deviations from that norm are met with suspicion. Fools’ wittiest language is taken to be an insouciant manifestation of the deeper danger of cognitive difference covered by a feigned performance.

In premodern English literature, fools are often depicted as comedic characters who make their living by performing jokes and sometimes songs for a monarch or another member of the nobility. The denotative and connotative functions of the terms “fool” and “folly” are broad in premodern English literature.<sup>13</sup> Some texts use the term “fool” to refer almost exclusively to characters who perform feats of verbal wit for an audience – that is, vocational fools – whereas others use the term as an umbrella to cover various cognitive, moral, and other qualities. Still more uses of “fool,” such as “fool” as a term of endearment, are sometimes related to performances of fooling but are not included in the present study. (The terms “clown” and “jester” are roughly synonymous with “fool”; although “clown” is slightly more likely to be used for a comedic bumpkin and “jester” typically refers to a character whose vocation is to perform before a court, these distinctions are not at all consistent in premodern literature. This project uses “fool” as an umbrella for all of these overlapping terms.)<sup>14</sup>

In writing about Shakespeare’s fools, scholars have frequently invoked such works as Erasmus’ *The Praise of Folly* and suggested that it is appropriate to read Shakespeare’s fools as the “wise fool” of Erasmus’ text.<sup>15</sup> The gesture to Erasmus has become so reflexive a move that it is regularly made in introductions of Shakespearean editions geared toward undergraduates.<sup>16</sup> Whereas the Shakespearean and Erasmian

readings of English literary fools yield a relatively neat characterological category, premodern literature itself proffers a messier picture: the category of the fool is a category with a centrifugal impulse.

As premodern visual representations of fools show, there is no consistent set of attributes that is common to all premodern fools (Figures 1-3). Literary portrayals of fools function much like Wittgenstein's notion of "family resemblance" – that is, portrayals of fools often share some features, but no feature or set of features is common to all. For example, in premodern visual depictions, some fools have tassels or bells on their coats, some fools are naked altogether, some wear motley or simply differently-colored hose, some have caps, some have shaved heads, and some carry "baubles" that may be either inflated bladders or intricately fashioned faces. Premodern fool literature presents a similarly wide array of qualities that may be associated with folly: some fools display verbal hyper-ability, while others are malapropists; some fools seem extremely witty, while others seem to lack conscious wit; some fools sing well, others badly, others not at all. Some fools bring about a "fool's reversal," in which they reveal truer folly in their audiences; other fools experience reversals of their own. Some fools are badly educated, dissolute young men; others perform in contradistinction to the badly educated and dissolute characters all around them. All of these visual and literary attributes indicate vocational folly, but none of them is necessary for indicating folly, and some of them are mutually exclusive.



Figure 1. BL Harley MS 1892, fol. 68. Psalter (Netherlands or England, c. 1490–c. 1510).<sup>17</sup>

A typical medieval depiction of a fool performing for his king appears in a fourteenth-century psalter (Figure 1). Whereas this performing fool is what we expect from scholarship's traditional framing of premodern English fool literature, the more pervasive visual *and literary* representation of the fool in the period shows the fool's intransigent resistance to acknowledging God. Medieval psalters commonly represented fools in illuminations accompanying Psalm 52, which begins, "The fool says in his heart, *There is no God.*" As V. A. Kolve has shown in his work on the

literature and iconography of the fool in Psalm 52, the psalter fool serves as the visible embodiment of rebellion and impiety.<sup>18</sup> In Figure 1, the fool is wearing motley colors, he has tassels on his clothing and bells on the tassels, and he is carrying a bauble—a long rod that typically either has either an inflated bladder, a ball, or a face carved onto one end. This fool's bauble has a face, which the fool would typically use during his verbal performances of wit. The bauble, which parodies a monarch's scepter, allows the fool's performance to hint saucily at the inversion of the hierarchical relationship between fool and ruler.



Figure 2. Bodley MS Douce 118, fol. 60v. Psalter (Artois, end of the thirteenth century.) Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.<sup>19</sup>

A slightly older depiction shows the plainer dimensions of the iconography of fooling (Figure 2). This fool's bauble has a ball on the end, and his head is shaved—a

common feature in the medieval iconography of fooling that is often invoked in literary texts.<sup>20</sup> Yet another psalter depiction shows several different kinds of folly gathered together (Figure 3). In the center of the floriated capital, a couple canoodles in the left-hand foreground. Most of the people in the crowd behind the couple have their backs turned toward God, while at least a few seem to be happily looking at the couple's canoodling. Meanwhile, the vocational fool – clearly marked as such by his tassels and bells – is shaking a hand at God, and the finger on his mouth may indicate mockery, as well. This psalter thus shows multiple kinds of figurative folly – lack of chastity, turning one's back on God, mocking God. And this psalter illumination, like the broader medieval and early modern literary tradition, represents all these various kinds of figurative folly in the person of the vocational fool. While the outward signs of folly vary throughout the premodern iconographic tradition, they all perform the same function: to witness externally to the fool's inward, embodied cognitive disarray. Premodern English literature conceptually models cognition as an embodied faculty; thus, the fool's cognitive difference from society is made visible through his habiliments, his words, and his songs.

For these reasons, visual depictions of fools in psalters were consonant with a host of premodern English and Scottish literary texts that catalogued the moral and cognitive qualities of fools. Nearly all such portraits insist on fools' deficiencies in character. Duplicity, mendacity, drunkenness, deficiencies in education, and the propensity for singing are all recurring features of these literary texts. According to such texts, some fools are clever, and some fools are virtuous, but no fool is both clever

and virtuous. By turns didactic, satirical, or both, these texts illuminate folly in rich, multi-faceted forms. Taken together, these literary depictions show fools and folly in an almost entirely negative light, yet their purposes and effects are as variable as prismatic colors. This wide array of textual representations of folly often resists existing scholarly categories for premodern literary folly.



Figure 3. BL MS Royal I E. IX, fol. 148. Psalter (England, first quarter of the fifteenth century).<sup>21</sup>

Literary scholarship has traditionally set great store by the categories of “natural” and “artificial” fooling – categories that are supposed to distinguish hyper-able from disabled fools. Although the premodern term “artificial” favorably denotes a fool’s performing talents – literally, his artful skills – premodern English literature typically meets “artificial” or vocational fools with considerably deep suspicions. Conversely, it often regards “natural” fools with tolerance and delight. Such “artificial” fools’ work is often construed by premodern texts as a counterfeit performance of natural fooling – a performance that dangerously obscures the boundary lines between ability and disability and thereby calls into question the status of its audience’s own intellection.<sup>22</sup> This premodern association of artificial fooling with craftiness and perfidy stands in stark opposition to the more pervasive trend in recent literary criticism that almost ubiquitously identifies the fool as a wise character. In such criticism, fools become safe – in fact, they become downright cuddly, serving as figments of modern scholars’ own skeptical sensibilities. Shakespeare’s corpus and its broader contexts, however, reveal fools performing a more complex negotiation between disparagements of their mental ability and their vocational imperative to display a dexterous wit.<sup>23</sup>

Many Shakespearean critics have with reason distinguished between Shakespeare’s early so-called “clowns,” played most often by Will Kemp, and the later “licensed” fools, played by Robert Armin. Such critics have often discussed qualities much like cognitive deficits in the Will Kemp characters while noting the wisdom and insight of the licensed fools that Robert Armin played. These critics often derive this separation of categories from Armin himself, whose 1600 pamphlet, *Foole upon Foole or*

*Six sortes of Sottes*, distinguishes between “[n]aturall” and “artificial” fools.<sup>24</sup> Scholars have often accepted Robert Armin’s categories and perpetuated them, as if to endorse the idea that Armin identified transhistorical categories. This scholarly proclivity has a long history. For instance, in a discussion of *All’s Well That Ends Well*, Samuel Johnson distinguishes between the “Clown” as “licensed jester, or domestick fool” – that is, the vocational fool – and the “Clown” as “servant, or rustic, of remarkable petulance and freedom of speech.”<sup>25</sup> Unlike many later critics, Johnson displays little interest in evaluating the relative merits of the different types of clowns’ performances. Twentieth-century critics were more eager to rush in where Johnson feared to tread. Dana Aspinall provides a valuable summary of twentieth-century critical judgments of Shakespearean fools: “Stage critics and historians emphasize that Armin’s influence rests in elevating [...] clowns’ rustic knockabout roles to more sophisticated representations wherein these clowns become courtly fools, infusing wisdom into the dramatic circumstances in which they operate.”<sup>26</sup> Aspinall traces this tradition back as far as two *PMLA* essays published in 1926 and 1927.<sup>27</sup> He cites Leslie Hotson’s *Shakespeare’s Motley* as a particularly noteworthy example of the critical distinction between the two types of Shakespearean fools: Hotson describes Kemp’s work as “low-comedy clowning,” whereas he characterizes Robert Armin as the first in a “new and distinctive line of sagacious fools.”<sup>28</sup> The overwhelming effect of this long critical history has been to elevate the work of the “sagacious,” artificial fools over the putative buffoonery of the natural fools.

This project shows that the tension between these categories of “natural” and “artificial” fooling appears frequently in premodern English literature.<sup>29</sup> For example, in *Twelfth Night*, Feste alludes to this tension by employing approximately synonymous terms:

Wit, an 't be thy will, put me into good fooling! Those wits that think they have thee do very oft prove fools, and I that am sure I lack thee may pass for a wise man. For what says Quinapalus? – “Better a witty fool than a foolish wit.” (1.5.28–32)

In Feste’s invocation, he cleverly puts himself in the category of natural fools who lack wit – a notoriously slippery premodern term encompassing a range of concepts such as cleverness, devious cunning, theological understanding, and both the figurative and physical faculties of reason. By this rhetorical move, he distances himself from the artificial fools who are seen as cunning feigners of folly. In both his quotation of the proverb attributed to Quinapalus and his assertion that “[t]hose wits that think they have thee do very oft prove fools,” he both suggests the oppositional relationship between hyper-able and disabled fools and hints at the instability of the divide between those categories. This instability and the words Feste uses to evoke it – “witty fools and foolish wits” – are at the heart of this project’s investigation of fooling.

To perpetuate these categories without question is to lose a sense of the instability of the boundaries between “witty fool” and “foolish wit” – that is, between intellectually dexterous entertainers and verbose malapropists, between “artificial” and “natural” fools. On the other hand, a certain amount of category confusion can enable us to see the threat that this instability poses – not only to “fooles artificiall” like Feste, but also to other early modern characters and audiences. Armin himself performs this

kind of category confusion when he writes that “fooles artificiall, with their wits lay waite / To make themselves fooles.”<sup>30</sup> Armin’s warning elides the distinction between “naturall” and “artificiall” disability of wit: playing the fool will make you a fool.

The insights offered by disability studies can do much to enhance literary studies’ understanding of fools and fooling in premodern England. Scholars of disability studies – particularly those who focus on disability and rhetoric – have shown how troubling and persistent an adherence to similarly dichotomized labels can be. Melanie Yergeau’s work on the rhetorically constructed divide between “high-functioning” and “low-functioning” autism articulates the problems that arise when this divide is reified: for example, “high-functioning” autistic individuals are often told that they are *too* capable to be truly autistic.<sup>31</sup> Yergeau shows how forms of disability are often understood as forms of hyper-ability. At the same time, she shows that hyper-ability itself is often misunderstood and disparaged, rather than celebrated. Yergeau writes, “Those autistic individuals who do speak (literally and metaphorically) and who do speak in atypical ways are in turn constructed as not being severe enough, as being too high-functioning, as not really having autism at all.” Such rhetoric creates a hierarchy of value between “high-” and “low-functioning” individuals with disabilities, elevating one group at the expense of another while excluding both groups from full participation in the larger society. As this project shows, similarly complex and problematic social treatments of cognitive alterity abound in premodern English literature.

The rhetoric that Yergeau critiques relies on observers' adoption of what Jay Dolmage and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson have termed a "normate stance": that is, a "central (invisible and normal) position that enables 'us' to diagnose others and make judgments about 'them.'"<sup>32</sup> This cordoning-off of disabled individuals from each other and from critics who write in a normate stance has damaging effects. Yergeau's work succinctly shows how the rhetoric of "high" and "low" functioning—especially as opposed to the normate stance of "neurotypical," or ostensibly non-disabled, functioning—can produce a hierarchical rhetoric that negatively affects individuals with autism:

Per the typical autism essay, functioning level involves the extent to which an autistic's personality traits match up with the expectations of the particular neurotypicals who author the dominant narrative. When others denote me as a high-functioning autistic, there's still an assumption that I'm malfunctioning, because no matter how "high" I am on the grid, I'm never just plain functioning. And when autistics are coined as low-functioning, the assumptions made involve malfunctioning on warp overdrive.<sup>33</sup>

Here, Yergeau shows how even celebrations of "high" functioning produce a deleterious rhetoric in which cognitive action without qualifiers—or "just plain functioning"—put boundary markers between neurotypicals. In this schematic, neurotypical individuals are presumed to be critical observers, and autistic and otherwise cognitively different individuals are presumed to be the passive subjects of observation. This work in studies of rhetoric illuminates not only contemporary debates about disability but also the tendency of premodern literary scholarship to adopt a "normate" stance vis-à-vis fools and to be quick to assume the transhistorical value of "high" and "low" forms of social performance.<sup>34</sup>

This critique from twenty-first-century disability studies indicates how the hierarchical rhetoric of “high” and “low” functioning might color literary scholars’ examinations of the variously abled forms of cognition represented in premodern English literature.<sup>35</sup> That is, while historicists have shown that twenty-first-century cultural conditions are not identical to premodern cultural conditions, the most acute practitioners of historicism are attuned to the ways in which modern-day cultural conditions may shape their views of earlier cultural contexts. Such attunement suggests that, if the emphatic premodern divisions between “natural” and “artificial” fooling have remained steadfastly entrenched in literary criticism, in the absence of clearly supporting evidence, the reason may be that such divisions too neatly align with trenchant twenty-first-century notions of “low” and “high” ability. The critical success of the notion of the “artificial” fool as clearly distinct from the “natural” fool may be facilitated by a modern societal tendency to locate social value in hyper-able cognition, rather than in a full array of cognitive variability.

The more than four-hundred-year stability of these categories of “natural” and “artificial” fooling in the critical literature is astonishing. The literary scholarship of the past half-century has effected significant shifts in critical consideration of premodern literary notions of gender, race, social status, sexuality, species, authorship, economics, semiotics, and epistemology – to name a few among many categories that have received sustained, often revolutionizing, attention. Despite these shifts with respect to other categories, characters, and forms of literary representation – and despite several incisive studies on fools – the field’s received preconceptions of fools and fooling have not

budged. Rather than accepting that our half-millennium-long adherence to this dichotomy indicates that we have ably historicized the literary fool, we might ask whether the moment is ripe for theoretically informed re-historicizing. My project's re-historicizing demonstrates that premodern fooling is indeed engaging discourses of disability; in so doing, it's offering a moral – rather than medical – model for thinking about disability in its social environs.

Until recently, many scholars have been reluctant to bring interventions from the field of disability studies to bear on early modern literature. David Houston Wood, who has done much to reverse this trend, attests to “a general, if not institutional, reluctance to engage disability as a theoretical model for early modern topics.”<sup>36</sup> In a special issue of *Disability Studies Quarterly*, he and his co-editor, Allison Hobgood, commendably seek to engage early modern scholarship with disability studies, as well as to move the critical conversation beyond earlier discussions of “monstrosity” and “deformity.”<sup>37</sup> Much of this new work in early modern disability studies has focused on visible disability, and relatively little research has been published on intellectual disability.<sup>38</sup> One notable exception to the predominance of recent critical focus on visible disability is Allison Hobgood's work on epilepsy in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Hobgood identifies the threat that epilepsy's lack of legibility poses in an early modern social context, and she argues that the epileptic body's “illegibility confounds early modern methods of knowing and articulating disability.”<sup>39</sup> The threat illegible disability poses pertains not only to epilepsy but also to cognitive difference. Premodern fools intensify this threat by performing wordplay and song as signs of cognitive difference, thereby

rendering this “invisible,” “illegible” disability both visible and sonic. Those fools who do sing employ their performances of song to register embodied aural, visual, and material forms of cognitive otherness.<sup>40</sup>

If this productive conjunction of disability studies and premodern literary studies is to be made, then the methodology employed to study disability is crucial. A sustained examination of cognitive disability in premodern representations of fools requires close attention to the contextual specificity of the English literary tradition, rather than by the selective importation of modern scientific or psychological terminology into premodern literary analysis. As Marie-Laure Ryan has pointed out, new research in cognitive science has proven increasingly persuasive to literary scholars, but this is a one-way street: scientists have not, in turn, been persuaded of the value of literary studies to their work. Melanie Yergeau accurately sums up the effect of this unidirectional interdisciplinary: “‘Science’ provides the basis upon which we [humanities scholars] can retro-diagnose literary characters, historical figures, or student writers.”<sup>41</sup> There is no value to be gained from attempting to present a modern mental-health diagnosis as the equivalent of premodern fools’ imagined disorders, and the aim of this project is not in any way diagnostic.<sup>42</sup>

Such efforts to apply a patina of scientific authority to literary analysis all too often advance scientifically dubious claims that contribute no literary or historical insights. This project instead investigates how English literary texts themselves form theories of cognitive disability that influence their own representations of performances of relative ability and disability. In other words, this is a project – not about how people

think – but about how people think they think. That is, it is about the interwoven skeins of literary fictions by which medieval and early modern England imagined cognitive possibilities and limitations.

Three salient skeins in premodern literary representations of fools and folly are worth foregrounding here via brief analyses. First, John Lydgate's *The Order of Fools*, an exemplar of anti-fool literature, portrays fools as morally vicious because of their cognitive difference. Second, Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* shows how premodern literary representations of multiform cognitive disability treat folly as distinct from, but comparable to, madness.<sup>43</sup> Third and most crucially, a brief discussion of William Dunbar's "Master Andro Kennedy's Testament" illuminates how the fool is often depicted as an *agent* of social disability. Thus, premodern English literature reveals the fool himself as a culpable agent of societal ills.

If the relationship of cognitive disability to fooling sometimes seems opaque, it is because recent literary studies have too often neglected the substantial anti-fool tradition in premodern English literature. This dimension of the English literary tradition often portrays fools as socially out of hand *because* they are cognitively disabled. This tradition is thoroughly encapsulated in an early-fifteenth-century poem attributed to John Lydgate, traditionally known as *The Order of Fools*. Lydgate's poem – entitled *A TALE OF THRESCORE FOLYS AND THRE* in MS. Harl. 2251, fol. 303–5 – delineates in minute detail sixty-three kinds of folly, cataloguing each kind of fool according to his specific moral failings. The seemingly exhaustive list of human failings participates in the most starkly disparaging elements of the anti-fooling literary





space for those whose folly is due merely to the limitations of the body precedes and is consonant with the similar exception Erasmus makes.<sup>45</sup> Lydgate levels a more forceful critique at the fool whose folly is due to moral intransigence and the refusal to “lere [. . .] goode.” Notably, the refusal to learn is associated with moral, rather than strictly cognitive, deficits – a theme that appears repeatedly in premodern fool-texts. The poem’s depiction of fools as morally corrupt, duplicitous, impious figures aptly sums up the backdrop for English literary depictions of fools throughout the medieval and early modern periods.

Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur* presents a skeptical view of the fool’s relationship to society. Malory’s version of the tale of “Syr Trystrams de Lyones” juxtaposes an instance of folly with an instance of fooling in order to show how these forms of cognitive disarray cause societal disruption. According to Malory, the hero Sir Tristram, hiding from King Mark and pining after Queen Isolde,

rode unto the wilderness and broke down the trees and boughs. And on many occasions [. . .] he would harp and play thereupon while weeping. [. . .] Thus he stayed there a quarter of a year; [. . .] and then he became naked, and he grew lean and poor of flesh. And so he fell into the company of herdmen and shepherds, and daily they would give him some of their meat and drink; and when he did any shrewd deed, they would beat him with rods. And so they clipped his hair with shears and made him like a fool.<sup>46</sup>

Though these few sentences do not yet give a name to Tristram’s mental state, this introduction to the episode deftly sketches several common narrative characteristics of cognitive disorder. Having lost his lover – a loss often associated with temporary folly or madness in premodern English literature – Tristram runs distractedly into the forest, distancing himself from the tale’s romanticized ideals of chivalric company and

civilization. Running naked, he forfeits the trappings of knighthood and also the physique that has given him his legendary prowess. Not coincidentally, his nakedness resembles that of the very early English iconographic depictions of fools. Having lost his accustomed social status, Tristram becomes first the fellow, then the laughingstock, of shepherds. He is visually “made lyke a foole” by having his hair rudely shorn off, a widely recognized, outward sign of inner cognitive derangement in premodern literature.<sup>47</sup> Folly’s association with musical performance is not only re-emphasized but dramatized through his harp-playing.

In his subsequent encounter with Sir Dagonet, Arthur’s own fool, Tristram performs a kind of “fooling” ritual, with the shepherds as spectators:

[¶]<sup>48</sup> And so one day Sir Dagonet, King Arthur’s fool, came into Cornwall with two squires with him; and as they rode through that forest they came to a fair well where Sir Trystramys was wont to be. And the weather was hot, and they dismounted to drink of that well, and in the meanwhile their horses broke loose. Just then Sir Trystramys happened upon them; and first he dunked Sir Dagonet in that well, and after that he dunked the squires – and at that the shepherds laughed. [. . .]

Thus Sir Trystramys endured there half a year, naked.<sup>49</sup>

Tristram and Dagonet face each other, fool and counter-fool, posing the question: What is the difference between the vocational fool and the madman, or witless fool? Malory’s telling of this story focuses on the epistemological problem occasioned by madness and fooling alike: how are these forms of cognitive difference identified and distinguished from the general societal condition? Following the passage I quoted above, Malory’s narrative names Sir Tristram’s cognitively disordered condition, yet it immediately casts doubt on this categorization:

[¶] Now turn we unto Sir Dagonet again. When he and his squires were upon horseback, he deemed that the shepherds had sent that fool to thrash them because they laughed at them; and so they rode to the keepers of the beasts and thoroughly beat them up.

[¶] When Sir Trystramys saw that those who were wont to give him meat had been beaten, he ran thither and caught Sir Dagonet by the head, and there he gave Sir Dagonet such a fall to the earth and bruised him so that he lay still. And then he wrested the sword out of Sir Dagonet's hand, and he ran with it to one of the squires and smote off his head – and the other squire fled. And so Sir Trystramys set off with the sword in his hand, running as if he were raving mad [Middle English: “wyld woode”].

[¶] Then Sir Dagonet rode to King Mark and told him how he had fared in the forest. “And therefore,” said Sir Dagonet, “beware, King Mark, lest you come near that well in the forest, for there stands a fool, naked – and that fool and I, fool, met together, and he almost slew me!”<sup>50</sup>

Tristram's actions are almost labeled as raving mad (“wyld woode”), but Malory refuses to assign them a definite name: Tristram runs “*as* he had bene wyld woode.” Perhaps the slightest of qualifiers, “*as*,” reflects the strands of the Arthurian tradition in which Tristram only feigns madness. Perhaps it adheres to the same principle that insists repeatedly on Tristram's singularity, near-invincibility, and honor – even as it allows him casually to lop off the head of Dagonet's nameless squire in this excerpt. Tristram's folly or madness besets him suddenly, showing how quickly one may slip from cognitive soundness into the state of being “wyld woode” – an invisible affliction that, in this narrative and many others in premodern English literature, is evinced by a haphazardly collected conglomeration of behaviors and physical changes. Dagonet's slight qualifier gestures toward the difficulty of ascertaining cognitive disorders.

Dagonet, however, seems to countenance no such doubts. The narrative voice has Dagonet identifying Tristram as “that foole” early in the final excerpt above, signaling Dagonet's apprehension of Tristram's similarity to himself even as it suggests

that Dagonet might also prefer to emphasize “that foole[’s]” alterity. In his complaint to King Mark, Dagonet appears to settle on the similarity of Tristram’s “wyld woode” state to his own station as fool. Just as “that foole” and “I, foole” meet together, Dagonet seems to say, the once-great Tristram is little better than a knighted fool, a parodic representation of chivalry. Dagonet’s appositive description of himself (“I, foole”), echoing his description of Tristram, effects a fool’s reversal. In this reversal, characteristic of fools throughout premodern literature, the fool critiques his opponent by comparing that opponent to himself. In this move, the fool levels the power relationship between himself and his high-status interlocutor, and he calls into question the thin distinctions between cognitive ability and disability in his social context.

William Dunbar’s poem “Master Andro Kennedy’s Testament” offers a brief, satirical portrait of a fool who is alleged to be putting on a false performance of folly for the sake of material gain. In Dunbar’s late-fifteenth-century mock-testament, Master Andro Kennedy catalogues the items he wishes to leave to various and sundry acquaintances. The poem satirizes both the speaker himself and the beneficiaries of his vaunted munificence. For example, the speaker says, “I leiff my saull forevirmare, [. . .] / Into my lordis wyne cellar” (ll. 18, 20).<sup>51</sup> Later, he leaves his “fenyening” and “fals wynyng” to false friars (“*Relinquo falsis fratribus*,” ll. 65–6). He turns next to “Jok Fule” — a proximate association of feigning friars and feigning fools much like Lydgate’s. In this stanza, the speaker casts the fool as a *disabling* agent, saying that the fool blears his lord’s metaphorical eyesight in order to put on a performance of folly that enables him to rake in wealth:

To Jok Fule my foly fre°  
*Lego post corpus sepultum.*°  
 In faith, I am mair fule° than he,  
*Licet ostendit bonum vultum.*°  
 Of corne and catall, gold and fe°  
*Ipse habet walde multum,*°  
 And yit he bleris my lordis e°  
*Fingendo eum fore stultum.*°

*freely*<sup>52</sup>  
*I bequeath after my body is buried*  
*more fool*  
*Although he shows a good face*  
*goods*  
*He himself has a great deal*  
*eye*  
*By pretending to be a fool*  
 (ll. 73–80)

When the speaker says, “I am mair fule than he,” the implication is that the speaker is “mair fule” not only because Jok Fule is actually possessed of great cognitive acuity, but also, perhaps, because the speaker is “mair fule” to have missed an opportunity to take up such a performance himself, and thereby to gain more riches to leave in his last will and testament. According to the speaker, the cunning fool is accruing wealth and position at the expense of his lord, and his fooling functions as a deliberate impairment of his lord’s perception and cognition, which are here conflated.

The poem thus mobilizes the conceptual metaphor of blindness as lack of knowledge: elsewhere, the speaker declares,

We mon all de, man, that is done.  
*Nescimus quando vel qua sorte*°  
 Na° Blind Allane wait of the mone.°

*We do not know when or by what chance*  
*No [more than]; knows of the moon*  
 (ll. 10–12)

Dunbar’s mock-testament, like other texts this project examines, compares the absence of knowledge to other disabilities – in this case, the physical disability of blindness. In the “Jok Fule” stanza, the fool directly causes this figurative blindness in his lord. In other words, this poem, like the *Tale of Beryn*, defines the fool by his ability to feign disability. Like Lydgate, Dunbar charges the fool with duplicitous dealing. Moreover, the fool’s alleged disability depends on the disabled judgment of his auditors: they are

insufficiently cunning either to discern the fool's trick or to play the fool themselves.

Despite the divergent formal tactics of their poems, both Dunbar and Lydgate portray fools as *agents*, rather than mere victims, of moral disarray and epistemological impairment.

This project, which comprises four chapters, considers cognitive difference across the medieval and early modern periods. The first two chapters are principally on medieval narrative poems; the final two are on early modern dramas. The trans-generic nature of the project expands the scope of previous scholarship, which has been heavily weighted toward dramatic fooling. My analyses resist a marked emphasis on the historiographically convenient break between the two periods. Instead, my focus on fool literature as a broad tradition adduces a continuity in premodern thinking about folly and cognition across the late fourteenth through early seventeenth centuries. Across this period, English writers of widely varying religious affiliations and social positions posit a remarkably continuous model of fully embodied, morally implicated cognition, and they use this model to create the literature of fools and folly. If literary scholarship relies on a sharply articulated break between the medieval and early modern periods, it produces analyses that overlook how medieval and early modern literature's models of cognitive difference are not separate melodies, but variations on a theme. For example, the tradition of thinking about the five bodily senses as "five wits" stretches from the early-fifteenth-century *Tale of Beryn* through late-fifteenth-century admonitions to cloistered nuns, Tyndale's early-sixteenth-century theories of biblical interpretation, and Shakespeare's Sonnet 141. In other words, writers from dramatically

disjunct religious and social backgrounds all use this model of the “five wits” for thinking through problems of the body and cognitive difference. This model’s strong through-line across several centuries reveals long-simmering anxieties about what happens when the body fails to produce morally and cognitively acceptable social performances.

Despite this strong through-line, though, my project does find some periodic shifts in attention. Early texts, such as *Robert of Cisyle*, evince the concern not that an individual will be taken for a fool, but that an institution will fail. This romance thus concerns itself with problems in the social functioning of a king and, thus, in the institution of the monarchy itself.<sup>53</sup> Sixteenth-century anxieties about folly, in contrast, become increasingly worried that the fool’s performances will disrupt the cognitive and educational workings of society writ large, rather than of one particular institution.<sup>54</sup>

As we have seen, much of the critical attention on fools has focused on Shakespeare’s later, “licensed” fools, who are often taken to be witty analogues to the Erasmian trope of the wise fool. Examining premodern English fool literature primarily through the lenses of Shakespeare and Erasmus shows only a few of the dimensions of premodern literary fooling, missing dimensions of the fooling performed not only by less able, “natural” fools, but also by licensed fools. My study, which examines a broader array of literature from across the medieval and early modern periods in England, shows that Shakespearean fools are generally not typical of, but aberrant from, the literary fooling tradition. This project asks: How do scholarly readings of literary fooling change if scholars refuse to view fools with a Shakespearean or Erasmian lens?

Accordingly, three chapters of this study examine more typical, pre-Shakespearean literature. The fourth and final chapter returns to Shakespeare, showing how scholarly readings of Shakespeare's fools change when such readings are informed by the broader premodern literary fooling tradition.

Chapter 1 examines the pseudo-Chaucerian *Tale of Beryn* (c. 1410), a narrative poem in which the title character's savior, Geoffrey, pretends to be a cognitively disabled fool before a court of law in order to deliver Beryn from legal troubles. Having initially been lulled into complacent amusement by Geoffrey's antics, the adjudicators of Beryn's case come to realize that they have been legally outwitted: "[W]e have hold hym a fole, but we be wel more!" (l. 3458). Geoffrey's performance of folly thus allows him to redistribute the tale's attributions of hyper- and dis-abled cognition. The *Tale of Beryn* sets forth two robust theoretical models concerning cognitive disability. The poem's interest in the "five wits," or five senses, proffers a theory of fully embodied cognition, while its portrayal of the fool's reversal proffers a pervasive, societal model of cognitive disability – rather than a model aimed at sussing out the cognitive singularity of the individual. While the *Tale of Beryn* does celebrate the vocational fool, it does so at the expense of the broader populace.

In contrast, Chapters 2 and 3 consider texts that present overt, unrelenting critiques of fools' cognitive disability. Chapter 2 looks at the medieval romance *Robert of Sicily* (extant in ten manuscripts, c. 1380–c. 1500), which explicitly links cognitive disability *qua* folly to loss of dignity. In this romance, the title character, a king, is punished for his injustices as a monarch by being turned into his own court's vocational

fool while an angel rules in his place – a demotion that is linked to the king’s disabled judgment and described repeatedly as a loss of dignity. The chapter frames cognitive disability in two distinctive ways: as an intertwined cognitive and moral disability, and as the cause of deserved downward social mobility. Ordering that Robert be outfitted with the trappings of a court fool, such as a bauble and tattered clothes, the angel drily notes, “Thy bauble shall be thy dignity,” making the trappings of Robert’s folly the witnesses to his social fall and his moral culpability.<sup>55</sup>

Chapter 3 similarly adduces a fool’s moral culpability, showing how such ethical critiques of fools and folly pervade early modern drama. In considering Wager’s 1569 play *The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art*, this chapter argues that fools’ songs are portrayed as direct impediments to their intellectual and moral education, as well as signs of their cognitive failures. Analyzing the play’s punning on “bale” (that is, “bauble”/“babble”), the chapter shows how the fool’s singing of solfège and nonsense syllables registers as “bale” and thus becomes associated both with non-signifying speech and with the material trappings of folly.

Chapter 4 expands the previous chapter’s exploration of fools’ singing with a consideration of the role of song in Shakespearean drama. Turning to one of the most iconic representations of witty fooling in English literature – Feste in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* – this final chapter examines the social status of popular song and its performers in the play. It argues that the aesthetic performance of song and the morally suspect act of counterfeiting folly both infuse the work of fools like Feste, evincing those fools’ social and cognitive marginality. The chapter argues that Feste works with and

plays against early modern anti-fool stereotypes as he uses song to blur cultural distinctions between “natural” and “artificial” forms of fooling. It demonstrates how Shakespearean fools’ performances of song are taken as expressions of cognitive difference, and it suggests that a thorough understanding of these signs of cognitive difference can, in turn, show the full range and effects of the fool’s engagement with the moralized discourse of folly.

My project crosses the historiographic boundary between the medieval and early modern periods in order to uncover the richness of the broader English literary fooling tradition. In so doing, it also excavates a trans-Reformational discourse of cognitive disability that traverses multiple confessional affiliations, as well as the perceived contours of Christian orthodoxy and heterodoxy. This transperiodic, trans-confessional discourse construes folly as cognitive disability. Whereas the category of folly might today register as a non-normative cognitive capacity marked for medical treatment, in premodern literature it is discussed as a moral and epistemological concern. According to premodern fool literature, folly’s infringement on moral and epistemological questions both causes and results from educational failure, and it threatens the received benefits of high social status. Thus, premodern literature adduces the folly as a societal, rather than an individual problem. In portraying folly as a problem of collective concern, such literature both marks the individual fool for attention and suggests that his moral failings redound to his community. Likewise, because the signal expressions of the fool’s folly – wordplay and song – require an audience, the fool’s performances

draw their audience into both the aesthetic pleasures and the moral problems of perceiving, enjoying, and participating in cognitive difference.

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<sup>1</sup> Except where indicated otherwise, all Shakespearean quotations in this project are from William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> The enduring notion of the fool as uniquely able to speak to an audience in need of hearing the truth persists. For example, Ralph Lerner uses this idea as a framing device for an erudite and wide-ranging exploration of subversive writing. Ralph Lerner, *Playing the Fool: Subversive Laughter in Troubled Times* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

Similarly, Beatrice Otto uses Erasmus to frame a discussion of fools' truth-telling, in which she writes that "[m]any proverbs express the idea that a fool, whether natural or feigned, would readily tell the truth without being prompted. This trait set him apart from the hordes of court entertainers with whom he had much in common and is perhaps one of the main reasons he so frequently enjoyed an intimate and trusting relationship with his monarch." Beatrice Otto, *Fools Are Everywhere: The Court Jester Around the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 131.

<sup>3</sup> Valerie Traub shows how the language of "pared wit" plays into the "spatial logic" that has prevailed in readings of this passage: "The Fool's anatomy of Lear's pared wit allegorizes the play's insistence that land and body, kingdom and family, are part and parcel of a spatial epistemology. Much of the play's tragic force is derived from exploiting the dramatic potential of this interactive chain of signification, whereby the play's central tropes – body, kingdom, crown, eyes, and brain (and with them, life, power, authority, sight, and rationality) – are continually spatialized, dissected, and partitioned. [. . .] The many critics who concur that in one fell swoop Lear destroys his kingdom, his family, and his mind are themselves subject to the magnetism of a spatial logic that pervades the play, as well as early modern culture. [. . .] From 'Give me the map there' to 'let them anatomize Regan,' the play's cartographic logic morphs into an anatomical one, creating a powerfully allusive and alluring spatial style of reasoning." Valerie Traub, "The Nature of Norms in Early Modern England: Anatomy, Cartography, *King Lear*," *South Central Review* 26.1 & 2 (Winter & Spring 2009): 42–81, pp. 51–2.

<sup>4</sup> This project will use masculine pronouns to refer to literary fools because, while there are scattered references to female fools in the historical record, the fools in medieval and early modern English literature are gendered male.

<sup>5</sup> Earlier scholars of disability studies have laid the path for scholars to attend to questions of bodily difference and relative ability in literature. See Tobin Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008); Tobin Siebers, "Disability as Masquerade," *Literature and Medicine* 23, no. 1 (2004): 1–22. Lennard J. Davis, *Bending over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions*

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(New York: New York University Press, 2002); Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London: Verso, 1995); Lennard J. Davis, ed., *The Disability Studies Reader*, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> eds. (New York: Routledge, 1997 and 2006, respectively); David T. Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); David T. Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001); Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, "Afterword – Regulated Bodies: Disability Studies and the Controlling Professions," in *Social Histories of Disability and Deformity: Bodies, Images and Experiences*, ed. David M. Turner and Kevin Stagg (London: Routledge, 2012), 175–89; Sharon Snyder, Brenda Brueggemann, and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, eds., *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2002); Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, ed., *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> There have been several significant exceptions to this tendency. Comprehensive studies of fools include Barbara Swain, *Fools and Folly During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932); Enid Welsford, *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1935); and Sandra Billington, *A Social History of the Fool* (Brighton: Harvester Press; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984). Valuable Shakespeare-centered studies include David Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Richard Preiss, *Clowning and Authorship in Early Modern Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Preiss' recent work makes a compelling argument for fools' roles in collaborative, non-static authorship in the early modern theater.

<sup>7</sup> In fact, earlier work took the multiplicitous strands of the English literary tradition into account. In 1932, Barbara Swain wrote, "Folly in native English literature up to 1550 though sometimes a mirthmaker was none the less uniformly a symbol of condemnation and scorn." Even Swain's comprehensive account, though, adduced a different trend in Shakespeare's dramatic corpus: "Later, in the plays of Shakespeare, the fool became an inspired interpreter of events." Barbara Swain, *Fools and Folly During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, p. 158. Scholars coming after Swain and her contemporary, Enid Welsford, tended to agree with Swain's account of the Shakespearean "inspired interpreter" while losing the sense of "condemnation and scorn" Swain found in earlier fool literature.

<sup>8</sup> The terms "medicalization" and "the medical model" are not without their own problems, particularly insofar as they simultaneously decline to say precisely *who* is perpetuating such models and yet imply that medical professionals are doing so. It is indubitably the case that these terms' influence in the field stems from their accurate reflection of the experiences of many disabled people, including many scholars of

disability studies. Nonetheless, this demurring critique fails to account for either the range of approaches and attitudes among medical professionals or the too-common adherence to “medicalizing” attitudes among some patients, family members, and others. I avoid using these terms elsewhere in this project because I find them imprecise and insufficient; here, I am employing them to trace a scholarly evolution of models for discussing bodily variation within the field of disability studies.

<sup>9</sup> For a widely cited, succinct formulation of this model, see Irina Metzler’s introduction to *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking About Physical Impairment* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 1–10.

<sup>10</sup> For a more comprehensive discussion of the emergence of these competing models, see Joshua R. Eyler, “Introduction: Breaking Boundaries, Building Bridges,” in *Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations*, ed. Joshua R. Eyler (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 1–8. Eyler associates the term “difference” with “ableist discourse” (p. 5n10). I choose, however, to employ the term in this project, because I think the term valuably permits a non-jargon-filled analysis of cultural responses to bodily variation and thus merits careful use, rather than blacklisting.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapters 1 and 4.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>13</sup> “fool,” n. and adj., *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, December 2013). Available at: <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/72642?rskey=YI5Lld&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>. Accessed on: July 24, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> “Fool” – originally “fol” – is derived from the Old French “*fol*,” which refers both to a madman and a fool. The term, which has similar resonance in late medieval and early modern English, gestures toward the premodern period’s blurry conceptual boundaries between folly and madness; the conditions were sometimes distinguished, sometimes conflated. See “fool,” n. and adj. *OED Online*, December 2013 (Oxford University Press). Available at: <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/72642?rskey=YI5Lld&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>. Accessed on: July 24, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> E.g., R. Chris Hassel, Jr., *Faith and Folly in Shakespeare’s Romantic Comedies* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980). Peter Happé suggests that Erasmus’ view of the fool tempered the early modern connection of folly to moral discourse: “The possibility that fools were evil was never forgotten, but to it was added, chiefly through the influence of Erasmus who in turn derived from St. Paul, the concept that the fool was also holy and that his folly was wiser than wisdom.” Peter Happé, “Staging Folly in the Early Sixteenth Century: Heywood, Lindsay, and Others,” in *Fools and Folly*, ed. Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996). 73–111, p. 74.

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Stephen Greenblatt, "Introduction to *Twelfth Night*," in Greenblatt, Stephen, et al., eds., *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Available at:

<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&ILLID=37320>. Accessed on: July 11, 2014. The British Library has generously made this image and the image in Figure 3 available, free of copyright restrictions, under a Public Domain Mark; see <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/reuse.asp>.

<sup>18</sup> V. A. Kolve, "God-Denying Fools and the Medieval 'Religion of Love,'" *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 19 (1997): 3-59.

<sup>19</sup> Available at:

<http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl~1~1~38877~108183?qvq=w4s:/what/MS.%20Douce%20118;lc:ODLodl~29~29,ODLodl~7~7,ODLodl~6~6,ODLodl~14~14,ODLodl~8~8,ODLodl~23~23,ODLodl~1~1,ODLodl~24~24&mi=90&trs=225>. Accessed on: July 11, 2014. The Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford has generously made this image available for non-commercial purposes; see <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/medievalimages/>.

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, in which characters' visual transformations into fooling roles are accompanied by head-shaving.

<sup>21</sup> Available at:

[http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=royal\\_ms\\_1\\_e\\_ix\\_fs001r#](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=royal_ms_1_e_ix_fs001r#). Accessed on: July 11, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Or, as Robert H. Bell says, "Like Jaques drawing auditors into the circle, fools ensorcell and make fools of us all." Robert H. Bell, *Shakespeare's Great Stage of Fools* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Swain's appropriately historicized commentary on Erasmus' relationship to the broader array of English fool literature provides a useful counterweight to less nuanced accounts of the "wise fool" tradition. In her historicized telling, Erasmus is the catalyst for the sixteenth-century change in English representations of fools:

The fashion of calling erring man a fool and of thinking of fools as sinners existed as a literary convention in the fifteenth century, at the same time as a fashion of keeping household fools and a fashion of simulating folly in which the fool stood for unreasoning high spirits and liberty of the irresponsible to criticize the social order. These fashions gave rise to points of view toward "folly" itself which were all incorporated in the figure of Folly as Erasmus presented her – critic of the two-fold nature of man, weak in reason and achievement, strong in imagination and love. But with the growth of a convention of realistic literary expression, the figure of the

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fool lost its symbolic quality and appeared as the simple clown, dunce, merry-maker. The word itself, grown colorless, became a simple term of condemnation.

Barbara Swain, *Fools and Folly During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, p. 184.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Armin, *Foole upon Foole, or Six sortes of Sottes*, Early English Books Online, London, 1600, p. B2r.

<sup>25</sup> Samuel Johnson, ed., *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, Vol. 3, (London: J. and R. Tonson, et al., 1765), p. 293 (footnote to stage direction in *All's Well That Ends Well*, I, vi [Johnson] or I, iii [Norton]).

<sup>26</sup> Dana E. Aspinall, "Robert Armin," in *Fools and Jesters in Literature, Art, and History: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, ed. Vicki K. Janik (London and Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998), p. 41.

<sup>27</sup> Emma Marshall Denking, "Actors' Names in the Registers of St. Bodolph Aldgate," *PMLA* 41 (1926): 91-123; Austin K. Gray, "Robert Armin, the Fool," *PMLA* 42.3 (1927): 673-685.

<sup>28</sup> Leslie Hotson, *Shakespeare's Motley*, p. 84, qtd. on Aspinall, pp. 41-42. There are more sophisticated analyses of these early modern categories of fooling: Robert B. Hornback's discussion of the two texts of *King Lear* suggests that the Quarto presents an "artificial" fool, in contradistinction to the Folio's more "natural" one (Robert B. Hornback, "The Fool in Quarto and Folio *King Lear*," *English Literary Renaissance* 34.3 (Autumn 2004): 306-338). (While I find Hornback's reading perspicacious, I would also suggest that Lear's Fool, like Feste, negotiates a more mobile, ever-shifting relationship between the categories of "natural" and "artificial" fooling.) See also Richard Preiss, "Robert Armin Do the Police in Different Voices," in *From Performance to Print in Shakespeare's England*, ed. Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); and Indira Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter: A Cultural History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> See, for instance, Chapter 4 (on *Twelfth Night*), and Chapter 1's discussion of the *Tale of Beryn*, in which a hyper-able fool's performance is contrasted with the errors of the dissolute, ill-educated title character.

<sup>30</sup> Armin, *Foole*, p. B2r.

<sup>31</sup> Melanie Yergeau, "Circle Wars: Reshaping the Typical Autism Essay," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 31.1 (2010): no pagination; available at: <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/1063>; accessed on: July 11, 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Dolmage, Jay, and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, et al., "Comment and Response: Two Comments on 'Neurodiversity,'" *College English* 70.3 (2008): 314-325, p. 314.

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<sup>33</sup> Melanie Yergeau, "Circle Wars," no pagination.

<sup>34</sup> For more on the premodern rhetoric of "high" and "low" as it appears in fool literature, see Chapter 2.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Hillis Goldsmith offers a prime example of this scholarly proclivity: "Many of the Fool's comments betray a shrewd knowledge of the world, not what one would expect from a brilliant half-wit." Robert Hillis Goldsmith, *Wise Fools in Shakespeare* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1955), p. 64.

<sup>36</sup> David Houston Wood, "Savage and Deformed: Shakespeare and Disability Studies," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America, Boston, Massachusetts, April 5-7, 2012.

<sup>37</sup> "Disabled Shakespeares," introduction to *Disability Studies Quarterly* 29.4 (2009): no pagination. See also the introduction to Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood, eds., *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013), 1-22.

<sup>38</sup> See also the work of the historian C. F. Goodey. For treatments including the period leading up to *Twelfth Night*, see his *A History of Intelligence and "Intellectual Disability": The Shaping of Psychology in Early Modern Europe* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011) and "'Foolishness' in Early Modern Medicine and the Concept of Intellectual Disability," *Medical History* 48 (2004): 289-310. For work venturing later into the seventeenth century, see "From Natural Disability to the Moral Man: Calvinism and the History of Psychology," *History of the Human Sciences* 14.3 (2001), 1-29.

<sup>39</sup> Allison P. Hobgood, "Caesar Hath the Falling Sickness: The Legibility of Early Modern Disability in Shakespearean Drama," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 29.4 (2009): no pagination.

<sup>40</sup> See also Samantha Bassler's investigation of early modern musico-theoretical connections between gendered musical performance and disabilities of mind and body, "'That Suck'd the Honey of his Music Vows': Disability Studies in Early Modern Musicological Research," *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 3.2 (2012): 182-94. Two particularly valuable contributions to scholarship outside the early modern period theorize the relationship between music and disability: Joseph N. Straus's *Extraordinary Measures: Disability in Music* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Julie Singer's "Playing by Ear: Compensation, Reclamation, and Prosthesis in Fourteenth-Century Song," in *Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations*, ed. Joshua R. Eyler (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2012), 39-52.

<sup>41</sup> Melanie Yergeau, "Clinically Significant Disturbance: On Theorists Who Theorize Theory of Mind," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 33.4 (2013): no pagination; available at: <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/3876/3405>; accessed on: July 10, 2014.

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<sup>42</sup> The trend Ryan and Yergeau adduce – that is, the trend among literary scholars to apply concepts from cognitive science to literary analyses without interrogating the limitations of the scientific concepts – has already reached the as-yet-embryonic subfield of early modern disability studies. For instance, a recent essay by Mardy Philippian takes up the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century concept of a “theory of mind” as a capacity possessed by most people but supposed to be lacking in autistic people, assumes the concept’s transhistorical applicability to the sixteenth century, and posits that the communal, vernacular liturgies found in the Book of Common Prayer might redress the supposed lack of a theory of mind in autistic congregants, who are assumed to have been present in early modern church services. This argument is constructed without reference to the vigorous debate over the validity of the concept of a “theory of mind” that is ongoing in autism studies, not to mention either the difficulty of ascertaining whether the modern-day diagnosis of autism might produce a greater understanding of early modern English churchgoers. Mardy Philippian, “The Book of Common Prayer, Theory of Mind, and Autism in Early Modern England,” in *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England*, ed. Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013), 150–66.

For a more critical summary of and response to the debate about theory of mind, see Melanie Yergeau, “Clinically Significant Disturbance.”

<sup>43</sup> See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the juxtapositional salience of alleged madness and fooling in *Twelfth Night*.

<sup>44</sup> The poem imagines that a fraternal order of fools is being formally founded. All quotations of *The Order of Fools* are from John Lydgate, *A Selection from the Minor Poems of Dan John Lydgate*, ed. James Orchard Halliwell (London: The Percy Society, 1840).

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter 3 for a more extensive discussion of Erasmus and sixteenth-century fool literature.

<sup>46</sup> I have translated the Malory quotations in this prospectus into modern English, following the contours of the Middle English lines closely. For the Middle English text, see Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. Stephen H. A. Shepherd (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2004), p. 301, emphasis added.

<sup>47</sup> See Figure 2 in this introduction, as well as the discussions of fool-shearing in Chapters 1–2.

<sup>48</sup> Shepherd’s edition adds some editorial, clearly denoted paragraph breaks for ease of reading.

<sup>49</sup> Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, p. 301.

<sup>50</sup> Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, p. 302.

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<sup>51</sup> William Dunbar, *William Dunbar: The Complete Works*, ed. John Conlee, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004).

<sup>52</sup> Annotations of “Master Andro Kennedy’s Testament” are selectively reproduced from William Dunbar, *William Dunbar: The Complete Works*, ed. John Conlee.

<sup>53</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>54</sup> See Chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>55</sup> Leslie Hotson’s detailed discussion of the early modern fool’s clothing and appearance perpetuates the seeming boundaries between “high-functioning” and “low-functioning,” “artificial” and “natural” forms of fooling. In recognizing the represented fool’s connection to cognitive disability, he distinguishes between more abled and more disabled forms of fooling, albeit by using fairly old-fashioned language: “We now see that a ‘motley’ was obviously either an idiot, or else a sane and clever entertainer — whether in private life or on the stage — who adopted the idiot’s uniform.” Leslie Hotson, *Shakespeare’s Motley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 16.

## Chapter 1

### The Five Wits and the Fool's Reversal in the *Tale of Beryn*

The *Tale of Beryn* is deeply invested in folly as a form of epistemological failure.<sup>1</sup> This chapter first shows how the tale's opening frame and subsequent events treat disability as a societal rather than an individual condition. It then examines the tale's representations of both folly and the five senses, or "five wits" – a standard topos in medieval didactic literature. Finally, it discusses the implications of the episode in which the title character's savior, Geoffrey, feigns a performance of fooling before a court of law in order to deliver Beryn from legal troubles.<sup>2</sup> Having initially been lulled into complacent amusement by Geoffrey's antics, Beryn's opponents come to realize that they have been legally outwitted: "[W]e have hold him a fool, but we be well more!" (l. 3458).<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey's feigned performance of fooling ultimately shows his interlocutors' folly – not because it brings about a transformation in mental state, but because it represents an *exposure* of a disability, framed in epistemological terms, that is already present. In this way, the tale takes an ostensibly moral category – folly – and re-reads it through the category of epistemology, blurring the distinctions between hyper-able wit and disabled cognition. The tale produces a theory of fully embodied cognition that elides the boundaries between sensory experience, moral practices, and epistemological

ability. *Beryn* thus presents a heretofore unrecognized model of cognitive disability that refuses the idea of disability as exceptional and makes it a general condition.

This portrayal of cognitive disability as not exceptional but widespread has received little attention in either Chaucerian or disability studies. Disability studies, in particular, have thus far focused primarily on how literary texts portray bodily disability as distinct from a broader cultural norm. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder's work on "narrative prosthesis" has provided an influential model for showing how literary narratives deal with the individually disabled body.<sup>4</sup> Mitchell, in particular, argues that stories often designate a character's physical difference or other outward sign of difference as the prosthesis that serves as the site of the narrative's own dis-ease with deviance from a physical norm. In such stories, either the character's deviance must be cured or the character must be annihilated.<sup>5</sup> Whereas this model serves as an insightful one for analyzing a form of narrative dealing with disability and bodily variation, it need not be the only theoretical angle from which literary representations of disability can be examined. Andrew Higl's work on *The Tale of Beryn* has already shown how the tale offers a model of disability that differs significantly from Mitchell's model of narrative prosthesis. Whereas Mitchell suggests that "disability lends a distinctive idiosyncrasy to any characters that differentiate themselves from the anonymous background of the norm," Higl shows how Geoffrey "leans on his crutch, [. . .] in order not to stand out, but to pass in a world where concepts of abnormality and normality are inverted."<sup>6,7</sup> Higl suggests that Geoffrey's later performance of folly before the law court extends his strategy of passing: "Thus,

for some years prior, he leans in his crutch to pass; now, he leans on his 'yerd' (3415) or 'fool's bauble' so as to pass and appear harmless and disabled as he prepares to defend Beryn at trial."<sup>8</sup> Higl perceptively points toward, though he does not fully explore, the paradoxical manner in which the accoutrements that typically mark the fool as different from the cultural norm – the bauble, the shorn head and beard – here enable Geoffrey to go unremarked until his cunning strategy for legal triumph is fully under way.<sup>9</sup>

Mitchell's and Higl's interventions, like much of the work in disability studies to date, have focused especially on cases in which individuals or sub-groups are identified as disabled and then stigmatized or cordoned off from the general population. The *Tale of Beryn* depicts the opposite phenomenon: Geoffrey's performance of folly excavates and brings to light forms of culturally widespread cognitive disability that affect nearly everyone in the society – everyone, that is, except Geoffrey, the feigning fool.

The poem identifies failing communal standards for the employment of cognitive abilities by specifically targeting failing reason and failing legal governance. The primary topos through which the tale describes a society-wide decline in cognitive abilities is the topos of the "five wits." The ostensibly secular tale's focus on the "five wits," and those five wits' susceptibility to sin, amplifies the account of disability and bodily variation that has thus far been proffered by scholars. Whereas it has been noted that "the stigma of sin" was "the most significant stigma medieval society attached to persons with disabilities," there has not yet been any examination of the significance to disability studies in medieval European Christianity's attachment of "the stigma of sin" to all persons.<sup>10</sup> The Chaucerian and other Middle English literature on the "five wits"

simultaneously show how widespread is “the stigma of sin” and how sin is imagined as an entry-point for cognitive decline.

The tale begins its depiction of the various forms of folly by leveling a broader critique of failures in reason – that is, failures in the wielding of cognitive skills and knowledge. In medieval literature, failures in reason are portrayed as problems related, though not identical, to folly and other cognitive disabilities. The *Tale of Beryn*’s bold opening lines suggest that few, if any, are perfectly reasonable and free from folly, indicting readers’ own powers of reasoning. The opening lines establish that the tale takes place long ago, in those far-off days when reason ruled the legal system:

Whilom,<sup>o</sup> yeres passed in the old dawes,<sup>o</sup> *Once; days*  
 When rightfullich by reson governed were the lawes. [. . .]  
(ll. 1-2)<sup>11</sup>

The merchant’s – or poet’s – choice to immediately interrupt the opening “[w]hilom” with the redundant “yeres passed in the old dawes” makes it abundantly clear that the tale will speak of a time and a set of customs from which the present day has declined. The tale’s temporal scaffolding thus outlines a decline from the reasonable statutes that governed the halcyon days of old. While this type of nostalgia is conventional in such narratives, it is nonetheless an odd framing device for a tale that proceeds to fill its depiction of those very halcyon days with unweeningly doting parents, a wayward youth, corrupt governors, and an entire town bent on trickery. This opening signals that the tale is invested in reason as an ever-deteriorating faculty. Moreover, it includes its readers in the chronological sweep of those latter days of degrading ratiocination it so deplores.

The popularly disseminated theology of the “five wits” and the idea that communal cognitive abilities undergo degradation provide a model for considering how medieval English literature conceives of bodily variation and disability. Across numerous Middle English texts, the five wits are discussed both as faculties corresponding to the modern “five senses” and as faculties of reason. These portrayals of the five wits suggest that they constantly open up the bodily senses to epistemological danger. Accordingly, the *Tale of Beryn* uses the “five wits” topos as a backdrop for its portrayal of cognitive decay. For instance, the *Tale* uses the idea of the “five wits” to take up the problem of communal failures in comprehension when it harps on the decline of modern times:

But it fareth thereby as it doth by other thinges,	
For burh nether ceté, <sup>o</sup> regioune ne kynges	<i>town nor city</i>
Beth nat nowe so worthy as were by old tyme,	
As we fynde in romaunces, in gestes <sup>o</sup> and in ryme.	<i>heroic tales</i>
For all thing doth wast, <sup>o</sup> and eke mannes lyffe	<i>decay</i>
Ys more shorter then it was, and our wittes fyve <sup>o</sup>	<i>five senses</i>
Mow <sup>o</sup> nat comprehende nowe in our dietes <sup>o</sup>	<i>Might; lifestyles</i>
As somtyme myghte these old wise poetes. (743–50)	

The poem thus locates well-functioning wit and able comprehension in the work of the poets of days past, whose historical context has earlier been commended as a reason-governed one.<sup>12</sup> The disparagement of “our [present] wittes fyve” adduces a pervasive cultural disability, which is identified not by the deviation of a sub-population from a norm but by widespread decline from the worthiness of the people and places of old-time literature – specifically “romaunces, [...] gestes and [...] ryme.” The tale’s account of such widespread decline rests heavily on late medieval literary developments of the “five wits” as embodied epistemological faculties.

The *Tale's* depictions of the five wits suggest that they constantly open up the bodily senses to epistemological danger. At the same time, there is often recognition of the five wits' positive capabilities. John Audelay's carol on the topic, which adjures the reader, "*Thy Fyve Wittis loke that thou wele spende,*" suggests the dual potential and danger these faculties embody:

*De quinque sensus.*<sup>9</sup>

*Concerning the five senses*

[Refrain:] *Thy Fyve Wittis loke that thou wele spende,  
And thonke that Lord that ham thee sende.*

The furst, hit is thi heryng: <sup>o</sup>	<i>hearing</i>
Loke thou turne away thyne ere <sup>o</sup>	<i>ear</i>
Fro ydil <sup>o</sup> wordis, untrew talkyng;	<i>From idle</i>
The laus <sup>o</sup> of God loke that thou lere <sup>o</sup> –	<i>laws; learn</i>
Lest thou be chent! <sup>o</sup>	<i>ruined</i>

*Thy Fyve Wittis loke that thou wele spende,  
And thonke that Lord that ham thee sende.*<sup>13</sup>

The carol's subsequent four verses touch similarly on the "wittis" of "seyng," "towchyng," "smellyng," and "tastyng." Each concludes with a warning to take care "[l]est thou be chent," followed by the cautionary refrain ("Thy Fyve Wittis loke that thou wele spend, ..."). The carol, filled with admonitions such as the one to "[w]orch no worke unlawfully" (16), displays the same anxieties about the five wits that other medieval literature on the topos articulates.

While Audelay's carol's admonitions do warn – in a rather familiar, banal fashion – against filling one's senses with sinful pleasures, they also posit a strong link between sensual wit and well-governed moral reasoning. In both its suggestion of synonymy between the "Fyve Wittis" and the "*quinque sensus*" and its stanzas on each of the senses, the poem further stresses that the five wits comprise both bodily appetites

and powers of reasoning. For instance, one notable line bids, “Let resun thee rewle in thyne etyng” (24). The idea of eating as a reason-governed process both comports with the religious concept of gluttony as a mortal sin and shows how closely late medieval English literature links moral error and disabilities in reason. Even more strongly, when the stanza on seeing says, “Thou hast fre choys and fre wil / To behold al wordlé thyng, / The good to chese, to leve the ille,” it suggests that the five wits actively function as epistemological guides. Likewise, the “towching” stanza’s admonition to “fley foly” (18) suggests that the five wits themselves serve as an epistemological threshold. From them, one may either turn toward well reasoned moral governance of one’s sensual appetites or to folly – that is, cognitive, moral, and sensual disability.

Similarly, the *Beryn*-writer and Chaucer himself use the “five wits” as both a proverbial catalogue of the senses and a standard by which human knowledge and mores are ever in danger of decline (cf. 748, 991, 1344, and 2587). The three references to the five wits in the undisputed Chaucerian canon appear in the *Melibee* and the *Parson’s Tale*. The *Parson’s Tale*, which arrogates theological authority to its condemnation of the five wits by attributing its viewpoint to Augustine of Hippo, explicates how the five wits serve as entry-points for sin: “Seinte Augustyn seith,/ ‘Synne is every word and every dede, and al that men coveiten, agayn the law of Jhesu Crist; and this is for to synn in herte, in mouth, and in dede, *by thy fyve wittes*, that been sighte, herynge, smellynge, tastynge or savouryng, and feelynge.’”<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere, the *Parson’s Tale* links the corruption of the five wits to damnation: “For certes, delices been after the appetites of the fyve wittes, as sighte, herynge, smellynge, savorynge, and touchyng./ But in

helle hir sight shal be ful of derknesse and of smoke, and therefore ful of teeres; and hir herynge ful of waymentynge and of gryntyng of teeth, as seith Jesu Crist."<sup>15</sup> While fools, their companions, and the faculties of the five wits are distinct entities, each might potentially pave the way to sin and damnation, according to the logic of this body of literature on fools and folly.

The poem depicts the "fyve wittes" as particularly susceptible to becoming disabled. Whereas some literary references to the five wits give the broad warning that the five wits potentially lead to sin and damnation, others suggest that the five wits serve as portals to outward enemies. Chaucer's *Tale of Melibee* cautions, "[F]or certes, the three enemys of mankynde – that is to seyn, the flessch, the feend, and the world – / thou has suffred hem entre in to thyn herte wilfully by the wyndowes of thy body, / and hast nat defended thyself suffisantly agayns hire assautes and hire temptaciouns, so that they han wounded thy soule in fyve places; / this is to sen, the deedly synnes that been entred into thyn herte by *thy fyve wittes*."<sup>16</sup> The *Melibee* here recapitulates a medieval tradition of allegorizing a verse from the book of Jeremiah – "For whi deth stiede bi 3oure wyndows, it entride in to 3oure housis" – by interpolating the five wits as the windows that allow sin inside.<sup>17</sup> A contemporary Wycliffite tract makes this connection even more explicitly: "And þus it is verrified þat god seiþ by Jeromye; deþ haþ entrid by 3oure wyndowis, þat ben fyue wittes. bi þes queyntises & many moo þe fend disceyueþ men."<sup>18</sup> This tract's broad concern with mounting a defense against diabolical machinations that corrupt human senses is vividly expressed in its title, "Hou sathanas & his children turnen werkis of mercy vpsodom & disceyuen men þer-inne &

in here fyue wittis.”<sup>19</sup> The title aptly encapsulates the writer’s concern – shared with many other medieval writers – that although the five wits themselves are not inherently governed by sin, they are ever in danger of being corrupted.<sup>20</sup>

By the late fourteen and early fifteenth centuries, anchoritic literature had made familiar the imagery of the senses as the soul’s bodily windows. In keeping with the broader five wits topos, this anchoritic imagery portrays the five wits as windows that must be guarded lest danger enter. For instance, the thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse*, or *Anchoresses’ Rule*, imagines the heart as an animal looking to escape confinement and the five wits as its guardians:<sup>21</sup>

<p>Middle English:</p> <p>The heorte wardeins beoth the fif wittes: sihthe, ant herunge, smechunge, ant smeallunge, ant euch limes felunge. Ant we schulen spoken of alle, for hwa-se wit theose wel, he deth Salomones bode: he wit wel his heorte ant his sawle heale. The heorte is a ful wilde beast ant maketh moni liht lupe.<sup>22</sup></p>	<p>Modern English translation:</p> <p>The heart’s guardians are the five senses (wits), sight and hearing, tasting and smelling, and the feeling in every part. And we must speak of all of them, for whoever protects these well does as Solomon commands: protects well [Middle English: “wit wel”] their heart and their soul’s health. The heart is a most wild beast and makes many a light leap out.<sup>23</sup></p>
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The verbal play on the noun “wittes” and the verb “wit” – translated “protect” in the modern English version – shows the double-edged nature of the “five wits” discourse: the sensuous “wittes” are imagined to be endangered and in need of protection, while the act of protecting them is articulated nearly homophonically. A few lines later, the text connects the five wits’ need of protection to the danger posed by literal windows, cautioning anchoresses against over-cherishing the windows of their cells: “Therefore my dear sisters, love your windows as little as you possibly can” (“For-

thi mine leove sustren, the leaste that ye eaver mahen luvieth ower thurles).”<sup>24, 25</sup> The text’s concern for both the health of the soul and safety of physical apertures — architectural windows as well as the bodily senses — is characteristic of the “five wits” literature’s treatment of body and soul together, rather than as separate entities.<sup>26</sup> This literature thus produces a theory of fully embodied cognition, in which the five wits are ever vulnerable to dangers.

The *Tale of Beryn*’s employment of the “five wits” topos links moral error, disabilities in reason, and failures in education. The poem identifies cognitive disability as a social problem emanating from a deficit in forms of moral knowledge. This earliest part of the tale is most directly interested in deficits resulting from a lack of learning. The deficits are attributed first to Beryn’s parents and later to Beryn himself.<sup>27</sup> Initially, the poem depicts Faunus, Beryn’s father, exercising the good judgment one might expect of a man portrayed as an exemplary figure from this time long past. He provides well for his son’s early education: the narrative tells how he “sent anoon for nurses, four and no les, / To reule this child afterward as yeres did pas” (887–8). The fine outcome that might perhaps be expected from all this “reule” hardly comes to pass, however. Breaking into the first person, the narrator paints a portrait of the young Beryn as an ungoverned terror:

But it had be<sup>o</sup> wel better he<sup>o</sup> had be wele i-lerned<sup>o</sup>      *been; [if] he; taught*  
 Noriture and gentilnes, and had i-had som hey.<sup>o</sup>      *restraint*  
(902–3)

Here, the narrator clearly lays the blame for Beryn’s violent behavior at his parents’ feet. Subsequent lines do so much more explicitly, when they suggest that Faunus and Agea



The narrative's heavy-handed assertion that only death could have turned Beryn from his "evill dede[s]" (l. 915) apparently closes off the possibility of Beryn's reformation—that is, the possibility of the very dénouement that Geoffrey will bring about by the end of the poem. Moreover, it closes off this possibility by building on the tale's own decline-and-fall topos, as well as its concern with the precarious status of the "wittes fyve."

The poem's many allusions to those five wits repeatedly suggest that they are faculties ever in danger of succumbing to debility. Although Beryn's own parents are troubled by his deficits in reasoning and self-governance, they, too, are susceptible to cognitive decline. On her deathbed, Agea pleads with Faunus:

Now wold ye so hereafter in hert be as trewe  
 To lyve without make<sup>o</sup> and on yeur sone rewe<sup>o</sup>      *spouse; take pity*  
 That<sup>o</sup> litill hath i-lerned sithens<sup>o</sup> he was bore.      *Who; since*  
 (981-3)

Troubled by these worries, Agea secures a promise from Faunus,

"Certes," quod Faunus, "whils I have wittes fyve,  
 I thynk never after yewe to have another wyff." (991-2)

Faunus' invocation of his own wits as faculties he presumes he will retain sounds an ominous note. Shortly after giving this promise to his dying wife, he does indeed remarry. As Karen A. Winstead points out, "Little more than one hundred lines later he has married, forgotten Agea, and 'litill carid / ffor eny thing at all, save his wyff to plesse' (1128-29)."<sup>29</sup> Faunus' remarriage to Rame, Beryn's eventual stepmother, is subtly cast as a failure in reasoning, and thus he joins the tale's pantheon of the foolish.

Meanwhile, the tale carves out a place for Beryn in this pantheon as it increasingly calls attention to his limited educational and cognitive resources and begins explicitly to give his actions the name of folly. Beryn, who has been given every advantage at birth by his parents, continues to reject these gifts in a spectacularly willful and obdurate manner. The most stunningly memorable of these moments comes when Beryn's father sends a maid to bring Beryn to the bedside of his dying mother: Beryn scoffs at the idea of interrupting his game of dice for such a mere inconvenience. At this point in the tale, the poet holds forth on Beryn's foolish failures of reasoning and judgment, explicating the results of his miseducation in a long Homeric simile:

But Beryn cam nat there,	
Namelich onto the place there <sup>o</sup> his moder lay,	<i>where</i>
Ne ones <sup>o</sup> wold he a pater-noster for hir soule say.	<i>once</i>
His <i>thought was al in unthryfft</i> , lechery and dyse, <sup>o</sup>	<i>dice</i>
And <i>drawing al to foly</i> , for yowth is recheles <sup>o</sup>	<i>reckless</i>
But there <sup>o</sup> it is refreyned and hath some maner eye. <sup>o</sup>	<i>Except where; supervision</i>
And therfor me thinketh that I may wele sey:	
A man i-passed yowth and is without lore <sup>o</sup>	<i>instruction</i>
May be wele i-likened to a tre without more <sup>o</sup>	<i>roots</i>
That may nat bowe ne bere fruyte, but root <sup>o</sup> and ever wast;	<i>rot</i>
Right so every youthe fareth that no man list to chast.	
This mowe we know verely by experience	
That yerd <sup>o</sup> maketh vertu and benevolence	<i>beating-rod</i>
In childhode for to growe, as preveth <sup>o</sup> imaginacioun;	<i>proves</i>
A plant whils it is grene, or <sup>o</sup> it have dominacioun,	<i>before</i>
A man may with his fyngers ply it where hym list	
And make thereof a shakill, <sup>o</sup> a withey <sup>o</sup> or a twist, <sup>o</sup>	<i>shackle; wreath; hinge</i>
But let the plant stond, and yeres overgowe,	
Men shall nat with both his hondes unnethes <sup>o</sup> make it bowe.	<i>hardly</i>
No more myght Faunus make his sone Beryn,	
When he growe in age, to his lore enclyne.	

(1048–68, emphases added)

The earlier lines of this passage suggest skewed thought, as if Beryn's modes of knowing are ever more bent toward folly. The strongly physical imagery of "drawing

all” to folly and, later, a man manually training a sapling to grow “where hym list” reinforce the literature of the five wits’ insistence that bodily senses pose dangers to the whole person. That is, according to these literatures’ verbal images, disabled cognitive and moral senses threaten the whole self, much like a small sapling, untrained, grows into an unyieldingly crooked tree.

This simile of the crooked tree appears again in disparate English texts on fools and folly, evincing a vocabulary for foolishly disabled cognition that spans time and genres. About one hundred sixty years after the appearance of the *Tale of Beryn*, a character in Wager’s Elizabethan morality play *The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art* utilizes another simile comparing foolish youths to ill-trained saplings. Wager’s sapling passage uncovers remarkable resonances between the *Beryn*-writer’s and Wager’s similes. According to the stage direction, Exercitation delivers this speech while the play’s fool, Moros, repeatedly interrupts by “put[ting] in his head”:

EXERCITATION: But folly hath so overcharged his reason  
 That he is past redress in my judgment.  
 While a plant of a tree is young and tender,  
 You may cause it to grow crooked or right;  
 So a child, while knowledge is but slender,  
 You may instruct whereto you will by might.  
 But after the plant is grown to a tree,  
 To any bowing it will not give place;  
 So young folks, when to age grown they be,  
 Wax stubborn and be of an indurate face. (ll. 536–45)<sup>30</sup>

The speech echoes the *Tale of Beryn*’s concern with training the youth and tree to grow correctly – down to the impossibility of making the tree “bowe” (*Beryn* 1066; cp. *Longer* 543). Both texts stress the necessity of corporal means to enforce learning and prevent folly: just as the “yerd maketh vertu and benevolence” (*Beryn* 1060), the youth must be

instructed “by might” (*Longer* 541). In addition to the common vocabularies surrounding folly in these texts, there are some slight differences in metaphorization. Exercitation’s speech adds the allegation that “folly hath [. . .] overcharged [Moros’] reason,” suggesting the quasi-Galenic anxiety about surfeited reason that pervades Wager’s play.<sup>31</sup>

The *Tale of Beryn*, for its part, ties Beryn’s moral decrepitude, as demonstrated in his refusal to go to his dying mother, to Beryn’s intentional rejection of the wisdom that comes from good “lore” (l. 1068)—a word that suggests both intellectual and moral instruction. Beryn shows some contrition for his treatment of his mother after her death: as the tale narrates, “Beryn lay so long or he myghte awake, / For al his fyve wittes had clene hym forsake” (ll. 1353–4). His utter abandonment by his “fyve wittes” leads him to behave temporarily like a madman: “He trampeled fast with his feet, and al totare his ere / And his visage both, ryght as a wood man” (ll. 1351–2). The poem thus suggests that the five wits, although they are ever-susceptible faculties, still do serve as guardians against utter cognitive disarray. Beryn repents of his folly and sets out on a venture with an outfit of merchant ships. However, as the tale strongly implies, he is still “lewde” and without “lore”; the sapling has already grown into a crooked tree. When Beryn leaves home, his outward actions may have taken a productive turn, but his “lewde” qualities go with him.

In the second half of the tale, the treatment of cognitive ability and variation shifts. The focus is no longer primarily on the five wits in general or on Beryn’s youthful failures in judgment, but on Beryn’s legal plight, Geoffrey’s feigned performance of folly,

and the trickery of the townsfolk among whom Beryn finds himself. Upon arrival in the new town, Beryn wagers and loses his ships in a game of dice. Beryn laments this fate, connecting his lack of wit to his lack of access to upper-class pleasures: “Had I had wit and grace, [. . .] / It were my kynd now among my baronage / To hauke and to hunt” (2344–6). Soon, however, Geoffrey enters—yet unnamed, designated only by his apparent physical disabilities and his assistive technologies:

And when that Beryn in this wise had i-made his mone,  
 A crepill<sup>o</sup> he saw comyng with grete spede and hast,      *crippled man*  
 Oppon a stilt under his kne bound wonder fast,<sup>o</sup>      *tightly*  
 And a crouch<sup>o</sup> under his armes, with hondes al forskramed.<sup>o</sup>      *crutch; contorted*  
 (2378–81)

Although Geoffrey regards Beryn as “lewde,” he agrees to help him as a fellow Roman (2436).<sup>32</sup> Here, the tale shifts even more of its critique of pervasive cultural disability from its previous targets to the local townsfolk’s self-disabling of their five wits. Geoffrey bitterly complains that the townsfolk “set all hir wittes in wrong, al that they mowe” (2498). Telling the story of his long residency in the town, he reveals that he is not truly a “crepill,” but has only disguised himself as one in order to save himself from the treachery of the townsfolk:

“For drede of wors, thus thought I myselff to disfigure. [. . .]  
 And so I hope nowghe,<sup>o</sup> as sotill<sup>o</sup> as they be,      *now; crafty*  
 With my wit engyne<sup>o</sup> hem and help yewe and me.      *outsmart*  
 My lymes<sup>o</sup> been both hole<sup>o</sup> and sound; me nedeth stilt ne crouch.”      *limbs; healthy*  
 (2504–9)

Even at this early stage in the escapade, Geoffrey’s heroic status rests on not *being* disabled but performing disability— even to the extent of “disfigur[ing]” himself. Unlike virtually all of the other characters in the tale, his limbs *and wit* are alike “hole and

sound,” and he – unlike the disabled man he pretends to be – needs no physical accoutrements to aid him. Indeed, his plan to save Beryn by feigning folly relies on his able-bodied capering and upon the agility of his cognitive faculties.

In this way, the poem’s narrative structure sets Geoffrey’s feigned folly in contradistinction to Beryn’s moral folly. Unlike other late medieval texts, such as *Piers Plowman*, the *Tale of Beryn* does not condemn Geoffrey’s feigning of folly before the court. Distinctively, Geoffrey is not portrayed as a trickster who merely pretends folly for his own gain. His performance of folly on behalf of Beryn is clearly represented as a virtuous, even an altruistic deed. Notably, Geoffrey does not sing or dance – forms of performance that premodern texts often associate with counterfeiting folly for mercenary gain.<sup>33</sup> His performance springs from a more strictly narrative tradition of literary fooling; he relies entirely upon outwitting his opponents through feats of verbal dexterity and fiction-making. The poem’s treatment of his feigned folly betrays little valorization of cognitive difference. Instead, the tale turns on Geoffrey’s cognitive hyper-ability, which is sharply and didactically contrasted with the cognitive failures of the “lewde” Beryn – and, indeed, with the rest of the characters in the tale.

In the dramatic courtroom scene that concludes Beryn and Geoffrey’s adventures, the performance of fooling exposes the manner in which embodied cognition can function as an aperture that leaves open the way for cognitive and moral peril to enter. The poem narrates how Geoffrey’s performance of folly completely takes in his audience, disabling their abilities of comprehension. Yet Geoffrey couches this feat as an unfeigned act, cloaking his canny performance in the rhetorical guise of artlessness. As Geoffrey

promises Beryn, “I woll nat feyn oon woord, as makers doon to ryme, / But counsell yewe as prudently as God woll send me grace” (2462–3).<sup>34</sup> Geoffrey’s pointed disparagement of poetic “makers” as feigners of words and his opposition of those makers to prudent counsel, divinely inspired, dramatically contrasts with the narrative’s earlier nostalgia for the work of “old wise poetes” (750).<sup>35, 36</sup>

Geoffrey’s promise not to feign, delivered before he has undertaken to disguise himself and perform as a fool, anticipates and fends off the routinely-made accusation that those who perform folly are feigning disability for their own gain. It does so at the expense of the tale’s fictional and nonfictional inventors: its rhymed dig at the feigning of “makers” asks the poem’s readers to question the veracity of every level of the fiction the poem’s own maker has so elaborately constructed. Indeed, the Merchant has prefaced the Tale of Beryn by exhibiting a certain anxious desire to emphasize the unembroidered quality of his tale. Saying that he will tell a tale to please his Host, he prefaces the beginning of his tale with a disclaimer about its lack of artifice:

“With this I be excused of my rudines, <sup>o</sup>	<i>ignorance</i>
Allthoughe I cannat peynt my tale but tell as it is,	
Lepyng over no centence, <sup>o</sup> as ferforth as <sup>o</sup> I may,	<i>essential point; to the extent</i>
But tell yewe the yolke <sup>o</sup> and put the white away.”	<i>[of an egg]</i>
(729–32)	

The Merchant’s assertion that he “cannat peynt [his] tale” serves as a subtle and sly acknowledgement of *lack* of ability.<sup>37</sup> His averred lack of ability to deliver anything other than the essential “yolke” of his story harmonizes with Geoffrey’s promise not to feign like a maker of ryme, even as both men’s claims ring dissonantly with the rhymed couplets that serve as the selfsame medium for their tales. Both of these men, notably,

are claiming to lack specialized ability and thereby positioning themselves as normative figures amid broader societal disabilities and hyper-abilities.

Indeed, Geoffrey himself claims that his motivation for hatching the plot to help Beryn stems from his resentment at the townsfolk's corruption of their own modes of knowing – that is, their self-disabling cognitive bent. Shortly after Geoffrey delivers his promise not to feign, he launches into his plan to don the guise – and, indeed, feign the part – of a fool in order to appear before the court and defend Beryn. He clearly spells out his motivation for doing so. He tells Beryn how the townsfolk use “hir fals lawe” to deal treacherously with all strangers within their borders: “For they think litill elles, and all hir wittes fyve, / Save to have a mannes good and to benym his lyve” (2586, 2587–8). His own words point back to the poem's earlier articulation of anxiety about the ever-deteriorating nature of the five wits. He blasts the townsfolk's direction of their pursuits toward “trechery” and against “trowth [...] and reson” (2584). He suggests that the citizens' insistence on “think[ing of] litill else” than treachery and bending “all hir wittes fyve” toward entrapping strangers disables the townsfolk's own cognitive agility – a critique to which the poem repeatedly returns. The language Geoffrey employs here reinforces his condemnation of the townsfolk: they are not merely robbing their visitors but working to “benym” – entrap and seize – their lives. Geoffrey's choice of a strengthened form of the Middle English verb “nimen” stands out: the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that the prefix “be-” attached to a stem “naturally intensifies the sense of the verb” and often creates a stronger verb with “a privative force.”<sup>38</sup> The cumulative effect of Geoffrey's diatribe is to declare that the citizens' privation of visitors serves as a

privation of their own five wits: their determination to “benym” lives springs from their self-limiting of their own “wittes fyve” to the knowledge and practice of treachery.

To combat this self-disabling of cognition and moral judgment among the people of the town, Geffrey undergoes a thorough physical transformation in order to take on his role as a fool before the court of law. He takes on the outer disarray that typifies the fool, ordering that his head and beard alike be carelessly shorn. The shearing of the fool’s head, a recurring motif throughout premodern English literature and iconography of fooling, sets the fool apart visually, indicating his cognitive difference from his audience:

“Have no dout,” quod Geffrey; “beth mery; let me aloon.  
 Geteth a peir sisours, shereth my berd anoon,  
 And afterward lete top my hede hastlych and blyve.”  
     Som went to with sesours, som with a knyfe,  
 So what for sorowe and hast, and for lewd tole,<sup>o</sup>      *crude instruments*  
 There was no man alyve bet<sup>o</sup> like to a fole      *more*  
 Then Geffrey was, by that tyme they had al i-do. (2914–2020)

Once shorn, Geffrey tells a series of ridiculously inane jokes, causing all around to “[laugh] at him hertlich” (3082). Geffrey’s alteration of his appearance and his verbal performance together do the trick. The poem portrays the effects of Geffrey’s performance of folly as a disabling of his audience’s already uncertain cognitive abilities. In this way, the poem suggests that the feigning fool’s *performance* of cognitive disability makes him an *agent* of disability. For example, Hanybald the provost’s assessment of Geffrey’s appearance and manner shows how thoroughly Hanybald is convinced that Geffrey is truly a fool, cognitively disabled by nature:

Hanybald loked on Geffrey as he were amased,<sup>o</sup> *insane*  
 And beheld his contenance and howe he was i-rased,<sup>o</sup> *shaved*  
 But evermore he thought that he was a fole,  
 Naturell of kynde, and had noon other tool,<sup>o</sup> *means*  
 As semed by his wordes and his visage both,  
 And thought it had been foly to wex with hym wroth. (2933–8)

This compact description shows how the *Tale of Beryn* is representing the townsfolk's ideas of congenital cognitive disability. The terms in which it represents such ideas – “a fole, / Naturell of kynde,” resurface many times throughout fourteenth- through seventeenth-century English fool literature. Hanybald's belief that Geffrey is a “fole” receives the appositive elaboration that, as a fool, Geffrey is assumed to be “naturell of kynde.” In premodern English literature, the term “naturell” refers to the type of fool believed to be cognitively disabled by birth or happenstance. “Kynde,” when used of a person, may refer to inherent qualities of character, to outward appearance, to feelings, to habits, to class or station, to lineage, to family or clan, and to a range of other traits that might be subsumed under the category of one's congenital state.<sup>39</sup> The redundancy of the phrase “naturell of kynde” drives home its point. Calling Geffrey “a fole, naturall of kynde” is twice calling that person's folly inherent – much like calling him “naturally natural.” As Mark Twain said of a similarly emphatic redundancy he encountered in his German studies, “I consider that that person is over-described.”<sup>40</sup>

The effect of this over-description is to show how completely Geffrey's performance of folly has taken in both Hanybald and Geffrey's broader audience. At the same time, by portraying the disabling effects on the townsfolk of Geffrey's performance of folly, the poem sets up the feigning fool as a disabling agent. Edward Wheatley's careful comparison of the treatment of disability in the *Tale of Beryn* and its

French source, *Bérinus*, suggests that this concern is particular to the *Beryn*-writer, who evinces far more interest than his sources do in the effects of Geoffrey's performance.<sup>41</sup>

Wheatley writes, "The English Geoffrey is also far more performative as a fool than the French Gieffroy: he warms up the crowd with his wit before the arrival of the false accusers, and they repeatedly 'laughed at him hertlich.'" <sup>42</sup> Indeed, the lines immediately preceding this laughter further emphasize how deeply Geoffrey's auditors are taken in by his disheveled appearance and verbal antics:

Thus Geffrey stode oppon a fourm,<sup>o</sup> for he wold be sey<sup>o</sup>      *bench; seen*  
 Above all other, the shuldres and the cry,  
 And stared al aboute, with his lewd berd,  
 And was i-hold a verry fole of ech man hym herd. (3077–80)

Not only does the description "verry fole" describe how completely the townsfolk believe in Geoffrey's quintessential folly, but even the mention of his "lewd berd" suggests that Geoffrey's audience regards him as vulgar, misshapen in both appearance and wit. Indeed, it is the thoroughgoing success of Geoffrey's "lewd" performance of folly that enables his stealthy legal victory. As Wheatley states, "Geoffrey's feigned disability leads to poetic justice for Beryn, but it also becomes a lesson to readers about misplaced belief in people who appear to be impaired. [. . .] The citizens' reaction to the fool shows that they are conditioned to respond with derisory laughter that keeps them from looking at him seriously, for he is actually a man they already know."<sup>43</sup> As if to confirm this point, the poem again describes the townsfolk's mistake in terms of failed knowledge when it says that "al that herd hym" laughed at Geoffrey's jesting words: "For they knewe hym noon other but a fole of kynde" (2965). The modifier "of kynde" reminds the poem's readers that Geoffrey's performance of folly has been so successful

as to make his audience believe that it is no performance at all. He has pulled particularly opaque epistemological blinkers over his auditors' eyes, limiting their ability to know him as anything other than the fool he feigns to be.

At the same time, the poem elsewhere suggests that Geoffrey's auditors' epistemological blinkers are self-made. In fact, the phrase "knewe [...] noon other" closely echoes the poem's earlier withering critique of the townsfolk, of whom it is said, "[E]very man his purpose was to have parte / With falsnes and with soteltees; they coud noon other art" (2003–4). The *Beryn*-poet's employment of the verb "connen" – in the stern phrase "they could noon other" – deftly disparages the townsfolk's knowledge and ability in the same syllable. Indeed, as the idiom "connen art" denotes possession of the knowledge necessary to perform a crafty trick, the poet suggests the townsfolk's limitation of their knowledge to the single cognitive trick of knowing and performing false deeds. The narrative construes this falseness as simultaneously a moral failure and an epistemological failure: the townsfolk's lack of "other art" is a deficit that precludes modes of acquiring and deploying non-deceitful knowledge. Later, when Beryn has triumphed over the townsfolk through Geoffrey's performance, the Steward uses "art" to denote the capacious cognitive abilities that have enabled the success of Beryn and his compatriots:

"These Romeyns," quod the Steward, "been wonder scly,  
And eke right ynmagytyff and of sotill art." (3526–7)

The Steward's description of the Romans' "sotill art" rings changes on the narrative's earlier critical description of the townsfolk's lack of any "art" but "soteltees" and "falsnes" (3526, 2004). The Steward clearly means to cast aspersions on "scly,"

“ynmagytyff,” and “sotill” modes of wielding cognition – the very modes of cognition that are repeatedly said to characterize his fellow citizens. A few lines later, Hanybald complains that Geoffrey has “caught us even by the shyn / With his sotill wittes in our own gren” (3891–2). The application of the adjective “sotill” to Geoffrey’s “wittis” echoes both the poem’s description of the townsfolk’s “soteltees” (2004) and the poem’s participation in the “five wits” tradition. “Sotill wittes” serves as a particularly stark term in the context of a complaint that the townsfolk have been caught in their own “gren.” Indeed, although the poem repeatedly touches on the superior dexterity of Geoffrey’s intellect, it simultaneously suggests that the townsfolk have been hoist by their own petard. While the poem at first seems to suggest that Geoffrey’s fooling takes in his audience, it ultimately portrays Geoffrey’s fooling as an unveiling of his audience’s existing epistemological deficits.

Geoffrey displays his cognitive ability by successfully defending Beryn against his accusers. He does so not by answering Beryn’s false accusers with truth, but by one-upping them with even bigger whoppers that win the case. These whoppers, in addition to Geoffrey’s fooling, engender another layer of epistemological confusion in the poem.

This episode in the courtroom, which seems antithetical to Geoffrey’s earlier rejection of feigning words, has attracted attention from scholars investigating the legal systems presented in the *Tale of Beryn*.<sup>44</sup> R. Evan Davis suggested that the tale portrays and critiques a legal system, based on Roman civil law, that diverges from the principles of English common law.<sup>45</sup> In other words, the tale marshals its critique by

portraying Roman civil law as more obstreperously inflexible than it was in actual practice. Davis shows that, because of the inflexibility of Roman civil law as portrayed in the *Tale of Beryn*, Geoffrey has to resort to “fabricating bigger lies” than his opponents’ in order to win the day for Beryn.<sup>46</sup> Of Geoffrey’s fabrications, Davis says, “Certainly not a single human being in that courtroom believes a word of what Geoffrey says, yet the rules of that court force them to sit there and accept pure fiction as legal fact.”<sup>47</sup>

Guillemette Bolens takes Davis’ observations farther, arguing that Geoffrey explicitly “link[s] law and fiction production” by inventing “legal fictions” to bolster his pleading on Beryn’s behalf.<sup>48, 49</sup> The point of these legal fictions is not to deceive. Rather, as Bolens puts it, “As far as *Beryn* is concerned, neither its readers – interested in *sotilté* – nor Geoffrey’s court audience are meant to believe or take as facts the fictions offered in the pleas and counterpleas. Both categories of auditor are supposedly well versed in the art of subtlety and in the use and reception of such legal narratives.”<sup>50</sup> Indeed, she says, “When Geoffrey debates at length with the blind man about circulating eyes, the text parades its fictional quality.”<sup>51</sup> Davis and Bolens’ contributions, taken together, suggest that these legal fictions are mandated by the legal system of the poem. Nonetheless, the enforcers of this legal system are ultimately taking in by a greater fiction.

Geoffrey’s feigning of folly is the fiction that creates the tale’s most shocking reveal. His fictional feigning expands the significance of the tale beyond law to the broader moral character of the populace. The revelation of Geoffrey’s hyper-ability puts his audience in the fool’s place:

Evander the Steward and al men that were there  
 Had mervill much of Geffrey that spak so redely,<sup>o</sup> *wisely*  
 Whose wordes thertofo semed al foly,  
 And were astonyed cleen<sup>o</sup> and gan for to drede. *were stunned*  
 And every man til other lened<sup>o</sup> with his hede *to another inclined*  
 And seyde, "He reported the tale right formally.  
 He was no fool in certen, but wise, ware<sup>o</sup> and scly,<sup>o</sup> *astute; sly*  
 For he hath but i-japed<sup>o</sup> us and scorned heretofore, *jested with*  
 And we have hold hym a fole, but we be wel more!" (3450–8)

This reversal – beyond the shaving of his head and appearing “naturell of kynde” (2936) that take in the spectators – is the act that designates Geffrey’s performance a fool’s performance. The fool’s reversal is the move by which the fool shows his auditors that they, not he, are the foolish ones.<sup>52</sup> In this particular fool’s reversal, Geffrey “hath i-japed” his audience not, as they initially thought, by silly riddles. Rather, he engenders “mervill” and “drede” in them by showing that the lone, ostracized, disabled character they have taken him to be is the only figure in the courtroom capable of showing to them their own cognitive failures. The fool’s reversal thus up-ends (turns “vpsodom,” as a Wycliffite might say) the attributions of individuals’ knowledge and cognitive abilities in the tale. Disability studies enables us to see this fool’s reversal and its effects as an implicit meditation on varieties of ability. The fool’s reversal re-distributes the attributions of hyper- and disability in the tale.

Over and over again, the tale explicitly shows that Geffrey is telling bold-faced lies – a trope often analyzed in disability studies, which has considered how disabled people are frequently accused of feigning their disability. Significantly, the *Tale of Beryn* presents an alternative world in which feigning is first undetected and, ultimately, celebrated. Indeed, when Geffrey educates Beryn at the close of the tale, his feigning of

folly and his web of fictions become the foundation of a wise, effectual form of education.

As we have seen, the fool's reversal is a work of re-distribution that destabilizes the notion of cognitive difference that his audience might otherwise posit between themselves and him. Still, the *Tale of Beryn's* handling of folly and the "five wits" topos can neither be read as an unalloyed celebration of cognitive disability nor a clear expression of disdain for disability and disabled people's value to society. On the one hand, Geoffrey's simulation of folly works precisely because it is a simulation – that is, because it locates hyper-ability, rather than disability or impairment, in the person of Geoffrey the "fool." The tale's reliance on the hyper-ability behind Geoffrey's performance precludes a neat reading of Geoffrey as disabled hero. On the other hand, this very complexity in the tale generates an exploration of multifaceted modes of cognition. Geoffrey's hyper-ability to perform the role of one who is by all appearances congenitally foolish (that is, "naturell of kynde," 2936) is contrasted with the townsfolk's explicit refusal to know any art but falseness. Indeed, if folly serves as both a cognitive deficit and an instrument for pointing *out* cognitive deficits, then Geoffrey's very performance is necessitated by the folly of the broader society. As the tale's participation in medieval "five wits" literature shows, the cognitive abilities of the entire society – not only of mere individuals – have been disabled. By the end of the tale, so prominent is the model of shared cognitive disability that no one but that mysterious impersonator, Geoffrey, is allowed to consider himself wise. Beryn, parents, townsfolk, officials, and even readers – all who come into contact with this odd little fiction must question their own

abilities, the imperfections in their cultural epistemologies, and in their own modes of cognition.

### Coda

The way in which the *Beryn*-writer de-centers Chaucer's authorial status by performing it anew may also be read as feigning of poetic ability and status – or, indeed, as a form of passing.<sup>53</sup> Just as Geoffrey passes as a “cripill” and then a “verry fole” among the townsfolk, the *Tale of Beryn* passes as a Chaucerian invention among the tales of the Northumberland manuscript.<sup>54</sup> Its attempt to pass as a *Canterbury Tale* is noteworthy, even though its differences from Geoffrey Chaucer's own tales have long been recognized by scholars.<sup>55, 56</sup> While Geoffrey's passing engenders epistemological confusion, calling into question the townsfolk's ability to know truly – that is, to “connen art” other than trickery, the *Tale* itself proffers another possibility for the value of passing. *Beryn* serves as an especially acute reading of Chaucer, although one notably out of step with contemporaneous fifteenth-century readings. As Karen Winstead notes, fifteenth-century writers overwhelmingly lauded Chaucer for his work's didactic merits, but the *Beryn*-writer pays homage to Chaucerian humor: for example, the *Prologue of Beryn* imitates Chaucer's flair for rollicking situational comedy.<sup>57</sup> In a similar vein, the joking riddles Geoffrey tells during his performance of fooling at the law-court attempt to channel Chaucer's verbal wit.<sup>58</sup> In these ways, *Beryn*'s passing as a Chaucerian tale opens avenues to knowing the Chaucerian corpus that are otherwise

unavailable in fifteenth-century tributes to Chaucer. It thus demonstrates that passing can serve as an epistemological gateway to specific kinds of readerly interpretations.

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter focuses on the *Tale*, but the *Prologue* has also attracted a great deal of commentary, particularly for its re-readings of characters featured in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. See E. J. Bashe, "The Prologue of *The Tale of Beryn*," *Philological Quarterly* 12.1 (January 1933): 1–16; Stephan Kohl, "Chaucer's Pilgrims in Fifteenth-Century Literature," *Fifteenth Century Studies* 7 (1983): 221–236; Bradley Darjes and Thomas Rendall, "A Fabliau in the *Prologue to the Tale of Beryn*," *Mediaeval Studies* 47 (1985): 416–31; Peter Brown, "Journey's End: The Prologue to *The Tale of Beryn*," in *Chaucer and Fifteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. Julia Boffey and Janet Cowen (London: King's College, Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1991), 143–74; Frederick B. Jonassen, "Cathedral, Inn, and Pardoner in the Prologue to the *Tale of Beryn*," *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 18 (1991): 109–32; John M. Bowers, "Controversy and Criticism: Lydgate's *Thebes* and the Prologue to *Beryn*," *Chaucer Yearbook* 5 (1998): 91–115; Glending Olson, "The Misreadings of the *Beryn* Prologue," *Mediaevalia* 17 (1994): 201–19; Robert S. Sturges, *Chaucer's Pardoner and Gender Theory: Bodies of Discourse* (New York: St. Martin's, 2000) and "The Pardoner in Canterbury: Class, Gender, and Urban Space in the *Prologue to the Tale of Beryn*," *College Literature* 33.3 (2006): 52–76; and Elizabeth Allen, "The Pardoner in the Dogges Boure: Early Reception of the *Canterbury Tales*," *The Chaucer Review* 36.2 (2001): 91–127.

<sup>2</sup> For another reading of the centrality of folly in the poem, see Stephen Harper, "'Pleyng with a yerd': Folly and Madness in the Prologue and 'Tale of Beryn,'" *Studies in Philology* 101.3 (Summer, 2004): 299–314.

<sup>3</sup> All quotations from *The Tale of Beryn* in this chapter are taken from John M. Bowers, ed., *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions*, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992). Earlier editions include John Urry, ed., *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, compared with the former editions, and many valuable mss. out of which, three tales are added which were never before printed* (London: B. Lintot, 1721); F. J. Furnivall and W. G. Stone, eds., *The Tale of Beryn, with A Prologue of the Merry Adventure of the Pardoner with a Tapster at Canterbury* (Millwood, NY: Kraus Reprint for EETS, 1975 [1887, 1909]); and Mary E. Mulqueen Tamanini, *The Tale of Beryn: An Edition with Introduction, Notes, and Glossary*, Ph.D. Diss. (New York University: 1969).

<sup>4</sup> David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> David T. Mitchell, "Narrative Prosthesis and the Materiality of Metaphor," in *Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities*, ed. Sharon L. Snyder, Brenda Jo Brueggemann, and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (New York: MLA of America, 2002), 15–29.

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<sup>6</sup> David T. Mitchell, "Narrative Prosthesis and the Materiality of Metaphor," p. 16; also qtd. in Andrew Higl, *Playing the Canterbury Tales: The Continuations and Additions* (Burlington: Ashgate: 2012), p. 99.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Higl, *Playing the Canterbury Tales*, p. 99.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Higl, *Playing the Canterbury Tales*, p. 100.

<sup>9</sup> The *Tale of Beryn's* portrayals of disability have also been perspicaciously analyzed by Edward Wheatley, whose seminal work will be discussed later in this chapter. See Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks Before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Abigail Elizabeth Comber, "A Medieval King 'Disabled' by an Early Modern Construct," in *Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations*, ed. Joshua R. Eyler (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010). See also Irina Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking About Physical Impairment* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Annotations of the quotations in this chapter are selectively reproduced from John M. Bowers, ed., *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions*.

<sup>12</sup> Jean E. Jost's reading of these lines dovetails with my reading of their conventionality and interest in widespread social decline while providing an alternative take on the *Beryn*-writer's own work. Quoting the *Tale's* commendation of "old tyme" (743-5), Jost remarks: "This conventional diatribe against the loss of nobility, of a more worthy time, of 'the snows of yesteryear,' by the fifteenth-century *Beryn*-poet directly acknowledges the social deterioration that, ironically taints his own production as well." Jean E. Jost, "From Southwark's Tabard Inn to Canterbury's Cheker-of-the-Hope: The Un-Chaucerian Tale of *Beryn*," *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 21 (1994): 133-48, p. 133.

<sup>13</sup> John the Blind Audelay, *Poems and Carols* (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 302), ed. Susanna Fein, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2009), pp. 178-9.

<sup>14</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, et al., 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987), p. 292, ll. 958-9, emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 322, ll. 207-8.

<sup>16</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, p. 229, ll. 1420-4, emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup> Jeremie 9:21, in *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, with the Apocryphal Books, in the Earliest English Versions, Made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and His Followers*, Vol. 3, ed. Josiah Forshall and Frederic Madden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1850), p. 365.

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<sup>18</sup> An anonymous Wycliffite in F. D. Matthew, ed., *The English Works of Wyclif: Hitherto Unprinted* (London: Early English Text Society, 1880), p. 218.

<sup>19</sup> Anonymous Wycliffite in F. D. Matthew, ed., *The English Works of Wyclif*, p. 210.

<sup>20</sup> There is a striking similarity between Audelay's concerns for governing the "fyve wittes" by reason and the Wycliffite writer's fear that these senses may be taken over by the "fend," together with Chaucer's connection of the five wits to the deadly sins. These texts demonstrate how closely the concerns of "orthodox" and "unorthodox" English writers of the turn of the fifteenth century were aligned, despite their diverging statuses with ecclesiastical hierarchies.

<sup>21</sup> The context of this passage, which opens the second part of the *Ancrene Wisse*, further emphasizes the danger of opening the five senses – and, specifically, the window-eyes – to outside temptations:

The heorte wardeins beoth the fif wittes: sihthe, ant herunge, smechnunge, ant smeallunge, ant euch limes felunge. Ant we schulen spoken of alle, for hwa-se wit theose wel, he deth Salomones bode: he wit wel his heorte ant his sawle heale. The heorte is a ful wilde beast ant maketh moni liht lupe. [. . .] Davith, Godes prophete, meande i sum time thet ha wes etstearit him: *Cor meum dereliquit me*. Thet is, "min heorte is edflohe me." Ant eft he blisseth him ant seith thet ha wes i-cumen ham: *Invenit servus tuus cor suum*. "Laverd," he seith, "min heorte is i-cumen ayein eft. Ich hire habbe i-funden." Hwen-se hali mon ant se wis ant se war lette hire edsteariten sare mei an-other of hire fluht carien. Ant hwer edbrec ha ut from Davith the hali king, Godes prophete? Hwer? Godd wat, ed his eh-thurl, thurh a sihthe thet he seh thurh a bihaldunge, as ye schulen efter i-heren.

For-thi mine leove sustren, the leaste thet ye eaver mahen luvieith ower thurles.

*Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Robert Hasenfratz, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), p. 96.

<sup>22</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Robert Hasenfratz.

<sup>23</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, in *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works*, trans. and ed. Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1991).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Robert Hasenfratz, p. 96.

<sup>26</sup> This medieval tradition of almost conflating the body and soul stands in contradistinction to some disability studies scholarship, which develops its theories of the cultural treatment of disabled bodies by positing a sweeping Christian disdain for

the body in favor of the soul. Both the localized medieval literature on the “five wits” and the formal post-Nicene doctrines of the traditions now known as Orthodox and Catholic Christianity paint a picture that is, if not unanimously anti-Gnostic, broadly more polyvocal on the status of the body than some of the most influential contributions to disability studies have acknowledged.

<sup>27</sup> In his consideration of the *Tale*’s treatment of adolescence, Ben Parsons notes rightly that the *Tale of Beryn* evinces a preoccupation with the problems of youth. He shows how this preoccupation appears in the writer’s structural choice to confine the narrative entirely to Beryn’s adolescence, eliminating the portions of the story in *Bérinus* that continue on into Beryn’s later life. This structural choice, I would add, intensifies the tale’s focus on folly and forms of fooling. It creates a new story arc that moves from initial folly through the hardship brought on by that folly. Finally, at its very end, it culminates in the melioration of folly through learning. Ben Parsons, “‘For my synne and for my yong delite’: Chaucer, the ‘Tale of Beryn,’ and the Problem of ‘Adolescentia,’” *The Modern Language Review* 103.4 (October 2008): 940–951.

<sup>28</sup> Anonymous Wycliffite in F. D. Matthew, ed., *The English Works of Wyclif*, p. 215.

<sup>29</sup> Karen A. Winstead, “The Beryn-Writer as a Reader of Chaucer,” p. 232.

<sup>30</sup> W. Wager, *The Longer Thou Livest and Enough Is as Good as a Feast*, ed. Mark R. Benbow (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967).

<sup>31</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>32</sup> The tale only explicitly identifies Beryn and his companions as Romans in the second half of the tale, as if their citizenship only matters when their legal and geographical otherness become salient – or perhaps when the niceties of Roman civil law come into play.

<sup>33</sup> Chapter 3 shows how such ideas persist in Wager’s *The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art*, and Chapter 4 shows how they obtain in late-sixteenth century literary treatises and Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*.

<sup>34</sup> The fuller context is:

“And if ye drede anything, clepe yeur men to londe  
And let hem be here with us all our speche-tyme,  
For I woll nat feyn oon woord, as makers doon to ryme,  
But counsell yewe as prudently as God woll send me grace,  
Take comforte to yewe, and herk a litill spase.” (2460–2464)

<sup>35</sup> These clashing views of “poetes” and “makers” within the poem may be compatible – stemming, for instance, from the tale’s shadowy distinction between the two terms, from an implicit valorization of “old wise poetes” over mere rhyming hacks, or from a subtle differentiation between multiplicitous voices and characters. Even so,

these clashing characterizations, placed seventeen hundred lines apart, reveal the *Beryn*-writer's penchant for digging up and bringing to light many competing strands of discourse within the poem. The tale further entrenches itself in irony by criticizing the feigning of "makers" of rhyme *within* the context of its own poetic structure, which consists entirely of rhymed couplets.

<sup>36</sup> Chapter 4 discusses George Putterham's *elevation* of the word "maker" as an instrument for critiquing the alleged "lightness" of head of the "rude, railing rhymers" whose prosodic techniques resemble fools' songs.

<sup>37</sup> Bowers comments on this passage: "The Merchant's apology for ignorance and inability to 'peynt' his tale is reminiscent of the Franklin's modest disclaimers (CT V, 716-28)." John M. Bowers, ed., *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions*, note to ll. 729-32.

<sup>38</sup> "be-, prefix," *OED Online*, (Oxford University Press, September 2013). Available at: <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/16442?rskey=OCTjNE&result=4&isAdvanced=false>. Accessed on: October 7, 2013.

<sup>39</sup> For a more thorough distillation of the range of nuance in Middle English "kynde" see "kīnde (n.)," *Middle English Dictionary* (University of Michigan, 2001). Available at: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED24248>. Accessed on: October 7, 2013.

<sup>40</sup> Mark Twain, "The Awful German Language," in *A Tramp Abroad* (Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing Company; London: Chatto & Windus, 1880), p. 608.

<sup>41</sup> For more detailed examinations of the *Bérinus*, see Guillemette Bolens' incisive "Narrative Use and the Practice of Fiction in *The Book of Sindibad* and *The Tale of Beryn*," *Poetics Today* 29.2 (Summer 2008): 309-351; Douglas Kelly, "Fortune and Narrative Proliferation in the *Bérinus*," *Speculum* 51 (1976): 6-22; and Helen Marie McIntosh, *The Literary Background of The Tale of Beryn*, Ph.D. Diss (University of Chicago, 1934).

<sup>42</sup> Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks Before the Blind*, pp. 109-10, quoting *The Tale of Beryn*, l. 3082. Guillemette Bolens similarly attributes Geoffrey's success to his hyper-able performance as a fool: "Geoffrey saves Beryn because he is capable of behaving like a fool, verbally, vocally, and gesturally. He qualifies as a sage insofar as his wisdom manifests itself through carefully manoeuvred signs of folly and foolishness, which are effectual when they succeed in triggering laughter in his audience." Guillemette Bolens, "Traditions of Simulated Folly in *The Canterbury Interlude and Tale of Beryn*," in *Behaving Like Fools: Voice, Gesture, and Laughter in Texts, Manuscripts, and Early Books*, ed. Lucy Perry and Alexander Schwarz (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 15-46, p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks Before the Blind*, p. 112.

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<sup>44</sup> For an examination of the courtroom episode that considers not its legal but its economic investments, see Jenny Adams, "Exchequers and Balances: Anxieties of Exchange in *The Tale of Beryn*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 26 (2004): 267–297.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Firth Green notes that Roman civil law was practiced in France in the late Middle Ages, by which point it was quite distinct from English temporal law. See Richard Firth Green, "Legal Satire in *The Tale of Beryn*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 11 (1989): 43–62, pp. 44–5.

<sup>46</sup> R. Evan. Davis, "Medieval Law in *The Tale of Beryn*," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 36 (1985): 261–74, p. 266.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Guillemette Bolens, "Narrative Use and the Practice of Fiction," p. 332.

<sup>49</sup> Bolens borrows the term "legal fictions" from Donald W. Sutherland, "Legal Reasoning in the Fourteenth Century: The Invention of 'Color' in Pleading," in *On the Laws and Customs of England: Essays in Honor of Samuel E. Thorne*, ed. Morris S. Arnold, Thomas A. Green, Sally A. Scully, and Stephen D. White (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 182–94.

<sup>50</sup> Guillemette Bolens, "Narrative Use and the Practice of Fiction," p. 327.

<sup>51</sup> Guillemette Bolens, "Narrative Use and the Practice of Fiction," p. 332.

<sup>52</sup> Although the fool's reversal is a hallmark of verbal fooling throughout the medieval and early modern periods and is familiar to scholars of drama, it has received virtually no sustained analysis in literary scholarship. A lone encapsulation of the work that the fool's reversal performs in English literature appears in Robert Weimann's *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater*: "In the folk play, both elements (the awareness of audience participation and the consciousness of the reality of the play world) are already present, and it seems only a step from here to the 'wise' fool's reversal of roles with the audience, i.e., 'you are the real fools, while I am merely playing this role, well aware that it is a role.'" Yet, as the *Tale of Beryn* demonstrates, this phenomenon is displayed in English literature far earlier than the Shakespearean drama Weimann analyzes, and it reaches across a plethora of genres. Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater*, ed. Robert Schwartz (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 44.

<sup>53</sup> The *Beryn*-writer's abilities as a prosodist have won him few admirers. C. S. Lewis called the poem's meter an "irregular nursery rhyme movement." C. S. Lewis, *English Literature of the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (Oxford, 1954), p. 241. The more sympathetic Mary E. Mulqueen Tamanini nonetheless mentions the meter's "extremely free form" and acknowledges that "[t]he *Tale of Beryn* is extremely irregular in prosody, with no apparent consistent metrical structure" (*The Tale of Beryn: An Edition*, p. 61). The

repeated excoriation of the *Beryn*-poet's work among early-twentieth-century literary scholars evinces a regard for Geoffrey Chaucer as a giant among Lilliputian continuators. This more magisterial view of Chaucer *contra* his imitators tends to obscure the active, participatory fiction-making that is woven throughout the *Tale of Beryn*, as well as the structure of the *Beryn*-text itself.

More recent scholars have been more willing to acknowledge the *Beryn*-writer's other achievements. John M. Bowers, one of the foremost scholars who insists upon rescuing *Beryn* from the "spurious" dustbin, notes, "[t]he *Beryn* poet was a scrupulous, discerning reader of the *Canterbury* fragments which came down to him. Though lacking his master's gifts as a versifier, he had a fine ear for colloquial dialogue, as well as real talents for inventing and staging comic action." John M. Bowers, "The Tale of *Beryn* and *The Siege of Thebes*: Alternative Ideas of *The Canterbury Tales*" [1985], in *Writing after Chaucer: Essential Readings in Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Daniel Pinti (New York: Garland, 1998), 201–226, p. 203. See also Bowers' "The House of Chaucer & Son: The Business of Lancastrian Canon-Formation," *Medieval Perspectives* 6 (1991): 135–43.

The *Beryn*-writer is an acute reader of Chaucer, although one notably out of step with his contemporaries. It seems unlikely that the *Tale of Beryn* will ever be added to most readers' lists of euphonious poems. However, the tale's nuanced accounts of the bodily senses, modes of knowing, fiction-making, and feigning offer new ways of discussing and examining folly and cognitive disability in medieval English literature.

<sup>54</sup> For analyses of the date and production of the Northumberland manuscript, see John M. Bowers' comments in *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions*; Daniel W. Mosser, "The Paper Stocks of the *Beryn* Scribe," *Journal of the Early Book Society for the Study of Manuscripts and Printing History* 13 (2010): 63–93, p. 66; and Linne R. Mooney and Lister M. Matheson, "The *Beryn* Scribe and His Texts: Evidence for Multiple-Copy Production of Manuscripts in Fifteenth-Century England," *The Library*, 7<sup>th</sup> series, 4 (2003): 347–370, p. 368.

<sup>55</sup> The modern reader encounters the *Prologue and Tale of Beryn* amid a scholar-constructed web, the Chaucerian canon, which has historically elevated the works of the "authentic" Chaucer over the works of the Chaucerian continuators. John M. Bowers, the most prolific *Beryn* scholar, de-centers this traditional understanding of Chaucer's relationship to the para-Chaucerians. Bowers makes the case that the *Canterbury Tales* familiar to most readers today is a "modern fabrication" concocted by Chaucer's nineteenth- and twentieth-century editors. Bowers points out that "no single manuscript, not even Ellesmere, contains all the tales and links to be found in a modern edition with its scholarly confluents" (John M. Bowers, "The Tale of *Beryn* and *The Siege of Thebes*: Alternative Ideas of *The Canterbury Tales*," [1985], in *Writing after Chaucer: Essential Readings in Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Daniel Pinti [New York: Garland, 1998], 201–226, p. 201).

The like-minded Andrew Higl argues that critical focus on the canonical Chaucer has largely relegated the additions and continuations to the "spurious" dustbin

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(Andrew Higgl, *Playing the Canterbury Tales: The Continuations and Additions* [Burlington: Ashgate: 2012], p. 1). The effect of this long critical history, he suggests, has been to occlude the active writing, reading, and meaning-making that went into the additions and continuations. As Bowers' and Higgl's arguments imply, these familiar "scholarly conflations" have presented readers with a flatter, less dynamic text than Chaucer's fourteenth-century circles or their fifteenth-century and later followers would have known.

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, Ben Parsons, "'For my synne and for my yong delite': Chaucer, the 'Tale of Beryn,' and the Problem of 'Adolescentia,'" *The Modern Language Review* 103.4 (October 2008): 940-951, pp. 942-3. For thoughtful reconsiderations of the *Beryn*-writer's place among the Chaucerian corpora, see John M. Bowers, "Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* – Politically Corrected," in *Rewriting Chaucer: Culture, Authority, and the Idea of the Authentic Text, 1400-1602*, ed. Thomas A. Prendergast and Barbara Kline (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999), 13-44; and John M. Bowers, "Two Professional Readers of Chaucer and Langland: Scribe D and the HM 114 Scribe," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 26 (2004): 113-146.

<sup>57</sup> Winstead argues that the more prevalent fifteenth-century tendency to praise the didactic aspects of Chaucer indicates a "transformation in aesthetics." She distinguishes the typical reading of Chaucer by many of his fifteenth-century admirers – Lydgate, Henryson, and the anonymous writers of *The Floure and the Leafe* and *The Plowman's Tale* – from the *Beryn*-writer's showcasing of Chaucerian comedy in the *Prologue and Tale*. My reading of the *Tale* concurs: the *Tale* relies heavily on just such imitations of Chaucerian humor as those she identifies. Karen A. Winstead, "The *Beryn*-Writer as a Reader of Chaucer," in *The Chaucer Review* 22.3 (Winter, 1988): 225-33, p. 232.

<sup>58</sup> Their success in this endeavor is contestable, to put it mildly.

## Chapter 2

### *Robert of Cisyle, King Turned Fool*

*Robert of Cisyle*, a medieval romance about a king who is punished for his foolish deeds by being compelled to serve as his own court's fool, explores the visible manifestations of an invisible disability – that is, folly. Unlike the *Tale of Beryn*, *Robert of Cisyle* deals with no witty characters who feign folly for a specific end. Rather, the fifteenth-century romance proffers a portrait of a fool who is bereft of able cognitive and moral judgment. It positions fools and kings as polar opposites: kings as those who ought to have wise moral judgment and fools as those whose disabled moral judgment brings about their downfall. It presents a hierarchical view of social class and cognitive difference: those of a high class are expected to possess outstanding cognitive abilities, and vice versa. Trouble brews when these neat alliances do not obtain. In the story, King Robert is clearly expected to play the role of a benevolent, wise king. When he fails to do so, however, an angel appears and tells Robert that he will be compelled to take on the role of court fool as punishment. When, having refused to acknowledge his folly, he prays to confess it, the Angel restores him to his former place as king. Robert commands that his story of descent into the role of a fool and his restoration to the position of king be written. He then sends the story to his

brother, the pope, who disseminates the story by preaching it as a homiletic example. The romance thus paints a relentlessly critical portrait of fools, whose intertwined cognitive and moral failings are depicted as directly responsible for their inherent lack of dignity.

Although scholars have previously written about the romance's metafictional dénouement, its treatment of Robert's pride, and its similarities to *Sir Gowther* and *King Lear*, no one has yet recognized its theorization of folly as cognitive disability.<sup>1</sup> As this chapter will demonstrate, *Robert of Cisyle* proffers several clear models of cognitive disability. First, disability is portrayed as simultaneously a moral and cognitive deficit – its moral and cognitive dimensions appearing here, as elsewhere in the texts this project examines, as inextricably intertwined concepts.<sup>2</sup> Second, cognitive disability *qua* folly is framed as both the cause of and the punishment for sin. Third, disability serves at the end of the story as a deterrent: Robert's fate as the king humbled *by his demotion to fool* becomes the homiletic example used to enjoin repentance. These models come together in *Robert of Cisyle* to form a critique of folly that is unalleviated by any witty fool's reversal, such as the one performed by Geoffrey in the *Tale of Beryn*.<sup>3</sup>

The romance *Robert of Cisyle* is extant in ten manuscripts that stretch from around 1380 to 1500.<sup>4</sup> There is evidence that the story was also adapted as a play and performed in Chester in the early sixteenth century.<sup>5</sup> This romance, then, underwent a shift from narrative poem to play that also coincided with broader,

trans-generic, trans-periodic shifts in the fool literature – from poetry to drama, from pre- to post-Reformation. The *Robert of Cisyle* narrative's movement from poem to play, variously religious to variously secular manuscript contexts, and medieval to early modern literature is emblematic of the complex genealogy of premodern English literary fooling.<sup>6</sup> It exemplifies the rich poetic tradition that is lost if early modern dramatic fools are read in isolation from non-dramatic literature.

The narrative emphasizes the mutability of cognitive ability and social status – that is, the ways in which cognitive and social failure are coordinates of one another. These forms of failure are likewise a feature of fooling in the English literary textual tradition, recurring in numerous texts in the broad trans-Reformation period. The textual tradition of the *Robert of Cisyle* romance, specifically, goes to great lengths to provide consistent, almost catalogic allusions to Robert's erroneous thoughts and beliefs, as well as his unstableness of heart and mind. The poem itself then accords Robert the visible effects of his inward errors by giving him the trappings of a fool.

*Robert of Cisyle* thus offers one of the most explicit connections between erroneous thought and the outward manifestations of folly of the texts in this project. Robert's habiliments during his sojourn as a fool and his companionship with an ape are portrayed as parodic signs of his undone dignity. The tale's insistence that Robert's folly should be made visible – literally visible, as habiliments that parody his former kingship – foregrounds the perceived

unsuitability of his high social station to his status as a cognitively disabled figure. The outer manifestations of Robert's disability force him to acknowledge, in the romance's logic, his inner deficits. The possibility of restoration comes only when he himself acknowledges the magnitude of the social descent from his once-high position as monarch to his compelled shame in his role as fool.

The audacity of *Robert of Cisyle's* portrayal of a king as someone capable of tumbling down the courtly hierarchy to the lowly position of fool has received surprisingly little attention. Post-Shakespearean scholars may have encountered *Robert of Cisyle* with so little surprise because the romance has been cited as a precursor to *King Lear*, perhaps the most renowned tale of a king's decline in post-classical western literature.<sup>7</sup> Yet taking *Robert of Cisyle* on its own medieval terms foregrounds the shock of its portrayal of regnant disability. Raluca Radulescu's book, a notable exception, builds on Paul Strohm's argument that the early-fifteenth-century Lancastrians, anxious about their shaky claims to legitimate monarchy, propped up those claims with an elaborate web of cultural fictions and propaganda.<sup>8</sup> Radulescu suggests that Strohm's thesis concerning monarchical anxiety might be extended chronologically throughout the remainder of the century, as well as generically – to medieval romances:

Monarchical crises and collapses in governance at the centre, in the provinces and abroad were factors that influenced the reading experiences of fifteenth-century audiences. This is the century that saw no fewer than seven kings (from Richard II to Henry Tudor) and five depositions or falls from power (Richard II, Henry VI—twice, Edward IV and Richard III) accompanied by changes of dynasty, as well as the anxious period of minority of England's youngest ever monarch, Henry VI. Spaced at increasingly shorter

intervals, these political upheavals left significant traces in the collective memory.<sup>9</sup>

It is within this context, which overlaps with the more than century-long production of the ten manuscripts that contain *Robert of Cisyle*, that we must consider the strange tenacity of a story that takes the self-inflicted deposition of a king as its framing device. As Strohm's and Radulescu's work suggests, medieval readers would have encountered romances' literary depictions of the fortunes of fictional kings against the historical backdrop of actual English monarchs whose reigns depended to a significant extent on the spinning of fictional webs.

Indeed, in the middle of the fifteenth century, the suggestion that King Henry VI resembled a fool was investigated as seditious speech. Henry VI was later remembered for his tenuous grasp on kingly power, and he was posthumously venerated for this shaky reign, which was seen by devotees as a lack of concern for worldly, secular things.<sup>10</sup> Despite this memorialization, though, the comparison of the king to a fool served in 1450 as grounds for a formal indictment:

It is to be inquired for our sovereign lord the king whether John Merfeld of Brightling in the shire of Sussex, husbandman, and William Merfeld of Brightling in the shire aforesaid, husbandman, at Brightling in the open market the Sunday in the feast of Saint Anne, the 28<sup>th</sup> year of our sovereign lord [26 July 1450], falsely said that the king was a natural fool and would often hold a staff in his hands with a bird on the end, playing therewith as a fool, and that another king must be ordained to rule the land, saying that the king was no person able to rule the land. [. . .]

Also the said John at Brightling on St James's eve, the 28<sup>th</sup> year above said [24 July], falsely said that he and his fellowship

would rise again and when they were up, they would leave no gentleman alive but such as they pleased to have.<sup>11</sup>

The move from calling the king a natural fool – indeed, citing his kingly habiliments as the reason to do so – and threatening a bloody uprising, however paratactically, is a strikingly direct one. Presumably the remark’s bluntness accounts for the need for juridical follow-up: A. R. Myers’ reprint of the indictment adds, “An endorsement shows that on 1 July 1451 a jury declared this to be a true bill.”<sup>12</sup> Radulescu, who cites the portion of the incident in which John Merfeld called the king a fool but does not note Merfeld’s threat to “rise again and [. . .] leave no gentleman alive,” comments that “[a]lthough the remark displays the offender’s ignorance (he did not understand the significance of the rod with the dove, part of the regalia), it is interesting to note how the varied imperial emblems of sceptre and orb could be mocked as the sceptre-like stick and round-white disk sometimes associated with the medieval fool.”<sup>13</sup>

If the trappings of kingship could so easily be mistaken for their parodic inversions, it is noteworthy that both the 1450 indictment of Merfeld and the pan-fifteenth-century *Robert of Cisyle* attempt so strenuously to maintain the presumptive distance between kingly and foolish roles. Because the indictment predates Henry VI’s eventual deposition and readeption, it is altogether too tempting to read the document as a hint of the turbulence yet to come for Henry and his subjects. While no such easy teleology is possible, it *is* feasible to note the threat that the breakdown in propaganda permits. This indictment, like the *Robert of Cisyle* romance, implicitly holds that even the potential cognitive



Here, the poem gives an attribution for Robert's pride: "in his *thought* he hedde pryde" (27). The poem is keen to focus on the problem in Robert's cognitive processes: while pride is mentioned at the outset and in a few other key moments of the story, the romance's language reminds its readers, far more assiduously, that Robert repeatedly manifests errors in thought. His errors, by their association with pride, acquire a negative moral valence.

*Robert of Cisyle's* association of sinful pride with thought gone awry is typical of late medieval texts. In the Wycliffites' vernacular translation of the gospel of Mark, produced the decade before the Vernon manuscript, Jesus exhorts his disciples not to worry about physically contaminating their bodies through food – which "may not defoule [a man], for it hath not entrid into his herte, but in to the wombe, and byneth it goth out, purgyng alle metis."<sup>15</sup> Instead, Jesus warns against internal sources of "defoulyng": "For the thingis that gon out of a man, tho defoulen a man. Forsoth fro withynne, of the herte of men comen forth *yvele thouztis*, [. . .] *blasphemyes, pride, folye*."<sup>16, 17</sup> This litany of errors enumerates pride, folly, and evil thoughts alike among many inward qualities that "defoulen a man" and thereby prove themselves more deleterious than the innocuously scatological process of "purgynge alle metis."

In a similar vein, *Robert of Cisyle's* assertion that "in his *thought* [Robert] hedde pryde" invokes an interlinked network of inward errors that Middle English literature often identifies as both moral and cognitive. Premodern English literature often – though not exclusively – discusses cognitive function in

terms of moral categories.<sup>18</sup> These cognitive and moral categories are simultaneously implicated with issues of class. Thus, in this romance, Robert's folly is depicted as incongruous with his kingliness; he must be brought "lowe" (e.g., ll. 45–46 ff.), descending to the status his moral and cognitive disability warrants, until his cognition, his moral capacity, and his status can be simultaneously restored.

The romance intimates the necessity for this fall and restoration by proffering an almost catalogic list of Robert's errors in thought, particularly in the plot-catalyzing scene in which he goes to church to hear the Magnificat at evensong. Once again, the narrative describes Robert's thought as replete with moral errors:

At midsomer, a Seynt Jones Niht,  
 30 The kyng to churche com ful riht,  
 Forto heeren his evensong.  
 Hym *thoughte*, he dwelled ther ful long:  
 He *thoughte* more in worldes honour,  
 Than in Crist, ur saveour. (29–34, emphasis added)

Both instances of the verb "thoughte" point toward errors in Robert's judgment: he grows impatient at the amount of time he has spent at evensong (l. 32), and he esteems "worldes honour" more than "Crist, ur saveour." The poem's phrasing of Robert's error-laden thoughts via active verbs subtly signals that Robert's cognitive processes are warping his perception of the world.

The following lines highlight Robert's lack of learning – a quality that is elsewhere associated with the folly of men of high social status.<sup>19</sup> The poem indicates that the king needs to have this very familiar Latin liturgy translated

into the vernacular:

35 In "Magnificat" he herde a verse,  
 He made a clerk hit him rehers  
 In langage of his owne tonge,  
 In Latyn he nuste,<sup>o</sup> that heo songe. *He did not know Latin*  
 (35-8)

Once more, Robert's knowledge is summarized in the negative ("nuste," l. 38). A later manuscript variant offers a version of this line – "ffor in latene wyste he not what þey songe" – that even more emphatically frames Robert's ignorance of Latin as a negation of potential knowledge (CUL Ff. 2. 38, l. 38).

The explication of this gap in Robert's knowledge leads to seemingly prescient lines about the precariousness of high social status. Once translated by the clerk, the verse from the Magnificat ominously and pointedly foreshadows Robert's fall from his high position:

The vers was this, I telle the:  
 40 Deposuit potentes de sede,  
 Et exaltavit humiles.  
 This was the vers, withouten les.<sup>o</sup> *lies*  
 The clerk seide anone right;<sup>o</sup> *right away*  
 "Sire, such is Godes miht,  
 45 That he may make heyghte<sup>o</sup> lowe, *high*  
 And lowe heighe in luytel throwe.  
 God may do, withoute lyghe,<sup>o</sup> *lie*  
 His wil in twynklyng of an eighe." (39-48)

These verses, followed almost immediately in the narrative by Robert's demotion to the role of his own court's fool, implicitly couch fooling as the inversion of kingship. These relatively few lines of the poem themselves focus on inverted relationships. They pointedly pair verbs of downfall and uplift: "Deposuit [. . .] exaltavit" (40-41). They employ chiasmus to show the precariousness of social

status: “heyghte lowe, / And lowe heighe” (46–7). The near-synonymity created by the articulation of these paired opposites in close proximity echoes psalmic pairing of synonyms and thus lends a liturgical cadence to the extra-liturgical poetry. The liturgical cadence gives the clerk’s words a quasi-prophetic quality in advance of Robert’s impending fall; later, the similarly liturgical cadence of Robert’s prayer will play a role in effecting his restoration.

The poem attributes the impending reversal of Robert’s position in the social hierarchy to his dogged moral-cognitive errors. Robert’s inversion-to-come seems ever more inevitable – to all but Robert, that is. Again effectually demonstrating his erroneous thinking, Robert scoffs at the clerk’s translation of Mary’s words:

The kyng seide with herte unstable:  
 50 “Al your song is fals and fable!  
 What mon hath such pouwer,  
 Me to bringe lowe in daunger?  
 I am flour of chivalrye,  
 Myn enemys I may distruye;  
 55 No mon lyveth in no londe,  
 That me may withstonde.  
 Then is this a song of nouht!”  
 This errour he hede in thought. (49–58)

The king’s disdain for the “fals and fable” liturgy follows a tradition of Middle English invective that associates “fable” with lying – e.g., Lydgate’s reference to “A fable vnsoth, / Falsly feyned” and the *Romaunt of the Rose*’s assertion that “paramours do but feyn [. . .] / With many a lesyng and many a fable.”<sup>20, 21</sup> That the king holds the evensong liturgy on par with other untrue fables bodes ill for him. A few lines later, the poet deftly undermines Robert’s assessment of the

liturgy – “song of nouht!” – with the rhyme at the end of the self-same couplet, which explicitly names Robert’s assessment an “errour.” More subtly, the poet features, but does not name, the category error Robert commits when he questions “Godes miht” by asking, “What mon hath such pouwer, / Me to bringe lowe in daunger?” (51-2). “Mon” functions here more as an indefinite pronoun than as a term for “human.” Still, by including God among the more generalized populace that might be described as “mon,” Robert skirts the edge of species confusion. This theme will return later in the poem, when Robert is demoted to the rank of ape’s companion. More explicitly, the erroneous assessment of the king’s “herte unstable” is made more pointed in the later CUL Ff. 2.38 variant, which speaks of the king’s “þoʒt vnstabull” (l. 39, emphasis added). The two texts’ almost seamless alternation of “herte” and “þoʒt” finds resonance within both the Latin and English texts of the Magnificat itself, suggesting a conceptual conflation of these centers of embodied apprehension.

These repeated emphases on Robert’s warped cognition hint at the punishment he is about to incur by refusing to acknowledge his *low* position in the divine-human hierarchy. Robert’s foolish assessment of his own position is thrown into relief by the implied surrounding context of the Magnificat liturgy itself, in which Mary’s language emphasizes that the proud are humbled by the power of God’s mind. For example, in the Old Vulgate Latin text, Mary says, “Fecit potentiam in brachio suo: dispersit superbos mente cordis sui.” The Tyndale Bible, translated from Greek, would later render this verse, “He hath

shewed strengthe with his arme, he hath scattered them that are proude in the ymmaginacion of their hertes."<sup>22</sup> The Wycliffite translation of the same verse suggests that, during the time of production and circulation of the Vernon manuscript, this vernacular rendering of the Lucan tradition valorized God's well-performing mind and heart: the Wycliffite Bible translates the Latin as "he scateride proude men with mynde of *his* herte."<sup>23, 24</sup> The effect of this Wycliffite version is to emphasize the power of God's mind and heart vis-à-vis humans' erroneous and unstable faculties.

In the landscape of the romance, Robert's insistent moral and cognitive errors cannot go unremarked or unpunished. Robert does continue to claim that he is too high to be brought low, citing his claim to "dignité." When the angel appears and says to him, "Thou art a fol," he rebuffs the assertion by saying,

[. . .] Thou shalt wite wel,  
 That I am kyng and kyng wol be,  
 With wronge thou hast my dignité.  
 The Pope of Roome is my brother  
 150 And the emperour myn other. (146-50)

It is a bold move: Robert, who has already been described as having "errour [. . .] in thought" (58) claims that the angel is the one who needs to know better ("Thou shalt wite wel," 146). His insistence that the angel wrongly apprehends his true kingly dignity reinforces the poem's framing of the roles of king and fool as polar opposites. The angel more directly contrasts "dignité" with folly in a line that is both conceptually and structurally opposed to Robert's assertion, "I am kyng and kyng wol be":



“mon.” In words clearly intended to show Robert how far he has fallen from his kingly station, the angel decrees that Robert shall be paraded around with an ape:

Thi counseyler schal ben an ape,  
 And o clothyng° you worth ischape.°     *one clothing; shall be dressed*  
 I schal him clothen as thi brother,  
 160 Of o clothyng – hit is non other;  
 He schal beo thin owne feere,°             *companion*  
 Sum wit of him thou miht lere.°             *learn*  
 (157–62)

The angel remarks repeatedly on how identical Robert’s station will be to the ape’s: Robert and the ape will wear identical clothing, as if the ape were Robert’s “brother” and “non other”; the ape will be Robert’s “owne feere.”

The romance uses its ape motif to repeatedly and emphatically portray Robert’s fall as a degradation.<sup>26</sup> Medieval literature and iconography often depict apes, much like fools, as jokers – or “japers” – kept by a lord for his amusement.<sup>27</sup> In *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, Lydgate has Poverty complain:

Off ffolkës off dyscressyoun,  
 I am had in derysyoun;  
 They holde off me but a Iape,  
 As a lord dothe off his ape.<sup>28</sup>

The character Poverty thus explicates a classed hierarchy, in which Robert has fallen from the highest to the lowest station. Other Middle English texts perform a similarly associative comparison of japers, janglers, apes, and folly. For instance, Chaucer’s *Parson’s Tale* establishes the moral reputation of all these figures by associating them with the service of the devil and sins of the tongue:

[649] ¶ Now comygh Iangelynge / that may not been withoutyn  
synne And as seyth Salmon it is a synne of a-pert folye / [. . .]

[651] ¶ Aftyr this comyth the synne of Iaperys / that been  
the deuyllys apis / for they make men to laughe at here folye / &  
at here Iaperyes / as folk doon at the gaudis of an Ape / [. . .] And  
right soo confortyn the vileyns wordis & knakis of Iaperis hem that  
trauayly in the seruyse of the dewil ¶ [653] These been the synnys  
that comyth of the tunge /<sup>29</sup>

The *Parson's Tale's* direct association of “the deuyllys apis” with laughter and “folye” ought to revise the more common scholarly accounts of both apes and fools. H. W. Janson's magisterial and still-cited *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* cogently argues that apes, long considered sinners and devilish figures in the Christian tradition, come to be regarded as more amusing, fool-like figures in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries – thanks in large part to the domesticating effect of the success of the vocational fool in late medieval and early Renaissance literature and art.<sup>30</sup> This reading of apes, though, relies heavily on a celebratory reading of fools. Texts like the *Parson's Tale* and *Robert of Cisyle* demonstrate that a more sinister interpretation of fools' and apes' pernicious effects was readily available to late medieval English readers.

Indeed, some Lancastrian texts invoked the images of apes and fools to show how precarious the king's position on his throne might be – and how easily disparaging words might damage his position. One such cautionary association of apes and folly with kingship appears in medieval Anglophone literature from Ireland – a translation of the *Secreta Secretorum* produced in the Pale during the reign of Henry V (1422). A passage on the necessity that the king maintain the law declares:

For manys lawes byth good alwey, Whan thay dyscordyth not from  
 the laue of god. By that hit apperyth that a kynge sholde be wyse  
 that he *be not y-callid* an ape. As Seynt bernard Seyth "*An  
 ape Envyronyth the fole kynge*, that sittyth in See, And therfor yf a  
 prynce be vnletterid, he sholde aftyr the consaill of letterid men  
 wyrche, and hym and his realme gouerne."<sup>31</sup>

Although the text claims to be a translation of Aristotle's advice to Alexander, these claims in no way hinder its references to St. Bernard and the book of Deuteronomy – or its pointed warnings that kings ought not to be "y-callid" apes or fools, but ought to be receptive to the "consaill of letterid men." These standards handily condemn Robert, whose failure to listen to the lettered clerk's liturgical translation makes him both a fool and an ape's social peer. Moreover, the *Secreta Secretorum's* insinuation that the compound noun "fole kynge" might juxtapose folly with kingship – with nary a lexical item as buffer between the two titles – is a pointed one, maugre the slight softening of the sentiment via the attribution to St. Bernard.

The poem continues even further in offering a blow-by-blow depiction of Robert's long fall down the hierarchical rungs of the courtly ladder. Robert's punishment by species confusion is intensified. As if to show that Robert can lose even more status than he loses in being paraded around as an ape's peer, the angel relegates Robert to eating meals with the hounds – *after* the hounds, in fact:

	Houndes, how so hit bifalle,	
	Schulen eten° with the in halle;	<i>Shall eat</i>
165	Thou schalt eten on the ground;	
	Thin assayour° schal ben an hound,	<i>taster</i>
	To assaye° thi mete bifore the;	<i>test</i>
	Wher is now thi dignité?" (163–68)	

Cambridge has a variant line here – the more biting “For thou art a kynge of dygnyte” (CUL Ff. 2.38, l. 174).<sup>32</sup> Whereas the Vernon line dwells on the king’s loss of dignity, Cambridge sarcastically contrasts kingly dignity with the king’s newfound dining place beside his own hounds – the lowest of the low creatures in the hall, who subsist on the scraps beneath the table.

Hounds are often used to analogize moral deficiency in premodern texts. For example, the Wycliffite Bible proffers an anti-canine proverb that suggests an equivalence between dog’s vomit and repeated folly: “As an hound that tourneth azeen to his vome; so an vnprudent man, that reherseth his folie.”<sup>33</sup> If, as the romance shows, Robert is determined in his rehearsal of folly, his demotion beneath the courtly hounds is a fitting yet rebarbative fate.<sup>34</sup> His utter loss of status is thus attributed to his determined adherence to cognitive error.

In other late medieval English texts, dogs are used in analogies that explicate fools’ moral corruption – specifically, their corrupt use of good words or counsel. A proverb in the Wycliffite translation of Ecclesiasticus says, “An arowe fastned in the hipe of a dogge, so a word in the herte of a fool.”<sup>35</sup> In a collection of proverbs in the Vernon manuscript – that is, the very manuscript that elsewhere contains one of the earliest versions of *Robert of Cisyle* – a collection of versified proverbs fleshes out this saying:

An arwe in an houndes buttoke  
 And counseil in a foles herte istoke  
 A-cordeþ wel, for nouþur makeþ sojourning;  
 Porw mouþ þei passen wiþ-outen restreyning.<sup>36</sup>

The verse rendition adds to the fool's half of the biblical saying an extra verb, "istoke," re-articulating the unbudgeable plight of counsel in the fool's heart. The fool's reception of counsel is analogized to an object stuck in a physical body – the metaphorized arrow in the hound's buttock. The proverb suggests lightly the premodern understanding of the fool's cognition as embodied – en fleshed – and the image it calls up of the injured hound hints at a certain possibility for pity, even as the proverb itself offers little hope of remedy for the fool.

Each of these comparisons of Robert to an animal species shows how "Godes miht" is "mak[ing] heyghe lowe" (ll. 44–5). Animals are portrayed as lowly, morally corrupting members of the court, and the angel repeatedly shows Robert-as-fool that he will be equally low. Just as the romance draws a distinction between human and animal, it draws one between human social classes: the role of king is greater than that of lower people, and the lowest person of all is the fool. The romance thus presents a damning portrait of the effects of loss of cognitive ability on the now-fool, who loses both the birthright to be treated as a king and the species-based right to be treated as a human.

The story's almost blow-by-blow explication of Robert's new-found equivalence to these lower forms, couched as a loss of "dignité," shows how thoroughly the romance's concept of folly as cognitive disability is entwined with the questions of class and what it means – or ought to mean – to be a king. The much later version of the romance found in CUL Ff. 2.38, which was

probably produced one hundred or more years after the Vernon manuscript, focuses even more closely on how folly is diametrically opposed to kingship.

While the great majority of Cambridge's text is nearly identical to Vernon's, it is about seventy lines longer than Vernon and most of the other early manuscripts, largely due to several insertions of lines that elaborate on the more direct early versions of the tale. In the section with the angel's decree that Robert will become a fool, then, CUL. Ff. 2.38 adds several lines that specifically cast Robert's trappings of folly as parodies of the customary habiliments of kingship. Specifically, it introduces the "babull," or bauble, which functions as a physical parody of the customary kingly scepter. Rather than asking Robert *where* his dignity has vanished, this version's angel says that Robert's "babull" shall *be* his dignity, mocking the king's expected scepter with the accoutrement of folly.<sup>37</sup>

Lyke a fole and a fole to bee  
 160 Thy babull schall be thy dygnyte  
 Thy crowne schall be newe schorne  
 ffor thy crowne of golde ys lorne (159-62)

The Cambridge version makes the ironic comparison of Robert's kingly accoutrements to his fool's trappings almost literally visual with the newly-inserted comparison of Robert's shorn crown to his gold crown. The couplet's antanaclasis – its repetition of the same word, "crowne," with two different denotations – suggests how thoroughly Robert's kingly status has been superseded by his folly. The same couplet's rhyming of "schorne" and "lorne" underscores the poem's figuring of the outward investiture of folly as loss of kingly degree – and, harking back to the previous couplet, loss of "dygnyte."

These trappings of folly, couched so repeatedly as the outward show of inward loss of cognitive and moral capacity, come to function as an externalized “defoulyng” of Robert the erstwhile king. In a century of English monarchs famously touchy on the question of the legitimacy of their kingship vis-à-vis other claimants to the throne, the romance’s portrait of a king’s “defoulyng” is a bold poetic move, indeed.

The romance overtly theorizes Robert’s newfound outward appearance of folly as a loss of kingly degree. This passage, which does not appear in the Vernon MS, emphasizes that Robert’s status as fool is the lowest possible “degre” in the court:

At lowar degre he myght not bee  
 Then be come a fole as thynkyth me  
 And euery man made scornynge  
 Of hym þat a fore was a nobull kyng  
 195 Lo how soone be goddys myght  
 He was lowe & that was ryght  
 He was euyr so harde be stadd  
 That mete nor drynke noone he had  
 But hys babull was in hys hande  
 200 The Aungell be fore hym made hym to stande  
 And seyde fole art þou kyng  
 He seyde ye° wyth owte lesynge° *yea; lying*<sup>38</sup>  
 And here aftur kyng wyll bee  
 The aungell seyde so semyth the° *it seems to thee*

(191–204)

Here, the angel declares that Robert’s belief that he *is* a king is merely a matter of seeming: Robert continues to deny the reality of his fall, even as he encounters all of its consequences. For this reason, this passage explicitly connects Robert’s bauble to his loss of kingship: his trappings of folly belie his words.<sup>39</sup> The

passage thus deftly gestures toward both the fool's erroneous beliefs and his contentious relationship with the truth. Robert's erroneous beliefs, which have caused his transformation into a fool, identify his newfound status as a cognitive deficiency that has become embodied. In this way, the romance insists on parallel socio-political and moral-cognitive hierarchies.

The poem aggressively pathologizes the change wrought in Robert's once-kingly appearance by his new habiliments of folly. The change is instantaneous and total, rendering Robert unrecognizable to his closest former associates. If Robert cannot acknowledge his lowly position as court fool, his courtiers cannot see that he has ever been anything else. In telling how utterly the members of Robert's own court fail to recognize him and thus spelling out the upshot of Robert's donning of the habiliments of folly, the poem employs a verb that suggests a total transformation of Robert's "figure":

Ther nas in court grom ne page,  
 190 That of the kyng ne made rage;  
 For no mon ne mihte him knowe,  
 He was *defygured* in a throwe. (189-92, emphasis added)

While both the *Middle English Dictionary* and the *Oxford English Dictionary* categorize "defygure" as an early form of "disfigured," the genealogy of these terms is complex. Both dictionaries cite this line in *Robert of Cisyle* as the earliest known instance of a denotation that signals transformation of appearance, rather than disfigurement in the more common modern sense of damage to the countenance. Still, both this context and early Middle English citations for "defygure" suggest that the two senses of the word – damaging alteration and

mere transformation – are imbricated. “Defygure” and “disfigure” are used to describe the effects of sin, as well as the effects of injury or disease. They are also used to describe the effects of successful disguise. Both senses are active in Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale*, in which Arcite looks in a mirror, seeing

That sith his face was so disfigured  
Of maladie the which he had endured  
He mighte wel, if that he bare him lowe,  
Live in Athenes evermore unknowe.<sup>40</sup>

In a very different context, the fourteenth-century *The Pricke of Conscience*, the connection to sin is overt:

[. . .]right angels [. . .]  
Fra þat blisful place thurgh syn þai felle,  
And bycome þan foule deuels of helle,  
And horribely defygurd, thurgh syn.<sup>41</sup>

If, then, Robert becomes “defygured” by merely donning the trappings of folly, the associations that these trappings bring into play include disease, sin, and a few hellish devils. Through his foolish cognitive and moral errors, the erstwhile king’s new appearance is linked to the “defyguring” effects of sin – a damning model for the visual rendering of invisible disability.

Robert’s erroneous cognitive judgment is shown to be intransigent as the narrative rendering of his downfall fails to correct his cognitive errors. Despite having become unrecognizable to his own courtiers, Robert remains confident that his brothers, the pope and the emperor, will recognize him as their brother and the king of Sicily. Whereas the rest of the court is clad in “riche aray” (267), Robert stands out in his fool’s garments, which clearly signal his low station:

The fool Robert also went,  
 Clothed in lodly garnement,<sup>o</sup> *hideous garments*  
 With foxes tayles mony aboute. [. . .]  
 An ape rod of his clothing,<sup>o</sup> *rode in the same clothing*  
 In tokne that he was underlying. (247-9, 271-2)

His outer raiment signals his inner disarray – that is, the fool’s clothes that are customary throughout medieval and early modern English literature are here explicitly theorized as witnesses to the fool’s inner cognitive state. The success of Robert’s punishment by demotion to court fool is borne out. When the angel-asking journeys with the entire court – including Robert-as-fool – to visit the pope and the emperor, the pope and emperor receive the angel as their own brother and the rightful king. The romance thus portrays the complete transformation of Robert’s status as brother of the highest spiritual and temporal rulers to brother of an ape. Meanwhile, the status of king is elevated in Robert’s absence; the throne is now inhabited by an angel claiming direct access to divine will.

The romance’s narration of this scene affords a complex account of knowledge acquisition: “The pope ne the emperour nouter, / The fol ne kneugh not for heor brother” (287-8). Clearly, the romance does not uniformly present the failure to know something – here, the failure to know *someone* – as a cognitive deficit; this scene is presented as the angel’s triumph, rather than the pope’s or emperor’s downfall. The pope and emperor’s lack of recognition for their brother is not depicted as the kind of error of thought that, together with deficits in moral judgment, make someone a fool. Rather, the “defygur[ing]” of Robert that makes him unrecognizable as king is construed as a revelation; those

who recognize him as a fool recognize him as he has ever been. The tale deals with the threat of invisible disability by rendering it visible, and by rendering it visible, disciplines and corrects it.

When his brothers fail to know him, Robert realizes the reality of his low position:

	Kyng Robert bigon to maken care, <sup>o</sup>	<i>to grieve</i>
	Muche more then he dude are, <sup>o</sup>	<i>did before</i>
295	Whon <sup>o</sup> his bretheren nolde <sup>o</sup> him knowe:	<i>When; brothers did</i>
	<i>not</i>	
	“Allas,” quath he, “nou am I lowe.” [. . .]	
305	“Allas, allas,” was al his song. (293–6, 305)	

The brothers’ failure to “knowe” Robert is rhymed with the reality of his “lowe” degree, and the man who has derided the Magnificat – prophetic liturgy, in his case – is reduced to a minimalistic song of lament: “Allas, allas.” Like other English literary fools, Robert’s song is outside the bounds of liturgy: having earlier misapprehended the critically prophetic words of evensong, he can now offer only a song of two plaintive syllables.

Yet these two minimalistic syllables signal Robert’s long-delayed acquisition of moral knowledge. Having seen the futility of his insistence that he is a king, Robert relents and prays, acknowledging his folly:

	For that name I hedde pride,	
	As angels that gonne from joye glyde,	
	And in twynklyng of an eithe	
	God binom heore maystrie. <sup>o</sup>	<i>took away their power</i>
345	So hath he myn, for my gult,	
	Now am I wel lowe ipult,	
	And that is right that I so be.	
	Lord, on thi fool Thow have pité.	

I hedde an errour in myn herte,  
 350 And that errour doth me smerte.  
 Lord, I leeved<sup>o</sup> not on The. *believed*  
 On thi fol Thou have pité  
 Holy Writ I hedde in dispyt,  
 For that is reved my delyt,<sup>o</sup> *taken away my delight*  
 355 For that is riht a fool I be,  
 Lord, on thi fool thou have pité. (341–56)

Robert's prayer almost painstakingly recapitulates the phrases that, earlier in the poem, have been used to point out his folly and to foreshadow his downfall. The opening of his prayer echoes the clerk's warning that "God may do, withoute lyghe, / His wil in twynklyng of an eigne" (39–49). Robert's words recall the prophetic promise that the high can be made low (45–7), the characterization of his "herte" as "unstable" (50), and the descriptions of his "errour[s]" of "thought" (58 *passim*). His admission that, as a fool, he "leeved not" on God affiliates him with the God-denying fool of Psalm 52, reinforcing both the romance's and the broader literary tradition's cognitive-moral condemnations of fools. In this way, his prayer for restoration holds his former cognitive and moral errors up to view: scrutiny of cognitive disability is the precondition for its eventual remedy.

Robert's prayer serves as more than a reflective inversion of the words that have presaged his fall: it attaches the label of "gult" (345) to his actions. Moreover, instead of attempting to refute the label of fool, Robert claims it for himself (348, 352, 355). The phrase he returns to every few lines — "Lord, on thi fool Thow have pité" — serves as a quasi-liturgical refrain. It closely echoes one of the oldest phrases in the Western Christian liturgy: "*Kyrie eleison*," or "Lord, have

mercy.” In Robert’s repeated pleas for pity – not general pity, but pity on “thi fool” – he utters a particularized *Kyrie eleison*, a simultaneously ritualized and yet individual plea. If Robert’s prayer has received relatively scant critical attention, except in its bare outlines, it is perhaps because pride has been identified as Robert’s besetting sin, and it is hardly surprising that a prominent deadly sin should require a prayer for pity. Yet Robert has been accused of more than pride: the poem explicitly names his folly, and it frames his movement from king to fool as a deposition. The deposition is attributed, in part, to the errors in thought and moral judgment that function as a form of disabled cognition. The shock of the deposition of the king is softened by the hope of his restoration and continued reign.

For the role of fool, however, there is no such promised redemption. Through Robert-as-fool’s own words, the poem attributes guilt – “gult” (345) – to his particular form of cognitive disability. Folly is shown to be a form of cognitive disability that requires divine remediation. Furthermore, the poem’s deliberate use of Robert’s new habiliments to conflate the vocation of fooling with the general condition of folly elides any firm boundaries between the deliberate performance of folly, the non-deliberate condition of cognitive disability, and the occasional moral foible. Exemplary of this elision is the treatment of Robert’s wit, which is represented as “turn[ed] vn to folye” and instrumental to Robert’s sinning. The Trinity Dublin manuscript alludes to the trouble with Robert’s wit quite early on, right after Robert falls asleep in church:

“Whan Robert woke he was nye out of wyt.”<sup>42</sup> The Cambridge manuscript amplifies this allusion near the end of its narrative. In Cambridge, an addition of several lines to Robert’s prayer attributes his downfall to the corruption of wit that leads to folly:

ffor when y seyde in my sawe  
 That nobynge myght make me lawe  
 395 And holy wrytt dyspysed wyth all  
 And for þy wrech of wrechys men me calle  
 And fole of all folys y am 3yt<sup>o</sup> *yet*  
 ffor he ys a fole god wrottyþ well hyt  
 That turneth hys wytt vn to folye  
 400 So haue y done mercy y crye  
 Now mercy lorde for þy pyte  
     Aftur my gylte geue not me  
     Let me a bye hyt in my lyve  
 Pat y haue synned wyth wyttys fyve  
 405 ffor hyt ys ryght a fole that I bee  
 Now lorde of þy fole þou haue pyte (393–406)

The phrases “wrech of wrechys” and “fole of all folys” are sincerely expressed, despite their formulaic – not to mention Pauline – quality.<sup>43</sup> These hyperboles serve to weaponize the self-critique in Robert’s admission that “he ys a fole god wrottyþ well hyt / That turneth hys wytt vn to folye” (398–99). Robert’s words, like many other premodern critiques of fools, suggest that Robert deliberately disables his own wit by choosing to turn it toward folly.<sup>44</sup> Even more incisively, Robert admits that he has “synned wyth wyttys fyve” (404), thus linking the problem of the commission of sin with the susceptibility of the five wits to corruption.<sup>45</sup> The poem’s model of folly as cognitive disability is tautological: folly is presented as self-disabling – its own cause, and its own punishment. This

causal structure enables the poem's equation of access to power with cognitive status.

Robert's restoration can be effected only once he buys into this view of folly. Once he does thus eviscerate his own actions and standing as a fool, King Robert is restored to his former station. He commands that the tale of his sojourn as a fool be written. His story is written and disseminated abroad. As Walsh has observed, the romance here takes on a metafictional quality, writing the very acts of its writing and dissemination:<sup>46</sup>

He let write hit riht anon,  
 Hou God myd His muchel miht  
 430 Made him lowe, as hit was riht.  
 This storie he sende everidel<sup>o</sup> *every bit of it*  
 To his bretheren, under his seel. (428-32)

The story, as written, thus inscribes the reformed king's endorsement of his temporary deposition to the status of fool as a means of reform. It is perhaps this culmination of the story that led Dieter Mehl to dub it a "homiletic romance."<sup>47</sup>

The Cambridge version buttresses this critical opinion with additional lines that suggest that the Pope, the king's brother, uses the story as homiletic fodder:

495 The Pope of Rome here of can preche  
 And the pepull he can teche  
 That þer pryde þey schulde forsake (495-7)

This version brings the focus back to pride, perhaps a predictable-enough focal point for a pope's homilies. The pope warns that "ffor pryde wolde yf hyt myght bee / Ouyr mownte [over-mount] goddys dygnyte" (503-4). His warning suggests that pride has the potential to do more than merely rob the prideful of

their “dygnyte”; it can also threaten the very “dygnyte” of God. If, as the romance suggests, the relationship between pride and folly is synecdochic, then folly is threatening indeed.

This threat may account for the thorough measures Robert and his brother, the pope, take to capture an appropriately homiletic version of the story in writing. The romance itself then localizes the story by referring to its status “[a]t Rome” and “[a]t seynt Petur kyrke.” The pope’s homiletic intervention emphasizes “godys wyll,” suggesting that this form of cognitive disability, folly, is a punishment – for the sin of pride, for errors of thought:

Thys storye ys wythowten lye  
 At Rome wretyn in memorye  
 At seynt Petur kyrke hyt ys knawe° *known*  
 510 And that ys crystys owne lawe  
 That lowe be hye at godys wyll  
 And hye lowe thogh hyt be ylle (507–12)

The romance’s assurance that Robert’s story is “wretyn in memorye” and known at St. Peter’s in Rome revises the relationship between the romance and its readers, who have been effectively written into the story. This immediate intervention in the present is being recovered anew by scholars: Raluca Radulescu has shown how fifteenth-century romances do not merely trace their historiographic genealogies back to their sources, but make interventions in the sociopolitical landscape in which they themselves are created and circulated.<sup>48</sup> To the readers of this metafictional conclusion, the pope’s sermon implies that folly is a remediable punishment – at least if one happens to be a king – with the prospect of being restored to an appropriately high station and moral position.

Still, its effect on fools who are not born as kings remains, at least in this romance, an open question, especially to its readers, who are presumably not all born to kingship.

*Robert of Cisyle's* view of folly as its own cause and punishment was widely disseminated in the fifteenth century, thanks to the romance's considerable circulation. The story of Robert had transgeneric influence, in addition to the popularity evinced by the ten surviving manuscripts of the *Robert of Cisyle* romance. The priest John Audelay mentioned the story of Robert as a negative exemplum in a poem, "*Hic incipit psalmus de Magnificat*," set in the middle of a sequence of hymns to the Virgin Mary and other female saints. The poem presents itself as an elaborated version of Mary's *Magnificat*, spoken in her voice and imagined to take place simultaneously in the present era and in the biblical context. In Audelay's poem, Mary is both "gret" with child (l. 25) and familiar with the medieval story of *Robert of Cisyle*. In speaking of God's might and power, she—like the clerk in the romance—emphasizes his ability to make "[p]roud men" low (ll. 41, 42, quoted below). Also as in the romance versions of *Robert of Cisyle*, she suggests that Robert's error is an error of thought (l. 50, below). Certainly, Robert's insistence on his high position, coupled with his ignorance of the liturgy spoken by the famously humble "hand mayden of the lord," evinces a misprision of the malleability of social degree in the Lucan story.<sup>49</sup>

Mary herself agrees with the *Robert of Cisyle* romance in assigning Robert's

blame to a form of species confusion, sketched out in the background of her account. This allusion, as in the rest of the poem, is framed by “*Mangnificat* [sic] *anima mea Dominum*” (“My soul magnifies the Lord”), the famous opening of Mary’s biblical speech. This refrain closes every stanza in the poem except, notably the stanza that explicitly takes up the story of Robert of Cisyle (stanza 2, below):

“His myght has made, in his pouere,  
 Proud men to sparpil<sup>o</sup> from his face *scatter*  
 With the mynd of his hert, fere and nere;  
 That nyl not seche mercé and grace,  
 45 Ne hem amend wile thai han space,  
 Thai schul be cast fro his kyngdam,  
 And have no part within that place.  
*Mangnificat anima mea Dominum.*

“Thenke on Kyng Robart Sesel:  
 50 He went<sup>o</sup> no lord had be bot he, *thought*  
 Yet sodenlé downe he felle  
 And was put into a folis degré!  
 An angel was set apon his se,  
 Fore he had these verse in his scornynge –  
 55 *Deposuit potentis de sede* –  
 And sayd in heven ther was no Kyng.

“Thus myghté men God pittis ful loue,<sup>o</sup> *puts very low*  
 And meke men he liftis ful hie,  
 That his grace and his goodnes here wil knowe,  
 60 And seche his grace and his mercé,  
 And no nother sekyrly<sup>o</sup> – *certainly*  
 At the dredful Day of Dome,  
 Here dedis schal deme ham hopynly.<sup>o</sup> *openly*  
*Mangnificat anima mea Dominum.”* (ll. 41–64)<sup>50</sup>

The ironies of this intertextual circularity abound: Mary’s song, inscribed in Audelay’s poem, invokes the tale of the king, which in turn accounts for its own ensconcement in text and homily. Moreover, the one stanza that abandons the

*"Mangneficat anima mea Dominum"* line turns instead to the line from the *Magnificat* that rings through *Robert of Cisyle* and foretells the downfall that the king is bringing on himself. Several phrases in Audelay's poem directly recall the romance versions of *Robert of Cisyle*. The romance manuscripts' vacillating concern with mind and heart are here instantiated in the cautionary explication of what God can do with the "mynd of his heart" (43). The poem's strategic summation of Robert's thought closely follows the romance texts by naming Robert's erroneous belief: "He went no lord had be bot he" (50). Likewise, Audelay replicates the romance versions' framing of the "folis degré" as a downfall from high to low. Audelay even recalls some formal elements of the romance: his poem, itself an adaptation of a biblical text long re-purposed for liturgical use, echoes the quasi-liturgical nature of Robert's prayer, with its refrain that repeatedly invokes the name of "Lord." In many ways, Audelay's adaptation of the story of "Kyng Robart Sesel" provides an account of the king's self-inflicted downfall that mirrors the concerns of the romance with erroneous thought, mutability of degree, and divine punishment for folly.

In contrast, though, Audelay's poem omits any mention of Robert's eventual restoration. Instead, it emphasizes the idea of folly as punishment and warning. Its invocation of the "dredful Day of Dome" suggests that, at least in some variations, the homiletic version of Robert's story is used primarily to warn hearers away from the kind of folly that will endanger them on Doomsday. Even more than the writers and scribes who produced the romance versions, Audelay

flirts with the politically dangerous implications of the king's story, especially in such lines as "*Deposuit potentis de sede — / And sayd in heven ther was no Kyng*" (55–6). These lines play with the temporality of kingship, subtly contrasting the monarch's momentary grasp of earth-bound power with the divine rule he denies. Perhaps Audelay's flattening-out of the details of Robert's material transformation — the shorn crown, bauble, brother-ape, canine dinner companions, and "defygured" appearance — lessen the shock value of the process by which the king's cognitive and moral errors are made visible. Indeed, although the words of the *Magnificat* would seem to indicate a mutability of social status without reverent respect for class, both Audelay and the *Robert of Cisyle* promulgators proffer a reading of the *Magnificat* that maintains a certain respect for kingly and other high stations, as long as the high person who has been made low makes sure to repent. This adaptive nuancing of the familiar "Magnificat" liturgy for late-fourteenth- and fifteenth-century English audiences may evince an appropriate political caution during the famously touchy Lancastrian period. Yet the multiple poems' efforts to keep distance between high and low, kings and fools still reveal that distance to be sometimes as narrow as the width of a coordinating conjunction, or invisible as the denotation behind the letters that spell out the word "crowne."

## Coda

About three decades and one change of monarch after the production of the last of the *Robert of Cisyle* romance manuscripts, there appeared a brief entry in BL. Add. 29777: "In this yeare [1529] an Enterlude named kinge Roberte of Scissill was playde at the high Crosse in Chester."<sup>51</sup> Did the king in this play become a fool? How was his folly staged? Was he permitted a restoration? It is impossible to know.<sup>52</sup> What this tantalizing entry does tell us is that the legend of Robert of Cisyle survived outside the context of medieval manuscripts and made its way onto the sixteenth-century stage – the very stage on which, over the next century, some of the oddest, sauciest, and best-remembered English fools would tread.

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<sup>1</sup> Linguistic, rhetorical, editorial, transmission, and source studies of *Robert of Cisyle* include Joan Baker, “*Deposuit potentes: Apocalyptic Rhetoric in the Middle English Robert of Sicily*,” *Medieval Perspectives* 12 (1997): 25–45; Joan Baker, “Editing the Middle English Romance *Robert of Sicily: Theory, Text, and Method*,” *Text* 10 (1997): 161–79; Lillian Herlands Hornstein, “*King Robert of Sicily: A New Manuscript*,” *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 78.5 (1963 Dec): 453–458; Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, “The Return of the King: A Reconsideration of *Robert of Sicily*,” *Folklore* 93.2 (1982): 216–219; Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, “Oral Tradition in the Middle English Romance: The Case of *Robert of Cisyle*,” in *Oral Poetics in Middle English Poetry*, ed. Mark C. Amodio and Sarah Gray Miller (New York: Garland, 1994), 71–87; John Simons, “A Byzantine Identity for *Robert of Cisyle*,” in *The Matter of Identity in Medieval Romance*, ed. Phillipa Hardman (Woodbridge, England: Brewer, 2002), 103–111; and Jeremy J. Smith, “Mapping the Language of the Vernon Manuscript,” in *The Making of the Vernon Manuscript: The Production and Contexts of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. a. 1.*, ed. Wendy Scase (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2013), 49–70.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 3, in particular.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 1. Yet another critical – if semi-intentionally humorous – portrayal of the cognitively disabled, “natural” fool appears in the post-Reformation Protestant play *The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art*. (See Chapter 3.) An intentionally comedic and yet dark, almost sardonic representation of fools appears in *Twelfth Night*. (See Chapter 4.)

<sup>4</sup> Stephen D. Powell has suggested that the differing manuscripts and their contexts introduce generic variability in the *Robert of Cisyle* story. See, especially, Powell’s work on reception environments in Stephen D. Powell, “Manuscript Context and the Generic Instability of *Robert of Cisyle*,” *Neophilologische Mitteilungen: Bulletin de la Société Néophilologique/Bulletin of the Modern Language Society* 100.3 (1999): 271–289. See also Powell’s “Multiplying Textuality: Generic Migration in the Manuscripts of *Robert of Cisyle*,” *Anglia: Zeitschrift für Englische Philologie* 116.2 (1998): 171–197; and “Textual and Generic Instability in the Middle English ‘Robert of Cisyle’: A Study with Critical Edition,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> See Martin W. Walsh, who has written the most comprehensive account of the lost dramatic versions of the story in “Looking in on a Lost Drama: The Case of *King Robert of Sicily*,” *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 14 (1988): 191–201. Walsh summarizes the known dramatic performances: “This story was dramatized on at least three occasions: at Lincoln, c. 1452; at Chester in 1529; and a Latin version

at St. Omers on the continent in 1623, a fair indication of its theatrical popularity" ("Looking in on a Lost Drama," p. 191).

<sup>6</sup> This chapter uses quotations primarily from the Vernon Manuscript (c. 1390) and Cambridge Ff.2.38 (c. 1500). Line numbers and glosses of the Middle English text are selectively reproduced from the same edition. Except where indicated otherwise, citations of *Robert of Cisyle* are from Edward E. Foster's edition, *Amis and Amiloun, Robert of Cisyle, and Sir Amadace*, ed. Edward E. Foster, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997). Foster's edition takes the Vernon Manuscript as its copy-text, with some consultation of Horstmann, Nuck, and French and Hale. See *The Vernon Manuscript: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. Poet. a.1, With Introduction by A. I. Doyle* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987); Carl Horstmann, ed., *Sammlung Altenglischer Legenden* (Heilbronn: Henninger, 1878), pp. 209-19; Robert Nuck, ed., *Robert of Cisyle* (Berlin: Bernstein, 1887); and Walter Hoyt French and Charles Brockway Hale, eds., *Middle English Metrical Romances* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1930), pp. 931-46.

Selected scholarship on the Vernon Manuscript includes A. S. G. Edwards, "The Contexts for the Vernon Romances," in *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Cambridge, England; Rochester, NY: Brewer, 1990), 159-70; Vincent Gillespie, "Moral and Penitential Lyrics," *A Companion to the Middle English Lyric*, ed. Thomas G. Duncan (Cambridge, England: Brewer, 2005), 68-95; and Wendy Scase, ed., *The Vernon Manuscript: A Facsimile Edition of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet.a.1*, Oxford, Bodleian Digital Texts 3 (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Donna B. Hamilton, "Some Romance Sources for *King Lear*: Robert of Sicily and Robert the Devil," *Studies in Philology* 71 (1974): 173-191.

<sup>8</sup> Raluca L. Radulescu, *Romance and Its Contexts in Fifteenth-Century England: Politics, Piety and Penitence*, Woodbridge, England: Brewer, 2013; Paul Strohm, *England's Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation, 1399-1422* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Raluca L. Radulescu, *Romance and Its Contexts in Fifteenth-Century England: Politics, Piety and Penitence*, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> For a fuller account of Henry VI's cult in trans-Reformational English literature, see Catherine Sanok, "Good King Henry and the Genealogy of Shakespeare's First History Plays" *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 40.1 (Winter 2010): 37-63. In some contrast to the account of the Lancastrian need for propagandized power I have sketched out here, Sanok notes that Henry VI's very weakness as a sovereign may have proved integral to the saint's cult, however unofficial, that sprang up after his death: "English men and women connected to Henry VI not through the vertical political fictions of the body

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politic but through something more complexly horizontal, a citizenship rooted in the body and routed through the cult of a saint whose forfeit of sovereign power allowed him to respond to their particular needs and to recognize in their lives the forms of fragmentation – physical, affective, economic – that make community difficult and necessary” (p. 56).

<sup>11</sup> A. R. Myers, ed., *English Historical Documents, 1327–1485*, Vol. 4 (London: Routledge, 1969), p. 259.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Raluca L. Radulescu, *Romance and Its Contexts in Fifteenth-Century England: Politics, Piety and Penitence*, p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> On Robert’s pride, see Lillian Herlands Hornstein, “King Robert of Sicily: Analogues and Origins,” *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 79.1 (1964 Mar): 13–21; and Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 186–7.

Liliana Sikorska suggests a slightly different reading, arguing that “it is not pride that is the most abhorred sin, but anger, the emotion which is the outcome of the sin of pride.” Liliana Sikorska, “Dealing with Anger: Robert of Cisyle and the Medieval Didactic Tradition,” *Poetica: An International Journal of Linguistic-Literary Studies* 66 (2006): 115–125.

<sup>15</sup> Mark 7:18–19, in *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, with the Apocryphal Books, in the Earliest English Versions, Made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and His Followers*, Vol. 4, ed. Josiah Forshall and Frederic Madden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1850), p. 107.

<sup>16</sup> Mark 7:20–22, in *The Holy Bible, [ . . . ] Made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and His Followers*, Vol. 4, p. 107, emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup> The form “defoulyng” appears elsewhere in Wycliffite writings. See, for example, Wyclif’s *De Officio Pastoralis*, which uses this term in advancing the argument that the laity should be enabled to judge the worthiness of prelates:

& þus siþ crist biddiþ iuge his werkis, why shulden not men juge & fle false prelatis? it is al oon to seye þis feynyng & to lette men to fle fro fendis & blesse hem fro þer wickid werkis, but teche men to assente to hem. lord, siþ crist biddiþ men þat þey shulden not trowe to hym but 3if he dide his fadirs werkis, what priuylegie [*sic*] hap anticrist heere þat men shulden trowe & susteyne hym in doying of þe deuels werkis? Also crist techiþ in þe gospel þat 3if salt vanyȝsche away it is not worþ aftir but to be

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castun out & be *defoulid* of men; & þis salt shulde be þes  
 prelatiſ. lord, wher þis casting out & þis *defouling* þat criſt  
 ſpekþ of be ʒyuyng of godiſ to ſiche curatiſ, &  
 mayntenynge of hem in þiſ ſtaat.

In F. D. Matthew, ed., *The English Works of Wyclif: Hitherto Unprinted* (London: Early English Text Society, 1880), pp. 418–19, emphasis added.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Chapters 1 and 3.

<sup>19</sup> See the discussions of Beryn's lack of learning (Chapter 1), Moros' ignorance of Latin in *The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art* (Chapter 3), and Sir Andrew's ignorance of languages other than English in *Twelfth Night* (Chapter 4).

<sup>20</sup> *Lydgate's Troy Book*, ed. Henry Bergen (with side-notes by Dr. Furnivall), Part II, Early English Text Society (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., and Oxford University Press, 1908), p. 799, Book V, ll. 913–14.

<sup>21</sup> *The Romaunt of the Rose*, in Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, et al., 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987), p. 737, ll. 4831, 4835.

<sup>22</sup> Luke 1:51, in *The New Testament, Translated by William Tyndale: The text of the Worms edition of 1526 in original spelling*, ed. W. R. Cooper (London: The British Library, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> Luke 1:51, in *The Holy Bible, [. . .] Made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and His Followers*, Vol. 4, p. 146, emphasis added.

<sup>24</sup> The full text of the Wycliffite translation of the Lucan Magnificat is:

And Marie ſeide, My ſoule magnyfieth the Lord, and my ſpirit  
 hath gladid in God, myn heelthe. For he hath biholden the  
 mekenesse of hiſ hand mayde. Loo! forsoth of thiſ alle  
 generaciouſ ſchulen ſeie me bleſſid. For he that iſ myʒti hath  
 done grete thingiſ to me, and hiſ name iſ hooly. And hiſ mercy iſ  
 fro kynrediſ in to kynrediſ, to men dredinge hiſ. He made myʒte  
 in hiſ arme, he ſcateride proude men with mynde of hiſ herte. He  
 puttide doun myʒty men fro ſeete, and enhaunſide meke. He hath  
 fillid hungry men with goode thingiſ, and he hath left ryche men  
 voyde. He, havyng mynde of hiſ mercy, took up Iſrael, hiſ child;  
 aſ he hath ſpoken to oure fadriſ, to Abraham and to hiſ ſeed, in to  
 worldiſ.

Luke 1:51, in *The Holy Bible, [. . .] Made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and His Followers*, Vol. 4, p. 146, emphasis added.

<sup>25</sup> See also my introduction to this dissertation.

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<sup>26</sup> See Stephen D. Powell, "Manuscript Context and the Generic Instability of *Robert of Cisyle*," pp. 279–80.

<sup>27</sup> See H. W. Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: University of London, 1952).

<sup>28</sup> *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man, Englished by John Lydgate, A. D. 1426, from the French of Guillaume de Deguileville, A. D. 1335, Part I*, ed. F. J. Furnivall, Early English Text Society (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1899), p. 607, ll. 22747–50.

<sup>29</sup> *The Parson's Tale*, in Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Cambridge MS of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (University Library, Gg.4.27)*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, Vol. 5 (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1868–1879), p. 633, ll. 649, 651–3.

<sup>30</sup> H. W. Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore*, pp. 13–73, 199–238.

<sup>31</sup> *Three Prose Versions of the Secreta Secretorum*, ed. Robert Steele, Vol. 1, Early English Text Society (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1898), p. 149, emphasis added. Steele' and F. J. Furnivall's excitement at the discovery of this version of the *Secreta Secretorum* is charmingly palpable: Steele writes that this text, "perhaps the only lengthy work known written in the English of the Pale early in the fifteenth century, is so important, linguistically and historically, that Dr. Furnivall wishes it to be in the hands of students as soon as possible. I have therefore postponed my Introduction and Notes" ("Note," n. p.).

<sup>32</sup> All quotations of CUL Ff. 2. 38's *Robert of Cisyle* text are from Joan Baker, ed., *Robert of Cisyle*, CUL Ff. 2. 38, diplomatic ed. Available at: <http://www2.fiu.edu/~bakerj/RS/texts/CULFF238.htm>. Accessed on: July 12, 2014. I am grateful to Professor Baker, who has generously made her diplomatic editions of all ten *Robert of Cisyle* manuscripts available on her website.

<sup>33</sup> Proverbs 26:11, in *The Holy Bible, [ . . . ] Made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and His Followers*, Vol. 3, p. 42.

<sup>34</sup> An even sharper passage in the Wycliffite diatribe "Of Prelates" includes the accusation that prelates "zeuen cure of soulis to worldly foolis, werse þan ben heþene houndis." It is difficult to assess who comes off worst in this analogy – the prelates, their clerics, or the fools and hounds to whom the corrupt clergy are compared by way of insult. "Of Prelates," in F. D. Matthew, ed., *The English Works of Wyclif*, p. 104.

<sup>35</sup> Ecclesiasticus 19:12, in *The Holy Bible, [ . . . ] Made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and His Followers*, Vol. 3, p. 158.

<sup>36</sup> In Carl Horstmann and Frederick James Furnivall, eds., *The Minor Poems of the*

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*Vernon MS (with a few from the Digby mss. 2 and 86)*, 2 vols., Early English Text Society (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1892-1901), p. 531, ll. 133–6.

<sup>37</sup> See Chapter 3's more extended discussion of the bauble as an accoutrement of folly.

<sup>38</sup> I have supplied light glosses for the quotations from CUL. Ff. 2.38.

<sup>39</sup> For more on the fool's "babull," or bauble, see Chapter 3.

<sup>40</sup> *The Knight's Tale*, in Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, et al., 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987), p. 44, ll. 1403–6.

<sup>41</sup> *The Pricke of Conscience*, ed. Richard Morris, The Philological Society (Berlin: A. Asher & Co., 1863), p. 64, ll. 2336, 2338–40.

<sup>42</sup> *Robert of Cisyle*, Trinity Dublin 432, ed. Joan Baker, l. 16. Available at: <http://www2.fiu.edu/~bakerj/RS/texts/TrinityD432.htm>. Accessed on: June 25, 2014.

<sup>43</sup> Martin W. Walsh has also noted the Pauline resonance of these phrases. See Martin W. Walsh, "The King His Own Fool: *Robert of Cicyle*," in *Fools and Folly*, ed. Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1996), 34–46, p. 43.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Chapter 1's analysis of the *Tale of Beryn*'s protagonist, Chapter 3's analysis of *The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art*'s Moros, and Chapter 4's analysis of *Twelfth Night*'s Sir Andrew Aguecheek.

<sup>45</sup> For a deeper discussion of the five wits as faculties susceptible to disability, see Chapter 1.

<sup>46</sup> See Martin W. Walsh, "The King His Own Fool: *Robert of Cicyle*," p. 43.

<sup>47</sup> Dieter Mehl, *The Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 120.

<sup>48</sup> See Raluca L. Radulescu, *Romance and Its Contexts in Fifteenth-Century England: Politics, Piety and Penitence* (Woodbridge, England: Brewer, 2013), especially pp. 1–56. Radulescu's work shows how "perennial concerns over human suffering and penitence and genealogical anxiety were modulated in order to serve multiple interests in a period dominated by dynastic fragility and violent political changes" (p. 3).

<sup>49</sup> Luke 1:38, in *The Holy Bible, [. . .] Made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and His Followers*, Vol. 4, p. 145.

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<sup>50</sup> John the Blind Audelay, *Poems and Carols* (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 302), ed. Susanna Fein, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2009). Line numbers and glosses are selectively reproduced from this edition.

<sup>51</sup> Qtd. in Lawrence M. Clopper, ed., *Chester* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), p. 26.

<sup>52</sup> A letter published by J. P. Collier, which purports to furnish more detail on the production, is now generally thought likely to be a nineteenth-century forgery. David Mills sums up the problems with Collier's letter's claims:

In 1831 J.P. Collier published a letter which he claimed to have found among loose papers of Thomas Cromwell in the chapter house at Westminster. The document is not now extant, and given Collier's subsequent activities in forging or inventing documents its existence must be suspect. It purports to be from the mayor and corporation to an unknown nobleman seeking his approval for the representation of 'Robert of Sicily,' 'a play, which som of the companyes of this Cittye of Chester, at theyr costes and charges, are makyng redy' and which they propose to play 'on Saynt Peter's day nexte ensewing.' Individual companies are recorded as performing individual plays from the Whitsun Plays at the High Cross, but no similar record of the performance of a semisecular play by a company has survived. Even if Collier's document were genuine, it would leave considerable problems, particularly about a performance upon St Peter's Day (which seems to relate to the statement that the production was to be in front of St Peter's Church).

David Mills, *Recycling the Cycle: The City of Chester and Its Whitsun Plays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), p. 128.

### Chapter 3

#### Fool's Bauble, Fool's Babble:

#### The Accoutrements of Cognitive Failure in *The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art*

DISCIPLINE: "A fool uttereth his anger in haste,  
 And hath not the wit measure to keep; [. . .]  
 As fair legs to a cripple are unseemly,  
 So to a fool honor is undecent;  
 As snow in harvest is untimely,  
 So is it a plague where a fool is regent."<sup>1</sup>

W. Wager's *The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art*, entered in the Stationers' Register in 1569, features a fool, Moros, as its protagonist. Depicting Moros' growth from boyhood to youth and old age, Wager confronts his fool with allegorical characters—Discipline, Piety, and so forth—who attempt to educate him. Moros steadfastly resists these attempts, preferring to clown around, literally, with the characters who are specifically named after vices, rather than improve on his slim knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Moros' foolish refusal of education is couched in heavily moralized terms. As Barbara Swain has previously commented, "The text is laden with scriptural comments upon fools, and the audience is not for a moment allowed to forget that to be a fool is practically to be a condemned sinner hastening to damnation."<sup>3</sup> Wager utilizes the allegorical conventions of a morality play, but he replaces the exuberant wit of the best-known medieval morality plays with warnings against popery. The play uses this

morality-play rubric to depict Moros as utterly bereft of his wits. As this chapter's epigraph shows, the fool's honor is analogized to physical disability: "As fair legs to a cripple are unseemly, / So to a fool honor is undecent" (ll. 1641-2). Likewise, his governance is likened to a pandemic ("So is it a plague where a fool is regent," l. 1644), and his failures in wit and temperance are described as a failure in keeping musical time (he "hath not the wit measure to keep," l. 1638).

Throughout the play, the Moros demonstrates his cognitive and moral deficiencies by spontaneously erupting into song at inappropriate moments. He regularly disrupts the action with his inane singing. He also persistently chooses his singing over forms of education: his inadequacies in Latin and moral knowledge are regularly pointed out by Discipline and other characters. In these ways, Moros demonstrates the deficits in his moral knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Even when he has grown to manhood, he proudly proclaims, "Singing and playing I love above all thing" (l. 1503). He proves his point by persuading his friends Cruelty, Impiety, and Ignorance to join him in—as the stage direction casually puts it—" [s]ing[ing] some merry song" (*s. d.* at l. 1513).

Discipline's reproofs become more and more damning. He is soon likening Moros to the atheistic fool of the Psalms: "All his senses he applied to vice; [...] Of such the Prophet did prophesy, / The fool saith in his heart there is no God. / Corrupt are they and full of villainy" (1608-10).<sup>5</sup> The solitary actor who stands in for the congregated People concurs, saying of Moros, "[W]e think him to be a devil of hell. / Neither learning, wisdom nor reason / Will serve where he taketh opinion" (ll. 1698-

1700). None of these critiques of his cognitive faculties or piety convinces Moros to amend his ways. He resolutely rejects both knowledge and wisdom, even when he is confronted by the character God's Judgment. God's Judgment strikes Moros down with a sword and orders that Moros be stripped of his clothes. Upon being stripped of his outer coat, Moros is revealed to be wearing a fool's coat underneath.<sup>6</sup> Unconcerned by this revelation of his true colors, Moros declares, "If it please the devil me to have, / Let him carry me away on his back" (ll. 1853–4). He is granted his wish and borne off to the devil. It's not a subtle play.

*The Longer Thou Livest* puts the performance of popular song in diametric opposition to intellectual and moral improvement. Specifically, as we shall see, it portrays the problems engendered by the fool's pairing of nonsense syllables with solfège—a system of musical pedagogy that assigns sung syllables to specific notes in musical scales—as a direct impediment to his moral education.<sup>7</sup> In this way, the fool's musical disruptions become both the indicator and the instrument of his continued cognitive failures. The play makes musical disruption central to its characterization of Moros' folly, and it frames Moros' singing as a cognitive disability—a disability defined entirely in terms of its deficiencies.

The character Wrath describes Moros succinctly: "He is as very a fool, I dare say, / And as stark an idiot as ever bare bable" (ll. 674–5). This chapter considers two questions: First, what does it mean to be a "very [. . .] fool" and a "stark [. . .] idiot" in this pre-Shakespearean early modern drama? Second, what does it mean for a fool to "bare bable" in the cultural contexts of premodern England? In order to answer these

questions, this chapter begins by using extensively-circulated premodern texts, such as Chaloner's 1549 translation of Erasmus' *The Praise of Folly*, to examine the vernacular literary historiography of cognitive aberrations in the late fourteenth through early seventeenth centuries. Utilizing an approach intended to shed light on changes *and* congruities in the language surrounding folly and disability across several centuries, this chapter shows how a key material sign of the fool's trade – the bauble – registers as an accoutrement of cognitive disability across a wide range of genres in premodern English literature. Finally, it utilizes these investigations of the fool's language and material accoutrements to consider the specific problems engendered by the fool's singing of nonsense syllables and solfège.<sup>8</sup>

### I. The Disabled Brain in Premodern Literature

The play repeatedly faults the fool's putatively deformed physiology for his cognitive failures. In this way, it sheds light on mid-sixteenth-century conceptions of the relationship between the body and cognitive disability. In particular, its role as a non-medical archive for cultural attitudes about specific forms of disability opens up new territory for the discussion of attitudes that have more contiguity with early modern debates about education, moral behavior and transgression, and aesthetic practices than with debates centered primarily on the practice of medicine.

Although the play does draw on some of the competing medical discourses of the sixteenth century, it does so imprecisely and for the attainment of broader, extra-medical ends. The play's various characterizations of fools' cognitive faculties function

broadly to separate those faculties from those that might be supposed to exist at the wiser centers of society. In this respect as in many others, Wager's didacticism takes hold. For instance, upon the entrance of the character Wrath, two other characters named for vices take it upon themselves to connect Moros to the specific vice of wrath by noting Moros' mutability of temperament:

IDLENESS: [. . . W]rath in fools will soon be gone,  
Yea, and as soon it will come again.  
INCONTINENCE: To fools not only incontinency  
Is annexed but wrath also furious;  
The mind of fools without clemency  
Soon waxeth hot and is temerarious. (ll. 648-55)

Incontinence's assertion that fools' minds universally grow "hot" draws roughly on Galenic humoral theory, which would categorize the heated, passionate, reckless young man as "hot."<sup>9</sup> Incontinence's description of Moros' hotness and changeable wrath clearly casts the fool's mind as problematically outside the bounds of morally prescribed decency. Furthermore, his use of "temerarious," which descends from the Latin adverb "*temere*" – that is, "blindly" in the sense of "rashly" or "by chance" – associates the fool's mind with disability in judgment.<sup>10</sup>

This positing of the fool's mind's disabled judgment continues when Discipline attempts to lecture Moros in a quatrain of moralizing Latin verses, which he then translates into English – another suggestion that Moros' learning is not up to snuff. Handily, Discipline's translation from Latin into English offers greater access to the playgoers, too. Discipline intones:

Nature hath a pleasure fools to create,  
 As mallows, nettles, and weeds of that rate.  
 These are dull of wit and of a gross brain  
 And set at nought virtue, given to pastime vain. (ll. 127, 129, 131, 133)

The critique of Moros' grossness of brain and the reminder that he is congenitally foolish are intriguing. This moment and the description of the fool's mind as "hot" are as close as the play comes to speaking of the fool's deficits in what modern readers might recognize as medical terms. Elsewhere throughout the play, Wager's characters diagnose Moros' folly according to educational and moral categories: his singing is problematic because it is childishly non-rational, disruptive, and against virtue.

Discipline's lecture illustrates a prevailing attitude toward fools in medieval and Renaissance English literature. In Wager's play, Discipline's heavy-handed allegations that the fool is deficient in both cognition and virtue are typical of the period's literary depictions.<sup>11</sup> Discipline focuses on the fool's lack of mental acuity ("dull[ness] of wit") and emphasizes this charge by calling the fool's brain "gross." For Elizabethan audiences, Discipline's choice of the adjective "gross" would have conjured up the image of a brain abnormally large, uncontained in its growth and impaired in its function. Discipline's assertion that fools are like weeds infesting a cultivated landscape alludes to the common anti-fool sentiments in premodern English literature, which often suggest that fools feign their skills in jesting and singing merely for social gain.

In Wager's play, the effects of Moros' "grossness of brain" are exemplified by his lack of knowledge, understanding, and erudition. Many of these effects are comedic, and they resemble errors made by other natural fools in premodern English literature. For example, Moros commits various malapropisms, corrupting the names of the

virtuous characters who are trying to educate and reform him. He re-names Discipline, Piety, and Exercitation, calling them “Diricke Quintine,” “Pine-nut-tree,” and “Arse-out-of-fashion” (see ll. 704ff.). These malapropisms – later made much more famous for historians of English literature by remarks like Shakespeare’s Dogberry’s “O villain! thou wilt be condemned into everlasting redemption for this” (*Much Ado* 4.2.50–51) – are intrinsic to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English depictions of folly.<sup>12</sup> Fools’ malapropisms, as well as their more sophisticated forms of wordplay, depict the fool of premodern literature as a corruptor of language – the very medium he relies upon to work his witty craft. Moros’ rendering of “exercitation” – the regular practice of study, art, bodily exercise, and religious devotion – as “arse-out-of-fashion” re-reads the word itself, flippantly overturning its supposedly timeless status and inherent virtue.

Neither Moros nor his companions take this re-reading as evidence of cognitive skill. Such habits, it is implied, are a result of the unremitting grossness of Moros’ brain, unimproved as it is perceived to be by any true learning. Moros himself reinforces the other characters’ dim view of his educational attainments, declaring, “I am but a learner you may see; / I can no further than K for a knave” (ll. 725–6). His declaration that he knows less than half of the alphabet thus associates his particular folly with deficient literacy. Whereas the play’s allusions to the fool’s creation by nature and resemblance to weeds suggest that his cognitive deficiencies are innate, its repeated reminders of the fool’s willful slovenliness in his studies simultaneously gesture toward the malleability of cognition. There is a tension in this portrayal of the natural fool who is yet blamed for his failure to change: according to the logic of the play’s portrayal of Moros, the fool’s

continual refusal to better mold his own cognition through exercitation, piety, and discipline lays the blame for his folly squarely at his own feet.

This disparaging of the fool's putatively outsized monstrosity of brain accompanies Wraths' disparagement of Moros as a "stark [. . .] idiot" (l. 674). In premodern English literature, "idiot" performs the dual functions of critiquing knowledge and congenital cognitive ability. Early attestations of this word appear with some frequency in religiously-affiliated contexts. The *Middle English Dictionary* traces the use of "idiot" as "unlearned, uneducated" to the Wycliffite Bible (c. 1384): "Forsoth thei, seyng the stedfastnesse of Petre and John, founden that thei weren men with oute lettris and idiotis, wondriden" (Deeds 4.13).<sup>13</sup> Here, "men with oute lettris and idiotis" appears to be a close translation from the Vulgate's "*homines sine litteris et idiotæ*." There are no clues from the context that the Wycliffite translators wished to do much more with "idiotis" than to make it synonymous with "men with oute lettris" – that is, to make it useful shorthand for lack of acquired learning. Indeed, this use of "idiotis," clearly influenced by its Latin source, drops out of the early modern biblical translations, which were primarily translated from Greek source-texts rather than the Vulgate.<sup>14</sup>

The conflation of lack of learning and lack of "natural" mental ability in "idiot(s)" appears throughout late medieval and early modern English literature. The *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that both senses of "idiot" – that is, the associations with uneducated ignorance and with lack of mental ability – were in written circulation by at least the early fifteenth century and current in the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>15</sup> A

passage that seems to combine these two senses appears in the *Foundation of St. Bartholomew's* (c. 1425, translated from a Latin MS, c. 1180). In this text, three Greeks visiting London “honoured and worschippid God, and aforne them that ther was presente, and beheld them, as simple ydiottys, they began wondirfull thynges to seye, and prophecye of this place.”<sup>16</sup> This translation, whose Latin original shows heavy influences of the language of the Vulgate Bible, already displays the characteristic representations of holy fools and idiots – the devout actions, the seeming mental deficits that ultimately are superseded by awe-inducing prophecy – that would become more famous with Erasmus’ work.

Indeed, both senses were employed by Thomas Chaloner in his 1549 English translation of Erasmus’ *The Praise of Folly*, a translation that would have been available in Wager’s younger years. Chaloner’s Englished version of Erasmus’ work contrasts the “idiot” to the educated person. For example, it notes that Pythagoras “preferred also the Ideote, and simple vulgars, before other learned and reputed persons”; it suggests that Homer concurred in this preference.<sup>17</sup> Chaloner, like the Wycliffite biblical translator, has clearly borrowed “idiote” from a phrase in the Latin original: Erasmus uses “*idiotas multis partibus*,” which Chaloner renders as “Ideote” while adding “simple vulgars” as a clarification of “*multis partibus*.”

This evolution in the denotations of the educationally and cognitively deficient “idiot” aligns also with other early modern characterizations of departures from an implied cognitive norm. A few lines after the passage lauding “the Ideote, and simple vulgars,” Chaloner’s translation invokes the familiar notion of the “naturall” fool as

deficient in cognition – not merely in learning. The narrative voice asks, “And by the faieth ye owe to the immortall goddis, maie any thyng to an indifferent considrer be deemed more happie, and blisfull, than is this kynde of men, whom commenly ye call fooles, doltes, ideotes, and paches? by most fayre and goodly names as I take them?”<sup>18</sup> This passage draws on a longstanding premodern notion that congenital, or otherwise “naturall,” fools are particularly exempt from any responsibility for securing their own salvation – an exemption specifically owed to their cognitive deficits.<sup>19</sup> In other words, Chaloner’s translation of Erasmus joins both the *Tale of Beryn* and *The Longer Thou Livest* in distinguishing between disadvantages of innate cognition and disadvantages of education. At the same time, it suggests that *both* problems result in disabilities that often reside in the same foolish people. It is the same move that Wager’s characters make elsewhere in the play when they condemn Moros for his “grossness of brain” and educational failures alike.

This double vision of folly obtains throughout *The Praise of Folie*. Erasmus, via Chaloner, continues by cataloguing early modern Christian attitudes toward fools. The Erasmian catalogue – strikingly replete with ideas that circulated among texts by 1380s religious radicals, as well as post-Reformation English writers of varying shades of Protestantism – is worth quoting in full:

Peradventure I move a thyng without purpose, and verie fonde at the fyrst syght, but ere I have dooen, ye will graunt I have cause to saie it.

Seeyng fyrst *suche ideotes are free, and exempt from all feare of death*, whiche feare is no small corrosive, to a mind that mindeth it I warrant you.

Lyke as they fele not what a twitching turment it is, to have a grudged conscience, and shrinke as little at these old wives tales of sprites, of divells, of hobgoblyne and the fayries, neither mournyng to them

selves for feare of evils and adversitees impendyng, nor braggyng overmuch upon hope of any good lucke commyng.

To be briefe, they are not tawed, nor plucht a sunder with a thousande thousand cares, wherwith other men are oppressed. *Thei blushe at nothyng, they doubt nothyng, they coveite no dignitee, they envie no mans fortune, they love not peramours: and lastly if they be veraie brute Naturalles, now they sinne not,* as doctours doe affirme.

Here, I woulde my Maisters of sapience, naie rather Maister fooles, shoulde repute with them selves, how on all sydes theyr myndes are vexed continually. Yea lette them but gather to accompt, to what a noubre of discommoditees, inconveniences, and difficulties the state of theyr lyfe is endebted, and so they shall soone summe vp, from howe many, and howe great evils I haue subtraied these my selie paches. Who not onely them selves are *ever mery, plaiyng, singyng, and laughyng*: but also what ever they dooe, are provokers of others lykewyse to pleasure, sport, and laughter, as who saieth, ordeined herefore by the godds of theyr benevolence, to recreate the sadnesse of mens lyves.<sup>20</sup>

Chaloner's Erasmus uses this catalogue to cordon fools off from society. His commentary on fools—a kind of *via negativa*—clearly suggests that the unmarked members of society *do* blush, doubt, covet dignity, envy others' fortune, love paramours, and sin—and, moreover, the natural state of their lives is “sadnesse.” Fools, in contrast, are defined here by their alleged non-participation in common human emotions, love and sex, and error. Their main function is to be provokers of merriment. This portrait does not match every other early modern portrait of vocational folly in exact detail. For counterexample, *Twelfth Night's* Feste apparently has a leman, albeit a very offstage one. Nonetheless, it clearly shares with many other literary portraits of fools an assumption that fools do not and ought not participate in the evils, cares, and melancholy of ordinary people. By means of their extra-ordinary brains, Chaloner's Erasmus suggests, fools are “subtrayed,” or subtracted from these evils—but at the cost of societal exclusion *except* during their performances of fooling.

## II. The Fool and His “Bable”

Because premodern literature typically recognizes disability as an educational, moral, and social problem, Discipline couches his recommended remedy for Moros in moral terms:

Forget your babish vanity;  
Folly and vice you must refrain  
And give yourself to humanity. (ll. 139–41)

Unfortunately for Discipline but fortunately for the entertainment value of the play, Moros little heeds this advice. The exasperated Discipline attempts to cure Moros with a repeat-after-me game in which Moros must repeat the prayer that God will “open mine intelligence” (346). Moros turns this exercise into a game in which, much like a modern-day child, he repeats every word Discipline utters, including compliments like “Well said” (l. 347). As the play traces Moros’ growth into manhood, nothing prevails against his resolute foolishness. He continues to exhibit “babish vanity,” cavorting and babbling like a young unformed child, rather than an educated youth. His determined failure to learn continues to be among his defining traits.

It is in this context that two of the play’s vicious characters mock the fool’s illiteracy by suggesting that he prefers his bauble to his books:

IDLENESS: [. . .] What dost thou with this book?  
Thou canst not read upon it, I am sure.

MOROS: Pine-nut-tree took it me thereon to look:  
There are goodly saints in it, fair and pure.

WRATH: Alas, one word to read in it he is not able;  
More fools than he to give him a book.  
A fool will delight more in a bable,  
And more meet for him thereon to look. (ll. 761–8)

Moros reveals that his knowledge of the book is limited to its images – the “goodly saints” who would have been depicted visually, perhaps à la Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments* (first published in 1563, several years before the entry of *The Longer Thou Livest* in the Stationer’s Register). Wrath throws a syntactic spotlight on the fool’s bauble – mentioned at the end of the line, a place of emphasis. The bauble clearly serves here to reinforce Wrath’s assertion of Moros’ true foolishness (“as very a fool”), as well as Wrath’s association of that foolishness with both cognitive disability and the ignorance born of failures in learning.

Wrath’s disparaging description of Moros’ mental capacities is strengthened by its allusion to the fool’s signal accoutrement, the bauble. As Wrath puts it, Moros is not merely an “idiot,” but “as stark an idiot *as ever bare bable*” (l. 675, emphasis added). In late Middle English and early modern English, the term “bale” referred both to a child’s toy and to the fool’s stick with a face and asses’ ears that served as his mock scepter. One of the fourteenth-century illustrations of the “*Dixit insipiens . . .*” fool of Psalm 52 depicts just such a bauble (Figure 4).<sup>21</sup> In fact, scholarly use of the term “bauble” indicates how dramatically early modern scholars have been influenced by a Shakespearean lens on the literature of the period: the “bauble” spelling first appeared in the First Folio of 1623.<sup>22</sup> The fool’s bauble is linked directly to his deficiencies in cognition, morality, and piety by Aaron in *Titus Andronicus* (5.1.81): “An idiot holds his bauble for a God.”



Figure 4. BL MS Royale 17 E VII, fol. 241. *Bible historiale* (Paris, 1356–7).<sup>23</sup>

For pre-First Folio eyes and ears, the word “bable” punned on the verb “to babble” – that is, to engage in idle talk.<sup>24</sup> Both words bore a homophonic correlation to medieval and early modern invocations of the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), in which the name “Babel” comes to stand in for divinely ordained linguistic confusion. The Wycliffite and Tyndale translations of the text speak of language being “confounded” at Babel and suggest that the name “Babel” itself is etymologically related to confounded language.<sup>25</sup> Premodern commentators on the story tend to focus on the confounding of language, rather than the creation of a suddenly polyglot society. For example, Trevisa’s translation of the *Polychronicon* (printed in 1480) speaks of the name “Babel” as “sowndenge a confusion, in that the langages of men edifieng hit were confusede by the wylle of God.”<sup>26</sup> The word “bable” and its homophones may have

reminded early modern audiences of confused linguistic efforts resulting from divine judgment and, thus, have reinforced the aura of divine judgment surrounding many premodern discourses on fools' corrupt language.

The verb form "to babble" was often linked with fools, as when Lyly's *Euphues* asks, "Alas fonde foole arte thou so pinned to [women's] sleeues that thou regardest more their babble then thine owne blisse?" This line handily employs "babble" to prop up its anti-feminism even as it associates listening to that "babble" with love's own brand of cognitive impairment.<sup>27</sup> In Chaloner's Erasmus translation, "bablyng" likewise serves as an insult when men's idle talk is likened to women's babbling:

And joigne we (hardily) to them these *Sophistrers* and *Logiciens*, beyng a race of men *more kackeling than a meny of dawes*: eche of whom in bablyng maie compare with tenne women chosen for the nones, and farre more happie shoulde be, in case they were onely bablers, and not skoldis also: in sorte that oftentymes for *the moone shyne in the water*, they strive whole daies together, and with to mucche arguyng, lette the trueth of the mattier slippe by them.<sup>28</sup>

The use of "bablyng" as a means of disparaging men by comparing their speech to women's gossip and scolding appears again. It suggests that a man – such as a fool – who babbles in this literature is considered as linguistically troublesome and irrational as a woman. The *OED* remarks on the probable onomatopoetic resonance in this word, playing as it does on the small child's not-yet-articulate "ba."<sup>29</sup> In this way, by extension, the fool's "bable" designates him as one ineligible for adult, male, homosocial camaraderie. His "bable" marks him as foolish because he babbles to it – that is, because his speech falls short of cultural ideals of sense-making.

Indeed, in the same time frame, "bable" was employed to refer to a child's (or

childish) plaything. A hybrid attestation of “babele” as child’s toy and “babele” as a trinket related to fools may occur in *John Russells Boke of Nurture* (c. 1475):

To teche vertew and connynge, me thynkethe hit charitable,  
 for moche youthe in connynge / is bareñ & fulle unable;  
 þer-fore he þat no good cañ / ne to nooñ wille be agreable.  
 he shalle neuer y-thryve / þerfore take to hym a babulle. (ll. 9–12)<sup>30</sup>

In this excerpt, the “moche youthe” who are marked as intellectually “bareñ & fulle unable” – that is, both bereft of innate talents and incapable of improving – are despaired of and consigned to perpetual childishness (“þerfore take to hym a babulle”). Although editorial and lexicographical commentary on this passage generally glosses “babulle” as a child’s trinket or toy, this poem is precisely coextensive with instances of “babulle” as a fool’s accoutrement and mock interlocutor. The fool’s back-and-forth with his “babulle” is homophonic with the pre-linguistic child’s play with a trinket. In modern-day terms, it is as if the sonic and visual trappings of the fool’s folly were synonymous with a child’s jangling of a parent’s keys. Indeed, the “babulle” in the *Boke of Nurture* might well have been read as a material sign of childish foolishness of mind. Middle English literary references to the “babele” appear to retain a connotative sense of the word’s etymological links to a host of Romance languages’ terms for babblers and fools. Notable among these links is the late Latin *babulus* for “fool,” which seems to have influenced the nonce-word, “babel” for “fool” itself, that appears in the late-fourteenth-century *Cleanness*.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, Skelton’s “A Replycacion Agaynst Certayne Yong Scolers Adjured of Late” (c. 1525) employs both “babele” as a verb for foolishly idle speech and a noun denoting the childish toys of those whose folly makes them like children.<sup>32</sup> Skelton, one

of the most vehemently anti-fool – not to mention misanthropic – writers of the early sixteenth century, provides a wealth of fooling-related invective in his verse.<sup>33</sup> At the beginning of “A Replycacion,” Skelton loudly denounces those anti-Marian “heretikes” who

leudly have their tyme spent,  
In their study abhomyable,  
Our glorious lady to disable,  
And heynously on her to bable  
With langage, detestable. (ll. 24–28)

Skelton’s characteristically swaggering verse makes it clear that the adverbial connotation of “bable” is “heynously,” a judgment that is implied in many other premodern texts that employ this term. Crucially, Skelton also connects such babbling speech to impious and lewd – that is, uneducated and willfully wrong-headed – religious opinions.

This religious connection to “bable,” both noun and verb, appears repeatedly in literature about foolishness and the refusal to learn. In Wager’s play, for example, the young man who refuses to learn is condemned for his irreligiosity, as well as his indolent refusal to better his cognitive powers through education. Skelton – who was probably writing under the auspices of Cardinal Wolsey in order to discredit the upstart young scholars who had dared to stray dangerously close to Lutheran and other Reformed positions – specifically connects the “bable”-as-toy to the foolishness of his scholarly antagonists:

Ye soored over hye  
In the [h]ierarchy  
Of Jovinians heresy,  
Your names to magnifye,

Among the scabbed skyes  
 Of Wycliffes flesshe flyes;  
 Ye strynged so Luthers lute,  
 That ye dawns all in a sute  
 The heritykes ragged ray,  
 That brings you out of the way  
 Of holy churches lay; [. . .]  
 Marked in your cradels  
 To beare fagottes for babyls.<sup>34</sup>

Skelton delivers a double catalogue of invective. First, his declaration that the errors of his (and Wolsey's) opponents exceed those of the ancient heretic Jovinian, the late medieval proto-Reformer Wyclif, and Martin Luther effectively positions Wolsey's opponents beyond the pale of acceptable theological affiliation. Second, he suggests that such opponents are more truly affiliated with the material instantiations of folly: the stringed lute, "ragged ray" (tattered raiment), and the infant's or fool's "babyl."

Other texts designate the fool's witticisms as mindless sound, analogized to babies' pre-linguistic, non-signifying vocal experimenting. The difference between the fool and the baby is that the fool is never acknowledged to progress to any more mature linguistic phrase. Indeed, one of Wager's successors in the premodern English historiography of fooling links the "bable" to other problematic sounds. In *A Nest of Ninnies* (1608) Robert Armin, who is thought to have originated most of Shakespeare's later fools, writes that those who "musically fret their time out in idle baubling [. . .] will become artificiall Fooles to outbrave Fooles indeede, but stick often in their owne quicksands, and are got out with repentance."<sup>35</sup> Armin suggests here that "artificiall" – that is, witty – fools catch themselves in traps of their own making; their idle, musical "baubling" becomes the means by which they disable their own wits, thus making

themselves more foolish even than congenital fools. *The Longer Thou Livest* is likewise deeply concerned with the problem of the musical fretting out of time in idle babbling. Moros' singing of solfège and nonsense syllables comes under censure as a form of musical babbling. His singing functions as the sonic accoutrement of his cognitive and moral failures, just as the fool's bauble serves as visual witness to his folly. It is to that musical babbling that this chapter now turns.

### III. Witless Boys and Their Noise: Fooling in Song and Solfège

In *The Longer Thou Livest*, Moros' singing of nonsense syllables serves as evidence of his folly. This characterization of the fool's singing is apparent from his earliest moments onstage. Even the stage direction announcing his first entrance comments on the foolishness of his singing: "Here enter' th *Moros*, counterfeiting a vain gesture and a foolish countenance [and] singing the foot of many songs as fools were wont." (The description of a supposedly congenital fool as gesturally "counterfeiting" – that is, performing – shows how completely the categories of counterfeited and natural folly are sometimes conflated in early modern literature.) Moros bursts onto the stage singing a string of popular songs, one after another, and preventing his interlocutors from getting a word in edgewise. The relevance of the songs to questions of morality or knowledge – or, indeed, anything – can be difficult to discern. Here is one such song in its entirety:

Martin Swart and his man, sodledum, sodledum,  
Martin Swart and his man, sodledum bell. (ll. 92–3)

Although nonsensical words in songs (like “sodledum bell”) do not directly show deficiencies in the singer’s reason, they do function non-rationally.<sup>36</sup> That is, they momentarily remove the song-text from rational discourse. Here, the text of the song celebrates Henry VII’s victory over the pretender Lambert Simnel, whose troops were led by a Martin Schwarz.<sup>37</sup> In other words, the song refers to an event Moros might well have learned about in his youth, but those details are undiscernable in his version of the song, which is just as interested in the non-rational, nonsensical “sodledum, sodledum” as it is in the history lesson.

In this early scene of *The Longer Thou Livest*, Moros continues in this antic vein for quite some time, singing fully nine songs in a row. The next character who does manage to speak, Discipline, reproves Moros:

It is time childishness to forsake.  
I would find somewhat to do, I trow,  
And not like a fool such a noise to make,  
Going up and down like a witless boy,  
Singing and bellowing like a daw. (ll. 108-11).

According to Discipline, then, Moros’ singing demonstrates his folly, vice, and witlessness – that is, his moral and cognitive deficits – as well as his likeness to inhuman species. To this assessment of his witlessness, Moros responds, saucily, “I have twenty moe songs yet” (l. 114). Clearly, the plays show, learning from admonition is not among Moros’ chief qualities. In fact, Idleness directly contrasts Moros’ utter ineptitude as a learner with his *ability* to rhyme and sing:

IDLENESS: Tell him one thing twenty times,  
And he will forget it by and by, God wot;  
Yet can he sing songs and make rhymes. (ll. 736-8)

While rhyming and popular song-making are often derided by early modern English writers as non-rational, sub-standard forms of aesthetic creation, *The Longer Thou Livest's* treatment of song suggests that the *specific* forms of singing in which Moros engages are antagonistic to the processes of improving cognitive ability through learning.

Furthermore, Moros' inept singing of solfège puts his cognitive inadequacies on display. When he is joined by his companions in vice – the none-too-subtly-named Idleness, Incontinence, and Wrath – he demonstrates the relationship between singing, bad morals, and lack of learning. Moros, the ringleader of the four, suggests that they indulge in more singing: “Before you go, let us have a song; / I can retch up to sing sol, fa, and past” (ll. 884–5). The self-critique implicated in his promise to “retch” up to high musical notes would have been apparent to Wager's early audiences, for whom the usage of the verb “retch” as the act of coughing up phlegm and other throaty excrements would have been well-established.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Moros' promise to “retch *up*” to “sol, fa, and past” inverts the direction of the degrees of the solfège scale, in which “fa” is lower than “sol,” rather than the other way around. In effect, he is promising to “retch up” to high notes by singing a descending scale – an indication of his deficits in knowledge. Moros' mistake, then, clearly indicates musical folly and general mal-education.

Moros then uses solfège coupled with nonsense syllables to attempt to establish a good pitch for their song:

MOROS: Let me study, it will come anon.  
 Pepe la, la, la – it is too high there;  
 So ho, ho – and that is too low;  
 Soll, soll, fa, fa – and that is too flat;  
 Re, re, re – by and by you shall know;  
 Mi, mi, mi – how say you to that?

IDLENESS: Care not for the true, but what is thy song;  
 No remedy, thou must first begin. (888–95)

Moros' combination of solfège with nonsense syllables is clearly portrayed as evidence of his stark idiocy.<sup>39</sup> Moros' singing fails to signify – either linguistically, as words ought, or musically, as solfège ought. His awareness that there ought to be an agreed-upon starting pitch for the song does demonstrate a kind of musical-social intelligence – yet his failure to find a good pitch shows his inability to meet the standard he understands.

In this scene, Moros may be referring to either of a few different solmization systems used to teach singing during the premodern period. One of the earlier systems – an ascending six-note scale using the syllables “ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la” – was employed in medieval England. Moros' singing clearly alludes to the last five of these six syllables: “re,” “mi,” “fa,” “sol,” and “la.” However, another system known as *fasola* was gaining traction in the mid-sixteenth century. (It is first attested in the 1570 *Whole Booke of Psalmes* – the year after *The Longer Thou Livest* was entered in the Stationer's Register. As the system was apparently deemed familiar enough to be of practical use in psalm-singing, it seems probable that it was current by the late 1560s.)<sup>40</sup> The *fasola* system names the notes of an ascending seven-note scale: “fa, sol, la, fa, sol, la, mi.” Because several of the syllables repeat, the *fasola* system relies more on context than the

medieval system; the syllable sung doesn't indicate the exact scale degree outside the context of the pitched notes (Table 1).

Sample scale	C	D	E	F	G	A	(B $\flat$ )			
Medieval solfège system	ut	re	mi	fa	sol	la				
<i>Fasola</i> system	fa	sol	la	fa	sol	la	mi			

Table 1.

As its cultural location attests, the *fasola* system had traction among singers of vernacular, Protestant-inflected psalms – a genre compatible with the overarching Protestant interests of the play. Moros' singing seems to occupy an awkward transitional space between traditional medieval solfège and sixteenth-century psalmody's *fasola* system. Whatever solmization system Moros might have in mind, he understands and employs it badly (Table 2).

Sample scale	C	D	E	F	G	A	(B $\flat$ )			
Medieval solfège system	ut	re	mi	fa	sol	la				
<i>Fasola</i> system	fa	sol	la	fa	sol	la	mi			
What Moros sings		re	mi	sol	fa	la	(mi?)	pepe	so	ho

Table 2.

Solfège is a system of musico-linguistic signification. Moros' confusion of the relationship between signifier (the "sol, fa" phonemes), signified (the descending trajectory of the scale degrees represented by "sol, fa"), and referent (the actually ascending motion of the notes) stirs the pot of signification. He further muddies the waters by messing up even that form of signification: he adds nonsense syllables that have no part in his solfège system ("pepe," "so, ho, ho") and presumably bear little musical relation to the notes required. Indeed, Moros' continued reliance upon the solfège scale may show that his musical education has never progressed very far.

Moros' attempt to figure out (or "study," as he says) the correct starting pitch again emphasizes his ineptitude in performing schoolboy-level musical skills. In his faux-erudition, he slides all over the solfège scale and gets no closer to his simple goal of finding a starting pitch for his song. These bootless efforts show that Moros' scant education has rendered him *less* able to perform even the simple songs that he wishes to sing with his comrades in vice. Thus, he turns his supposed musical education – a system meant to expand the range of his cognitive skills – to mere babble. Even in this late stage of the play, he is still acting as a witless boy making noise.

Idleness' response to this elaborate performance of pitch-searching is: "Care not for the true, but what is thy song." Idleness' flagrant disregard for "the true" further emphasizes these four friends' abandonment of the "true" learning advocated by Discipline and the other virtuously allegorical characters. Moros' and his friends' flouting of its system stands in for a flouting of the authority of their would-be educators. *The Longer Thou Livest* suggests, censoriously, that song is for the deliberately ignorant, who choose to engage in it because they reject better instruction. The play thus offers a distinctively dark portrayal of both popular songs and the fools who sing them. Moreover, the play's gleeful performances of songs and silly games render its audience and players complicit in the foolishness it purports to critique. The foolishness is, after all, by far the most exuberantly delightful aspect of the play, which otherwise is made up of long lectures on the wickedness of popery and the proper Protestant methods of reforming one's life.

Moros' offenses against the play's soundscape do not end with his songs – or even with his “retch[ing]” up to high notes. While listening to another of Discipline's didactic, Latin-heavy excoriations of his cognitive faculties, Moros suggests that he might respond to this instruction with a non-verbal, non-musical noise:

DISCIPLINE: *Animi vilis timor argumentum est;*  
 Fear of a vile mind is an argument.  
 Conscious accuseth the foolish beast  
 That he hath forsaken wholesome document. [. . .]

MOROS: Body of God, of him I am so afraid  
 That at every word I am like to fart. (ll. 970–3, 988–9)

Discipline is arguing that Moros' mind is so corrupt as to be analogous to a cognitively deficient animal's. Moros' interjecting threat signifies less than solfège, less than babble. In an act of uncontrolled rebellion, he threatens – as Hamlet might say – “a sound, but not in governance.” This moment encapsulates the threat that Moros and other fools pose to their more educated, seemingly virtuous interlocutors. Fools, their “vile mind[s],” and their utterances are rarely in governance. Perhaps this refusal of lower-case bodily and cognitive discipline is what makes the character Discipline, like *Robert of Cisyle's* angel, deem the fool more comparable to a “beast” (l. 972) than a human being.

Wager's very late medieval morality play has a twist. It presents the hallmark allegorically-named characters of the earlier and more famous medieval moralities, but it grinds a distinctively Protestant axe. It contains several diatribes that rail in passing against transubstantiation, indicating a Protestant eucharistic theology that marks itself not merely as non-Catholic but as post- and anti-Catholic. More germane to this

chapter's concern with fools is the character Fortune's threat: "A popish fool will I place in a wiseman's seat" (l. 1065). According to the logic of the play, neither a "fool" *nor* a "popish" character belongs in a wiseman's place. Throughout the play, folly is characterized as mental and moral debility, and here Fortune labels such debility Catholic. Conversely, the virtuous characters in the play associate uprightness, wisdom, and wit with Protestant orthodoxy. This binaristic division of mental ability from disability, virtue from vice, old orthodoxy from new orthodoxy, contrasts sharply with the religious valences folly accrues in such late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth-century texts as the Wycliffite tracts, the *Tale of Beryn*, and Audelay's poems and carols. These medieval, pre-Reformation texts all occupy different spaces on the spectrum of ecclesiastical orthodoxy with respect to the hot-button debates of the turn of the fifteenth century; they differ over the role of clergy and the circulation of vernacular scriptures among the laity.<sup>41</sup> However, they clearly agree in their characterization of the five wits' or senses' precarious status, which they characterize as ever susceptible to corruption—that is, debility. Wager's play, on the other hand, posits a universe in which able cognition and its fruits are strongly allied with a Protestant soteriological system. The religious dimension of the English literary history of fooling—rather than neatly aligning with some (imagined) theory about cognitive disability in orthodox and heterodox, or pre- and post-Reformation, contexts—makes up a variegated pattern, alternately matching and clashing with its own claims.

Coda: Wager, Shakespeare, and the Pleasures of Folly

*The Longer Thou Lives'*s comedic but ultimately damning portrayal of the fool's cognitive shortcomings provides a context that challenges scholarly readings of the putatively "wise" fools in the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Familiar Shakespearean fools like Feste and Lear's Fool are rich, nuanced, keenly provocative characters not because they're merely dispensing wisdom like candy to high-status recipients, but because they are working within the full scope of the premodern fooling tradition. This tradition valorizes their hyperability in wordplay, even as it scoffs at the supposed lightness of their wits and reminds them of their alleged disabilities in cognition. The connection between Moros' steadfast witlessness and the obtuse silliness of "natural" fools like Dogberry is obvious. The connection between Moros' behavior and that of witty "artificial" fools like Feste and Lear's Fool is perhaps less so, but it is equally important. Moros' songs, like Feste's and Lear's Fool's songs, overflow the bounds of rational discourse, inviting their audiences to join in the pleasures of this transgression.

The pleasures of transgression in babble and in song underwrite Wager's otherwise heavy-handed morality play. The songs, bad jokes, and irrepressible antics of Moros and his companions – while sternly condemned by Discipline and the other virtuous characters – are the mainstay of the play's action. When Erasmus says that fools "not onely them selves are ever mery, plaiyng, singyng, and laughyng: but also what ever they dooe, are provokers of others lykewyse to pleasure, sport, and laughter," he suggests that fools make available forms of pleasures peculiar to their

performances of fooling.<sup>42</sup> While Erasmus does not condemn such pleasures, the virtuous figures in *The Longer Thou Livest* do. Still, it seems that Wager understood that, despite Discipline's reproaches and the ultimate pronouncements by God's Judgment, the pleasurable insouciance of the fool and his fellows would draw audiences to the play. Moros' performances of fooling, then, make audiences complicit in the pleasures that the virtuous characters proscribe. By featuring the entertainment value of witty wordplay and popular song, Wager's play draws the audience into the fool's moral circuit, challenging spectators to recognize the lightness of their own wits and to continue the fool's staging of aesthetic pleasures, however silly those pleasure may seem. As Moros himself says, "If you will have any more, / Vouchsafe to sing it yourself, / For here you have all my store" (911-13).

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<sup>1</sup> W. Wager, *The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art*, ll. 1637–8, 1641–44. All quotations of Wager in this chapter refer to W. Wager, *The Longer Thou Livest and Enough Is as Good as a Feast*, ed. Mark R. Benbow (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> In a brief comparison of *The Longer Thou Livest* to other late morality plays, David Bevington has previously noted the play's fixation on Moros' refusal of education: "The play has no chief Vice; the central figure is a human protagonist. His centrality focuses the play upon his failure to learn." David Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 165.

The replacement of the late medieval Vice figure with a fool comports with the traditional scholarly genealogical reading of the Vice as the early modern fool's dramatic forebear. This reading, while not inaccurate, may have obscured the extent to which the emerging early modern dramatic fool depends on earlier poetic traditions of representing folly – particularly traditions that represent the refusal of education as a key form of folly.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Swain, *Fools and Folly During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 167.

Other criticism on Wager's work has focused largely on its dramaturgy, its Protestantism, and its examinations of socioeconomic problems. The existing scholarship related to Wager's work includes David Bevington, "Staging the Reformation: Power and Theatricality in the Plays of William Wager," in *Interludes and Early Modern Society: Studies in Gender, Power, and Theatricality*, ed. Peter Happé and Wim Hüsken (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, 2007), 353–380; David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968); Nicoletta Caputo, "A 'Deformed' Christianity: Ethical Transubstantiation in English Reformation Plays," in *The Poetics of Transubstantiation: From Theology to Metaphor*, ed. Douglas Burnham and Enrico Giaccherini (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2002), 63–74; Kent Cartwright, *Theater and Humanism: English Drama in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); David Coleman, *Drama and the Sacraments* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); John D. Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama, 1350–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); T. W. Craik, *The Tudor Interlude* (Leicester, England: Leicester University Press, 1958); Edmund Creeth, *Mankynde in Shakespeare* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1976); Janette Dillon, *Language and Stage in Medieval and Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 106–140; Mark Eccles, "William Wager and his Plays," *English Language Notes* 18, no. 4 (1981): 258–62; Willard Farnham, *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1963 [first published 1936]); Lynn Forest-Hill, "Maidens and Matrons: The Theatricality of Gender in the Tudor Interludes," in *Interludes and Early Modern Society: Studies in Gender, Power, and Theatricality*, ed. Peter Happé and Wim Hüsken

(Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 43-71; Francis Guinle, "'Where Angels Fear to Tread': Allegory and Protestant Ideology in *The Longer Thou Livest, the More Fool Thou Art* (1559) and *Enough is as Good as the Feast* (1560), in *Tudor Theatre: Allegory in the Theatre*, ed. Peter Happé (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000), 145-158; Peter Happé, *English Drama Before Shakespeare* (New York: Longman, 1999); Robert C. Jones, "Dangerous Sport: the Audience's Engagement with Vice in the Moral Interludes," *Renaissance Drama* 6 (1973): 45-64; Ahmad Ramez Kutrieh, "The Doubling of Parts in *Enough Is as Good as a Feast*," *English Language Notes* 12 (1974): 79-84; W. Roy Mackenzie, *The English Morality From the Point of View of Allegory* (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1914); Ineke Murakami, "William Wager: Monstrous Ambition and the Public Weal," in *Moral Play and Counterpublic: Transformations in Moral Drama, 1465-1599* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 45-72; Ineke Murakami, "Wager's Drama of Conscience, Convention, and State Constitution," *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 47.2 (Spring 2007): 305-29; P. V. Neuss, "The Sixteenth-Century English 'Proverb Play,'" *Comparative Drama* 18 (1984): 1-18; Leslie Mahin Oliver, "William Wager and *The Trial of Treasure*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 9.4 (August 1946): 419-29; Robert Potter, *The English Morality Play* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975); Paul S. Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: The Politics of Religious Dissent, 1560-1662* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970); Melissa Smith, "Personifications of Plague in Three Tudor Interludes: *Trial of Treasure*, *The Longer Thou Livest*, *the More Foole Thou Art*, and *Inough Is as Good as a Feast*," *Literature and Medicine* 26.2 (Fall 2007): 364-85; Richard Southern, *The Staging of Plays Before Shakespeare* (New York: Theater Arts Books, 1973); Elisabetta Tarantino, "'Between Peterborough and Pentecost': Nonsense and Sin in William Wager's Morality Plays," in *Nonsense and Other Senses: Regulated Absurdity in Literature*, ed. Elisabetta Tarantino, et al. (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), 55-85; Louis B. Wright, "Social Aspects of Some Belated Moralities," *Beiblatt zur Anglia* 42 (1930): 107-48.

<sup>4</sup> The play makes musical disruption central to the character of the fool, Moros, and it frames Moros' singing as a cognitive disability – a disability defined entirely in terms of its deficiencies. *The Longer Thou Livest* puts the performance of popular song in diametric opposition to intellectual and moral improvement, portraying the fool's disruptive singing as a direct impediment to his moral education. In this way, the fool's musical disruptions become both the indicator and the instrument of his continued cognitive failures.

<sup>5</sup> W. Wager, *The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art*, ll. 1637-8, 1641-44. All quotations of Wager in this chapter refer to W. Wager, *The Longer Thou Livest and Enough Is as Good as a Feast*, ed. Mark R. Benbow (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967).

<sup>6</sup> The exact appearance of this coat is unclear from the stage direction. A motley coat would have been a likely candidate, albeit not the only possibility.

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<sup>7</sup> See Owen Jander, "Solfeggio," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press. Available at: <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/26144>. Accessed on: July 24, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Because much of this language appears in biblical translations and other explicitly religious texts, this chapter's methodological approach enables a secondary intervention in critical conversations about variables and constants in religious discourse across the period of the Reformation, as well as across religious communities of varying degrees of orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

<sup>9</sup> Sanguine temperaments are of course also characterized as hot, but this passage's overall notion of the fool's changeable wrathfulness seems to be a transparent exposition of choler. See Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body, Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 13ff.

<sup>10</sup> This Latin etymology, however recondite it might seem to modern readers, would certainly have been available to the intended audience of Wager's play, replete as the play is with reminders of the necessity of Latin learning for the well-educated young man. Discipline, in particular, often speaks Latin and then translates it, after the fashion of a curmudgeonly schoolmaster.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>12</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> The book called "Acts" in most sixteenth-century and later translations is called "Deeds" in the Wycliffite Bible.

<sup>14</sup> The 1540 Great Bible offers, "When they sawe the boldnes of Peter and Iohn, and vnderstode that they were vnlearned and laye men, they marueyled" (Acts 4.13). The 1568 Bishops' Bible, which famously served as a source for many of the biblical allusions in Shakespeare's work, offered an identical rendering—as did the King James Bible later, in 1611. That is, the tradition of English Bible translation that would have been most immediately available to post-Reformation playwrights preferred to translate this verse as a reference to lack of learning but deemed "idiotis" a less optimal choice for doing so.

Shakespeare's invocation of the Bishops' Bible has attracted widespread commentary. For a succinct recent discussion of this subject, see Hannibal Hamelin, *The Bible in Shakespeare*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> "idiot, n. and adj.," *OED Online*, December 2013 (Oxford University Press). Available at: <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/91049?rskey=3doBMb&result=1&isAdvanced=false>. Accessed on: July 24, 2014).

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<sup>16</sup> *The Book of the Foundation of St. Bartholomew's Church in London*, ed. Norman Moore, 1886, p. lvi.

<sup>17</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folie: Moriae Encomium: a booke made in latine by that great clerke Erasmus Roterodame.*, Englished by Sir Thomas Chaloner knight, (Early English Books Online, 1549), n. p.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. The Latin version offers a similar cornucopia of names for fools: "*Ac per Deos immortales, est ne quidquam felicius isto hominum genere, quos vulgo moriones, stultos, fatuos, ac bliteos appellant, pulcerrimis, ut equidem opinor, cognominibus?*" See Desiderius Erasmus, *Moriae Encomium* (1509), 436 C.

<sup>19</sup> See Sandra Billington, *A Social History of the Fool* [Brighton: Harvester Press; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984, pp. 22 *passim*.

<sup>20</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folie: Moriae Encomium: a booke made in latine by that great clerke Erasmus Roterodame.*, Englished by Sir Thomas Chaloner knight, n. p., emphasis added.

<sup>21</sup> For a slightly expanded discussion of the fool of Psalm 52, see this dissertation's introduction, which is indebted to V. A. Kolve's "God-Denying Fools and the Medieval 'Religion of Love,'" *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 19 (1997): 3-59.

<sup>22</sup> "bauble, n.," *OED Online*, December 2013 (Oxford University Press). Available at: <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/16308?rskey=sdRuIt&result=1&isAdvanced=false>. Accessed on: July 24, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Available at: [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=royal\\_ms\\_17\\_e\\_vii\\_vol\\_1\\_fs001r](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=royal_ms_17_e_vii_vol_1_fs001r). Accessed on: July 11, 2014. The British Library has generously made this image available, free of copyright restrictions, under a Public Domain Mark; see <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/reuse.asp>.

<sup>24</sup> "babble, v.1.," *OED Online*, December 2013 (Oxford University Press). Available at: <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/14199?rskey=0tbsj4&result=2&isAdvanced=false>. Accessed July 24, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Here are the passages in the Wycliffite Bible (1380s) and the Tyndale Pentateuch (1530):

<p>Genesis 11:5–7, 9a [Wycliffite Bible]:</p> <p>Forsothe the Lord cam down to se the citee and tour, which the sones of Adam bildiden. And he seid, Lo! the puple is oon, and o langage is to alle, and thei han bigunne to make this, nethir thei schulen ceesse of her thouȝtis, til thei fillen tho in werk; therfor come ȝe, go we down, and scheende we there the tunge of hem, that ech man here not the voys of his neizbore. [. . .] And therfor the name therof was clepid Babel, for the langage of al erthe was confoundide there.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>In The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments, with the Apocryphal Books, in the Earliest English Versions, Made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and His Followers, Vol. 1, ed. Josiah Forshall and Frederic Madden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1850), p. 98.</i></p>	<p>Genesis 11:5–7, 9a [Tyndale Bible]:</p> <p>And the LORde came down to see the cyte and the toure which the childern of Adam had buylded. And the LORde sayd: See, the people is one and haue one tonge amonge them all. And thys haue they begon to do, and wyll not leaue of[f] from all that they haue purposed to do. Come on, let vs descende and myngell their tonge even there, that one vnderstonde not what a nother sayeth. [. . .] Wherefore the name of it is called Babell, because that the LORDE there confounded the tonge of all the world.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>In William Tyndale's Five Books of Moses, called The Pentateuch, Being a Verbatim Reprint of the Edition of M.CCCXXIII., ed. J. I. Mombert (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph; London: Samuel Bagster &amp; Sons, 1884), p. 39.</i></p>
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<sup>26</sup> *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis; together with the English translations of John Trevisa and of an unknown writer of the fifteenth century*, Vol. 2, ed. Churchill Babington (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1869), emphasis original.

<sup>27</sup> John Lyly, *The Complete Works of John Lyly*, Vol. 1, ed. R. Warwick Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), p. 249.

<sup>28</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folie: Moriae Encomium: a booke made in latine by that great clerke Erasmus Roterodame.*, Englished by Sir Thomas Chaloner knight, n. p., emphasis original.

<sup>29</sup> "babble, v.1.," *OED Online*.

<sup>30</sup> *John Russells Boke of Nurture, Harl. MS. 4011, Fol. 171*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall (Bunday: J. Childs and Son, 1867).

<sup>31</sup> *Cleanness: An Alliterative Tripartite Poem on the Deluge, the Destruction of Sodom, and the Death of Belshazzar, by the Poet of Pearl*, ed. Sir Israel Gollancz (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), l. 582.

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<sup>32</sup> See also Tom Betteridge's discussion of "linguistic disorder" in *Literature and Politics in the English Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 16ff.

<sup>33</sup> For an overview of Skelton's treatment of fools and folly, see Michael West, "Skelton and the Renaissance Theme of Folly," *Philological Quarterly* 50.1 (January 1971): 23-35.

<sup>34</sup> I have modernized some of the orthography in this excerpt for the sake of clarity. John Skelton, *The Poetical Works of Skelton and Donne, with a Memoir of Each*, Vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1881), pp. 239-40, ll. 161-71, 174-5.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Armin, *Fools and Jesters, with a Reprint of Robert Armin's Nest of Ninnies* (1608), (London: The Shakespeare Society, 1842).

<sup>36</sup> See Chapter 4's discussion of the early modern theorization of song as a non-rational aesthetic form.

<sup>37</sup> Nicholas Orme, *Fleas, Flies, and Friars: Children's Poetry from the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

<sup>38</sup> See "retch, v.2," *OED Online*, December 2013 (Oxford University Press). Available at: <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/164208>. Accessed on July 24, 2014.

<sup>39</sup> The history of English usage of solfège has received surprisingly little critical attention. One exception is Timothy Johnson's "Solmization in English Treatises Around the Turn of the Seventeenth Century: A Break from Modal Theory," *Theoria* 5 (January 1990): 42-60.

<sup>40</sup> Bernarr Rainbow, "Fasola," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press). Available at: <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/09349>. Accessed on: July 24, 2014.

<sup>41</sup> For more discussion of religious models of cognitive disability vis-à-vis different confessional affiliations and modes of orthodoxy, see Chapter 1.

<sup>42</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folie: [. . .] Englished by Sir Thomas Chaloner*, n. p.

## Chapter 4

### Counterfeiting and Singing Folly in *Twelfth Night*

In *Twelfth Night*, Feste's performances of fooling encourage an inquiry into how embodied ability is treated on the Shakespearean stage. This chapter thus brings the concerns of early modern disability studies to bear on the scholarly conversation surrounding early modern song in Shakespearean drama. Song highlights the marginal position of both female and male characters deemed outside the parameters of idealized masculinity.<sup>1</sup> Simultaneously, as in Wager's *The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art*, song in Shakespeare's plays points out cognitive difference: it identifies characters portrayed as cognitively disabled, and it enables audiences to question the social assumptions that mark off those thought to have cognitive ability from those considered cognitively disabled. This view of song is repeated, and given greater specificity, in early modern writers who direct critiques at vocational fools. These writers critique not only the fools' jests and performances of verbal sparring but also their performances of popular songs, implying that fools' songs are implicated in the allegation that fools counterfeit their performances in order accrue wealth or other social gains. Such writers argue that songs are a marker of both low social station and cognitive deficiency, and that they are even cognitively disabling – that is, deleterious to singer and audience alike. Feste is notable among Shakespeare's fools for his singing

and his questioning of the very concepts of wit and ability – as well as his hyper-explicit playing with the boundaries between moral opprobrium and approved wisdom, between cognitive dexterity and disability, between nature and art.

Song is integral to stage fools' portrayal of otherwise invisible difference. On the Shakespearean stage, song tends to register the singer's marginalized social position. Nearly every singer in Shakespeare's plays is marginalized with respect to power, cultural authority, or social position. While it has previously been noted that many of Shakespeare's characters who sing are marginalized, I would add that these characters are frequently *hypermarginalized*, a term that feminist scholars have used to refer to the position of any person whose identity intersects with more than one socially marginalized category.<sup>2,3</sup> The young, often nameless boy singers in the plays are marginalized with respect to class and age (see, for example *Measure for Measure*, 4.1). The Welsh Lady Mortimer is marginalized with respect to gender, nationality, and ethnicity or race (*1 Henry IV*, 3.1). When Ophelia sings, she is marginalized with respect to gender and, arguably, rank, and she is further hypermarginalized by her madness (*Hamlet*, 4.5). Although not all marginalized Shakespearean characters are directly associated with song, it is clear that song is deeply implicated in hypermarginality throughout Shakespeare's corpus.<sup>4,5</sup>

The unmarked position of power and authority at the center of all these marked forms is most often occupied by the adult, economically advantaged white male. In Shakespearean drama, this character is typically the mature male protagonist or male romantic lead.<sup>6,7</sup> To cite only a few examples from the Shakespearean plays that include

songs: Antony, Henry IV, Henry VIII, Romeo, Troilus, Prospero, Theseus, Demetrius, Lysander, Orsino, Claudio, Orlando, and Bassanio do not sing. Othello and Shylock, men who are socially marginalized by ethnicity and religion but are nonetheless in powerful positions, do not sing. Nor does *The Merchant of Venice's* Gratiano, though he boldly announces, "Let me play the fool" (1.1.79). In short, although powerful adult male protagonists in the Shakespearean corpus often request, listen to, and discuss songs, they almost never sing.<sup>8</sup> Cataloguing this phenomenon highlights the singularity of the rare cases in which male characters do break into song. When they do, they are most often slipping into positions of less social power and authority.

When previously powerful male characters break into song, it can indicate not only a loss in social station, but also a loss of wits. For instance, Lear's inarticulate snatches erupt when he has lost his kingdom, his family, and his wits. His singing serves as a sign of his loss of reason, as Cordelia indicates late in the play when she tells her men,

Why, he was met even now,  
As mad as the vexed sea, singing aloud. [...]  
What can man's wisdom  
In the restoring his bereavèd sense,  
He that helps him take all my outward worth.  
(Folio version, 4.3.1-2, 8-10)

Cordelia's appositive characterization of her "mad," "singing" father closely echoes Gertrude's description of Ophelia, whose madness is evinced and permeated by song: Ophelia famously appears singing before the court and dies while "chant[ing] snatches of old tunes" (4.7.148). *King Lear* places its age-assailed monarch among Shakespeare's madly singing characters – boys, women, fools – who are already less powerful. This

social placement strikingly demonstrates that in Shakespeare's dramatic universe, no one's wits are safely immutable. Lear's Fool, prominent among Shakespearean fools for his saucily explicit comparisons of vocational folly to the king's deteriorating cognition, hints early in the play that the potential mutability of Lear's wit has ever been a present threat. Having listened to the Fool's saucy banter, Lear retorts "Dost thou call me fool, boy?" The Fool famously answers, "All thy other titles thou has given away. That thou was born with" (Quarto only, scene 4, lines 131-2). This stunning reversal brushes off Lear's kingship and all the other advantages of his birth as mere outward trappings, suggesting that he is by rights both marginal and disabled. In this moment, the Fool seems to anticipate Lear's later recognition of other socially marginalized people—his acknowledgment that he has "ta'en / Too little care" of "[p]oor naked wretches, whereso'er you are" (3.4.36-7, 3.4.32). This acknowledgment comes about about only when Lear himself has been pushed to the literal margins of his former kingdom. The Fool's paradoxical characterization of Lear's mental mutability as an always-latent feature of his cognition challenges the very category of cognitive disability. Indeed, this characterization renders the category ambiguous and its constituents dubious.

Fools are the targets of longstanding anti-fool sentiments in premodern literature.<sup>9</sup> Such anti-fool sentiments, which appear in such medieval texts as William Dunbar's fifteenth-century characterization of "Jok Fule" and Lydgate's *Order of Fools*, remain active in the sixteenth-century fool literature that immediately precedes the earliest productions of *Twelfth Night* (c. 1602).<sup>10</sup> This anti-fool literature associates singing, vocational fools with disingenuity and outright lying. Late medieval and early

modern writers often claim that some of the performers of popular song billing themselves as disabled – e.g., blind harpers and natural fools – are capitalizing on popular demand for this type of performance. Minstrels, whom literary historians have identified as the musical forebears of vocational fools, are often said to be counterfeiting musical ability – badly – in order to gain and keep employment.<sup>11,12</sup> Similarly, vocational fools are often said to be counterfeiting cognitive disability in their verbal performances. In fact, *Piers Plowman* contains a sweeping damnation of both these forms of counterfeiting: the Prologue specifically states that some minstrels are “synnelees” but that “japeres and jangeleres, Judas children, / Feynen hem fantasies, and fooles hem maketh, / And han wit at wille to werken if they sholde.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, fools are explicitly associated with the seamier side of minstrelsy and are said to be feigning cognitive disability in order to avoid more legitimate labor.<sup>14</sup>

Tomaso Garzoni’s treatise *L’hospedale de pazzi incurabili* repeats these allegations of fools’ counterfeiting at great length.<sup>15</sup> Garzoni draws up a serious indictment against counterfeit fools, charging them simultaneously with craftiness and with disabling their own cognitive faculties. The treatise was published in Italian in 1586 and met with great success in Italy, which may well have inspired Edward Blount to publish it in English as *The hospitall of incurable fooles* in 1600.<sup>16</sup> There is little evidence surrounding the circumstances of its English publication, and the translation has been attributed variously and conjecturally to Edward Blount himself or to Thomas Nashe. The latter attribution arose from a note in one early copy of *The hospitall*: “Tho. Nashe had some hand in this translation and it was the last he did as I heare P. W.”<sup>17</sup> However, there is

no other evidence to support the case for Nashe as translator, although there may be a rather fanciful allure in the notion that the author who wrote so vividly of Jack Wilton's travels into Italy in *The Unfortunate Traveller* might have had a more than passing interest in Italian madness.

*The hospitall's* prefatory letter to the well-to-do John Hodgson connects it to the literary works of other luminaries of the period: Thomas Dekker's *The Gull's Horn-book* (1609) and a prefatory epistle to Thomas Middleton's *Father Hubbard's Tales: or the Ant and the Nightingale* (1604) both refer to Hodgson in laudatory terms. This connection, however oblique, suggests that *The hospitall* may have circulated—or its publisher may have wished that it should circulate—among consumers of early-seventeenth-century dramatists' prose works.

The treatise tells of the narrator's hospital for fools, who are all given "distinct Cels [within the hospital], wherein they may all commodiously, and with great ease repose themselves."<sup>18</sup> The "*pazzi*" in the Italian title might more accurately be translated as "madmen" or "crazy people," and Garzoni signals his satirical intent by signing his prefatory note to the reader as "*Il pazzissimo*" (roughly, "the craziest of all").<sup>19</sup> The English translation's employment of "fooles" for "*pazzi*" reflects the blurry conceptual boundaries between folly and madness that obtain in premodern English and French literature.<sup>20</sup> It also destabilizes the balance between analysis and performance—between talking about fools and acting a fool.

The blurring of folly and madness likewise appears in the content of the treatise itself. The narrator lays out chapters (or "discourses"), each devoted to one of twenty-

nine clearly demarcated types of fools. The sixteenth discourse, which is devoted to “parasiticall or scoffing Fooles,” begins:

It is not in a manner convenient, that these whom we call Parasiticall or counterfeit Fooles, should have place in the Hospitall of our Incurables, in that they not being really Foolish in minde, as the others are, have little to doe in this assembly, but it seemeth that they should rather be placed in the number of the wise, sage Cato affirming that, Stultitiam simulare loco, prudentia summa est. To play the Foole in time and place is greatest wisdom sure.<sup>21</sup>

Conspicuously, this statement makes it clear that the fools deemed incurable and therefore suited to residence in the hospital should be irrevocably cognitively disabled, or “really Foolish in minde” – that is, one might assume, they should be “naturall” fools. Those fools lodged in the hospital should not merely be giving a performance of folly: they should not be “artificial” fools. In other words, this passage calcifies the traditional early modern distinction between “naturall” and “artificial” folly.

Moreover, the passage clearly medicalizes the condition of the “naturall” fool while attributing merit to the “artificial” one. Monica Calabritto has shown how Garzoni’s Italian text operates in an atmosphere of increasing regulation of social norms at the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>22</sup> She argues, “Garzoni’s treatment of madness and of mad individuals is more rigid and conservative than that which was used in contemporary hospitals in Italy.”<sup>23</sup> Garzoni’s obsession with delineating distinct categories of persons plays, consciously or unconsciously, into English concerns about drawing boundary lines between the cognitively disabled members at the margins of society and their nervous contemporaries in the social center.

However, the narrator immediately complicates this account – and the discourse’s implicit investment in the boundaries between “naturall” and “artificiall” folly – by describing a more troublesome kind of fool:

But because there be some that otherwhiles play the Fooles in jest, with that little folly they have in their heads, it being a manifest signe of folly, to play the Foole for no purpose at all, to give other men contentment, by such men I say, we onely meane it, when in this our Hospital we place Parasiticall or counterfeit Fooles.<sup>24</sup>

Those who counterfeit folly “in jest” for entertainment – that is, those who perform fooling vocationally – are placed in the hospital for being “really Foolish in minde,” after all. The narrator thus portrays the “counterfeit” performance of cognitive disability as concrete evidence that the performer is actually cognitively disabled. In Garzoni’s treatise, no display of folly will keep the fool who displays it safely outside the confines of the hospital.

The narrator’s disdain for “play[ing] the Foole for no purpose at all” is shared by numerous other early modern literary figures. One explanatory moment occurs in Book II of *The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia*, in which the Jacques-like Plangus likens “wretched humaine-kind” to players on the stage:

Like players pla’st to fill a filthy stage,  
Where change of thoughts one foole to other shewes,  
And all but jests, save onely sorrowes rage.  
The child feeles that; the man that feeling knowes,  
With cries first borne, the presage of his life,  
Where wit but serves, to have true tast of woes.<sup>25</sup>

Here, Plangus represents all the players on the stage as fools engaging in pointless jokes and histrionics. He clearly regards the players as the sort who “play the Foole for no purpose at all,” unless that purpose is to intensify the “true tast of woes.” Garzoni’s

narrator shows a similar contempt for players and members of the lower classes alike in the discourse on “ridiculous fooles.” In this discourse, a mad king demonstrates his complete abandonment to his follies by “practis[ing] and convers[ing] as well with the basest vulgar sort, as with gentlemen and great lords” and “tumbling and dauncing like some stage foole, to the great abashment of those that were present at such indignities.”<sup>26</sup> The king’s genuine behavior, an indicator of his genuine madness, becomes more worthy of censure when it mimics the behavior of the stage fool’s feigning of folly.

Indeed, Garzoni’s narrator says that counterfeiting folly may *induce* cognitive impairment:

And there is no doubt but that amongst these men, we may well reckon that Gallus Vibius [...] who many times fayning himselfe to be a Foole, and jesting in this manner, at last he came to be so in good earnest, growing a starcke naturall Foole, to the ende that whereas he scoffed and deluded others, for chastisement of his folly, he might at last remaine derided and flouted himself.<sup>27</sup>

The dangers of feigning folly and jesting like a fool are similarly expounded by the narrator of Dekker’s *The Guls Horne-booke*, who promises readers, “Tush, tush, *Tarleton*, *Kemp*, nor *Singer*, nor all the litter of Fooles that now come drawling behinde them, never plaid the Clownes more naturally then [*sic*] the arrantest Sot of you all, shall, if hee will but boyle my Instructions in his brainepan.”<sup>28</sup> Dekker’s narrator evinces both a witty weariness of the English stage-fool tradition and a sly knowledge of how the categories of “artificiall” and “naturall” folly are often elided in the same tradition.

Garzoni’s narrator, not content with mere allusions to performed folly, immediately proffers an explicit example of a stage player. In contrast to *Twelfth Night*’s

Viola, who calls Feste “wise enough to play the fool” (3.1.53), the narrator clearly sees “playing of the foole” as disabling one’s wits:

In our daies one Garbinello hath a notable grace in playing of the foole, who as in representing a poore Padoan countrey man, a Magnifico, or some doddipoule Doctor Gratian he hath no fellow; so in this other kind of dissimulation, exceedeth he all others, for whosoever heareth or seeth him, by actions, gestures, and words, judgeth him to bee no other then a naturall Foole.<sup>29</sup>

This account, with its insistence on the impossibility of discerning between playing a fool and being one in fact, props up the indictment of feigning fools that the treatise has been developing. Published shortly before the earliest recorded performance of *Twelfth Night* (1602), it bears more than a passing resemblance to Malvolio’s attitude in his passive-aggressive altercations with Feste (e.g., 1.5), and does much to illumine Feste’s precariously liminal position between “counterfeit” and “real” folly. The distinction between “counterfeit” and “naturall” folly is completely elided in the figure of Garbinello: despite his status as a player, he is judged “to *bee* no other then a naturall Foole” by both the auditory and visual senses of all who witness him (emphasis added). Feste and all other vocational fools run just this risk of being doubly censured for both displaying counterfeit folly and bringing “naturall” folly upon themselves.

The narrator closes this discourse with a supplication to Mercury, whom the counterfeit fools are said to regard “as the god of all knaves, and craftie jackes like to themselves” and to rely on for protection.<sup>30</sup> In the supplication, the narrator names Mercury “the inventor of the Harpe [...] and of Rhetoricke,” thereby associating the god with the artistic practices for which fools are both celebrated and derided.<sup>31</sup> He concludes by promising that, if Mercury will give the counterfeit fools in the hospital

his protection, he can “expect without any delay, before thy image in the Temple of the Phenicians, the oblation of a Foxes skinne, which will be an offering much conformable both to them and thy selfe.”<sup>32</sup> In associating counterfeit fools and their mythological patron with the craftiness of the fox, the narrator concludes his exposition of these fools’ cognitive deficits with a gesture toward their alleged hyper-intellection and lack of ethical virtues. Despite or perhaps because of its internal self-contradictions, this characterization of vocational fools as both hyper-intellectual and hyper-disabled follows them throughout early modern literature. Indeed, given the narrator’s sly characterization of himself as “*Il pazzissimo*,” the indictment of the counterfeit fools is one in which he may be implicating himself.

This common portrayal of fools’ vocation as counterfeiting is not in every case a criticism associated with anti-fool sentiment. In early modern English, the word “counterfeit” does not have a uniformly negative connotation.<sup>33</sup> For example, George Puttenham’s *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) identifies artificial fools’ counterfeiting of folly<sup>34</sup> as the source of the humor in their performance:

[A] buffoon or counterfeit fool, to hear him speak wisely, which is like himself, it is no sport at all, but for such a counterfeit to talk and look foolishly, it maketh us laugh, because it is no part of his natural, for in every uncomeliness there must be a certain absurdity and disproportion to nature and the opinion of the hearer or beholder to make the thing ridiculous. But for a fool to talk foolishly or a wise man wisely, there is no such absurdity or disproportion.<sup>35</sup>

For Puttenham, the catalyst for the audience’s laughter at the performance of the “counterfeit fool” is the audience’s recognition of the misalignment between the fool’s actual ability and his performance of disability. In other words, like Viola in *Twelfth*

*Night*, Puttenham recognizes that the counterfeit fool is giving a performance of folly – not necessarily playing himself. Simultaneously, he takes comfort in deriving his amusement at the counterfeit fool’s performance from the “disproportion” between the fool’s presumed ability and his performance of disability. As scholars of disability studies working in other periods point out, audiences frequently prefer that able-bodied performers represent disabled characters and that disabled bodies be hidden from public view.<sup>36</sup> Puttenham clearly locates the audience’s pleasure in a performance of folly in precisely this dissociation between the representation of disabled, bodily intellection and the performer’s own bodily, cognitive ability. Nonetheless, as Garzoni’s treatise demonstrates, this very dissociation renders premodern fools suspect and subject to moral opprobrium.

The problems Garzoni and Puttenham adduce converge in the figure of the vocational fool as he is played on the early modern English stage. Act 4, scene 2 of *Twelfth Night* shows Feste negotiating the problems inherent in “fayning himselfe to be a Foole,” as Garzoni would put it, as he plays the role of Sir Topas the curate while he, Maria, and Sir Toby Belch torment Malvolio in the “dark house.”<sup>37</sup> After Feste has taunted Malvolio by counterfeiting the voice of Sir Topas and accusing Malvolio of lunacy, Maria remarks to Feste, “Thou mightst have done this” – that is, might have performed the role of Sir Topas the curate – “without thy beard and gown, he sees thee not” (4.2.57–58). Other commentators have justifiably used this line to point out how unnecessary it is for Feste to don a curate’s costume in order to deceive Malvolio.<sup>38</sup> I want to emphasize that Maria’s comment also demonstrates how entirely Feste’s

performance of the curate's role relies on vocal counterfeiture. Immediately after her comment, Sir Toby bids Feste doff the persona of Sir Topas by saying, "To him in thine own voice," thereby confirming that Feste's playing of Sir Topas relies on the assumption of uncharacteristic vocal qualities (4.2.59). Maria's and Toby's words both evince their assumption that the voice in which Feste performs his fooling – as opposed to the voice of he uses when performing as Sir Topas the curate – is his "own voice." That is, they assume no counterfeiture in the vocal qualities of Feste's usual fooling.

Toby's remark here suggests that Feste's voice is taken as synonymous with his identity as the fool. And throughout the play, other characters imply that Feste's vocal characteristics are constant and recognizable when they repeatedly comment that his voice is notably beautiful in song. It is implied that the part of Feste the fool is thought of by all but Viola as uncounterfeited, rather than as a performed role. Criticism on *Twelfth Night* evinces a similar understanding of Feste's voices. For instance, Lois Potter refers to Feste's vocal performance as Sir Topas as Feste's "trick voice," thus – like Sir Toby – conferring a kind of normativity on Feste's "own voice."<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, to join Toby in deeming Feste's habitual voice to be his "own voice" is to presume to know something like Feste's true self and to ignore the possibility, spoken by Viola, that there is a consummate artifice in Feste's "playing of the Foole." Feste's vocal disguise or "trick voice" emphasizes his audience's difficulties in discerning the differences between his performance and his "own" persona – if there are any. His vocal counterfeiture gestures toward the twin possibilities that his entire act of playing the

fool is likewise counterfeited *or* that the illusion of counterfeiture veils genuine cognitive disability.

At the same time, the artifice and potential counterfeiture implicated in Feste's fooling do not diminish the disruptive effect of his songs and witty repartee. When Feste doffs the voice of Sir Topas and "re-enters" as the fool (or so Malvolio is led to believe), he announces his re-entry by singing. "Hey Robin, jolly Robin, / Tell me how thy lady does," he begins, and Malvolio instantaneously recognizes him and calls out, "Fool!" (4.2.65–67). Feste, however, ignores the address and continues to sing while Malvolio tries to attract his attention:

MALVOLIO	Fool!
FESTE [ <i>singing</i> ]	"My lady is unkind, pardie."
MALVOLIO	Fool!
FESTE	"Alas, why is she so?"
MALVOLIO	Fool, I say!
FESTE	"She loves another —" Who calls, ha?
MALVOLIO	Good fool, as ever thou wilt deserve well at my hand, help me to a candle, and pen, ink, and paper. As I am a gentleman, I will live to be thankful to thee for 't. (4.2.67–76)

Even as Malvolio attempts to interrupt the song, Feste's seemingly silly ditty becomes the means by which he can ignore Malvolio's pleas. Malvolio's pleas, in turn, remind both Feste and the audience that Feste is "playing of the Foole," although Malvolio clearly regards the fooling persona as genuine — or genuine enough for supplication. Thus, in facilitating Feste's insouciant performance of counterfeit fooling while serving as an impediment to Malvolio's attempt to catch Feste's ear, the song disables social concord.<sup>40</sup>



In the scene at hand, Feste leaves with another song, the second of the two songs that bookend his performance of “himself” – that is, of the counterfeit fool whose persona can never be certainly distinguished from his “own voice”:

FESTE            I am gone, sir,  
                       And anon, sir,  
                       I'll be with you again,  
                       In a trice,  
                       Like to the old Vice,  
                       Your need to sustain;  
                       Who, with dagger of lath,  
                       In his rage and his wrath,  
                       Cries, ah, ha! to the devil:  
                       Like a mad lad,  
                       Pare thy nails, dad;  
                       Adieu, good man devil. (4.2.111-22)

The song's jangling, repetitive rhymes harken to the technique that, according to Puttenham, “showeth a certain lightness either of the matter or of the maker's head.” The song's comparison of the first-person singer “to the old Vice” links Feste to the history of fooling on the English stage, in which the Vice served as a dramatic precursor to the fool. Simultaneously, it highlights the slippage between sung words and their performer. At the same time, the form of the song itself places Feste within the minstrel tradition that received so much derision from premodern writers. A devotee of Puttenham's, hearing this song, might well have thought of Puttenham's critique of Skelton: “But a rude, railing rhymer, and all his doings ridiculous, he used both short distances and short measures, pleasing only the popular ear. In our courtly maker we banish them utterly.”<sup>41</sup> Feste, whose song clearly fails Puttenham's standards for the “courtly maker,” deflects attention from his song's failures by further ostracizing his fellow outsider, Malvolio – a deflection that relies on the disruption of fooling to disable

the judgment of his courtly audience. Indeed, the “rude, railing” rhymes of Feste’s songs more than hint at his own marginalized status as a cognitively different fool whose songs fail would-be elite aesthetic standards like Puttenham’s. Moreover, these songs provide pleasure to audiences, as evidenced by their frequent presence in comedies and even tragedies. Audiences who enjoy the pleasures these songs offer implicate themselves in Puttenham-esque judgments of the “popular ear,” showing their own cognitive bent toward putatively low aesthetic forms.

Popular song is often represented as “non-rational” in early modern literature – that is, it is not forced into the analytical categories of rationality and irrationality.<sup>42</sup> This assertion would have shocked the vast majority of early modern music theorists, as well as their medieval and classical forebears: music was, after all, long categorized among the fundamental disciplines in the classical quadrivium – which also included astronomy, math, and geometry – rather than the trivium, which was comprised of grammar, rhetoric, and logic. In theory, music was even seen as hyperrational: the music historian Claude Palisca has argued that sixteenth-century Renaissance thinkers increasingly thought of music as an art that governed all the other disciplines.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, musical practices have always troubled musical theories, and Shakespearean songs often fail to meet these theoretical standards of hyperrationality.<sup>44</sup> Feste’s songs, in addition to refusing to engage such musico-theoretical standards, operate under the umbrage of sixteenth-century socio-musical biases that deem popular song insufficiently erudite and insufficiently gentlemanly.

George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* aptly showcases the intersecting prejudices concerning cognitive faculties, gender, and class that underpin these standards of hyperrationality in medieval and Renaissance theories of music. His theories of the relative merits of "artificial" and "popular" song both parallel premodern theories of "artificial" versus "natural" fooling and reproduce the cultural norms that categorize singers and fans of popular song as cognitively deficient. Puttenham strongly links specific poetic conventions with specific genres of song and, in turn, specific kinds of singers. His discussions of the poetic forms he associates with popular song often begin, like other discussions in the *Arte*, with questions of aesthetic judgment. For example, book 2, chapter 10 begins with this injunction:

But this ye must observe withal, that because your concords contain the chief part of music in your meter, their distances may not be too wide or far asunder, lest the ear should lose the tune and be defrauded of his delight. And whensoever ye see any maker use large and extraordinary distances, ye must think he doth intend to show himself more artificial than popular, and yet therein is not to be discommended.<sup>45</sup>

Puttenham analogizes the work of the poet ("maker") to the work of the musical composer through a pun on "concords." In early modern writing about music, "concord" often refers to consonant harmony; in Puttenham's treatise, it also often serves as a synonym for "rhyme."

Here, Puttenham's analogy specifically compares the treatment of rhyme to the treatment of harmonic rhythm, the rate at which the chords change in a given piece or section of music.<sup>46</sup> Puttenham suggests that relatively slow harmonic rhythms run the risk of allowing auditors to "lose the tune." This is an indication that he might have appreciated such pieces as simple motets by contemporary composers of "more

artificial than popular” music, but that he would have been less taken by the more complex works that were being written by his contemporaries.<sup>47</sup> In other words, the passage identifies Puttenham’s musical tastes as solidly middlebrow. At the same time, it lauds artifice in poetic creation at the expense of the “popular,” which is assumed to be lowbrow.

These aesthetic values appear elsewhere in the treatise, particularly when Puttenham deals with performances of song and poetry – that is, the very type of performance given by Robert Armin’s fools and the other singers in early modern plays. In another of the *Arte*’s many passages that use music as an extended metaphor for poetry, Puttenham directly links fools, songs and rhymes, and “lightness” of mind:

Note also that rhyme or concord is not commendably used both in the end and middle of a verse, unless it be in toys and trifling poesies, for it showeth a certain lightness either of the matter or of the maker’s head, albeit these common rhymers use it much. For as I said before, like as the symphony in a verse of great length is, as it were, lost by looking after him, and yet may the meter be very grave and stately, so on the other side doth the over-busy and too speedy return of one manner of tune too much annoy and, as it were, glut the ear – unless it be in small and popular musics sung by these *cantabanqui* [from It. *cantabanchi*, “sings-on-benches”] upon benches and barrels’ heads, where they have none other audience than boys or country fellows that pass by them in the street; or else by blind harpers or such like tavern minstrels that give a fit of mirth for a groat, and their matters being for the most part stories of old time, as *The Tale of Sir Topas*, the reports of *Bevis of Southampton*, *Guy of Warwick*, *Adam Bell*, and *Clym of the Clough*, and such other old romances or historical rhymes, made purposely for recreation of the common people at Christmas dinners and bride-ales, and in taverns and alehouses and such other places of base resort. Also they be used in carols and rounds and such light or lascivious poems, which are commonly more commodiously uttered by these buffoons or vices in plays than by any other person.<sup>48</sup>

Ostensibly, this passage, which is a single sentence in the 1589 edition<sup>49</sup> – long and compendious, even by Puttenham’s standards – cautions against the use of internal

rhymes. Internal rhymes are indeed characteristic of medieval English verse, and their chiming sounds might be thought of as the aural cousins of the tailed rhyme that is famously satirized in the *Canterbury Tales*' "Tale of Sir Thopas." Puttenham's clear disdain for this type of verse comports with the more forceful and concise assessment of Chaucer's Host: "Thy drasty rymyng is nat worth a toord!"<sup>50</sup> However, Puttenham expands his critique to impugn the cognitive ability of the makers of such rhymes, the character of those who perform them, and the taste and class of those who enjoy them.

Puttenham's suspicion of performers of popular song draws on the conceptual metaphor of blindness as want of judgment: literal blindness becomes metaphorical blindness to finer music and poetry, in Puttenham's estimation. Thus, his reference to "blind harpers" is an observation of the reality that many early modern performers of popular song were physically impaired. It is also an insinuation that figurative blindness – that is, want of musical judgment – impairs the cognitive apprehension of the "base" audiences who enjoy the blind harpers' performance. Indeed, Puttenham's concern that the jangling internal rhyme "showeth a certain lightness either of the matter or of the maker's head" shows his anxiety that inept poetry – what we might call disabled poetry – reflects not only the disabled apprehension of its auditors and performers but of its creators, too.

The other critiques Puttenham here lays out likewise charge performers and hearers of popular song with failures in cognitive apprehension. One such form of failed apprehension is aural: perhaps surprisingly, the "ear" that Puttenham fears will be glutted by "the over busy and too speedy return of one manner of tune" is not the

abstracted ear of an auditor assumed to share Puttenham's tastes, education, or status. Rather, it is a generalized "ear" capable of representing both educated auditors – such as Puttenham and his readers – and "boys or country fellows." Puttenham makes it quite clear that he regards the latter's taste for the "popular" songs of the *cantabanqui* as neither astonishing nor commendable. Likewise, he displays contempt for the "blind harpers" and "tavern minstrels," who commercialize their songs by "giv[ing] a fit of mirth for a groat."<sup>51</sup> Puttenham's characterization of these singer's performances suggests that the "fit[s] of mirth" that harpers and minstrels parcel out for hire are unworthy of the attention of the higher ranks, both because they fail adjudications of taste and because they subject performances of song and poetry to commodification.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, his dismissive employment of "groat" participates in a wider late-sixteenth-century tradition, evinced by such other texts as Robert Greene's 1592 *Groats-Worth of witte, bought with a million of Repentance*, of associating the lowly groat with impaired cognition and moral fault.<sup>53</sup>

The genre of popular song itself thus fails Puttenham's standards for gentlemanly intellection and freedom from economic exchange. He implies that popular song and its rhymes are found wanting, not only for their "light" and "lascivious" characters, but also for their susceptibility to intellectually unworthy forms of exchange. His critique of such songs clearly encompasses figures similar to Feste, who sings for hire, and Autolycus, who baldly peddles ballads with his other "trumpery" (*Twelfth Night* 2.3; *The Winter's Tale*, 4.4.680). Puttenham's employment of the conceptual metaphor of blindness as lack of insight, paired with his repeated cautions that the

“tune” of poetry should not lose the ear, evinces his belief in an interplay between sight and sound; between words and music; and between making, performing, hearing, and assessing poetry. The nexus of the system he lays out is the popular song – the sung poem – a genre that he deems inherently lacking, disabled, and moreover, “more commodiously uttered by these buffoons or vices in plays than by any other person.” The formulation of this critique throws the burden of poetry’s failures not upon courtly makers, but upon the lower entertainers of benches, taverns, and the popular playhouse: the minstrels, the vices, and their artistic heirs, the “buffoons” or fools.

Throughout *Twelfth Night*, Feste – a lower entertainer, such as the ones Puttenham despises – displays the awareness of the “witty fool” who knows he is ever in danger of being taken as cognitively disabled. This anxiety is especially apparent during his exchange with Olivia in act 1, scene 5, when Feste accosts Olivia with words that highlight how he is performing “fooling” for her entertainment:

FESTE            Wit, an ’t be thy will, put me into good fooling! Those wits that think they have thee do very oft prove fools, and I that am sure I lack thee may pass for a wise man. For what says Quinapalus? – “Better a witty fool than a foolish wit.” God bless thee, Lady! (1.5.28–32)<sup>54</sup>

Feste’s speech introduces the idea, widely bruited about in the early modern period, that the vocational fool’s entertainment value rests on his cognitive deficiency. Feste’s perhaps overly-dramatized show of reverent invocation of “Wit” functions as an insouciant metacommentary on the mental dexterity that he, who is “sure [he] lack[s]” wit, is about to be called upon to display.

Likewise, the rest of the scene circles incessantly around the playful juxtaposition of the supposedly cognitively deficient fool’s performance of wit with Olivia’s

ostensibly more sober conversation. Olivia answers Feste's greeting with a curt "Take the fool away" (1.5.33), whereupon Feste commences a nimble mock-interrogation of the wisdom of Olivia's conduct. He closes his performance with a deft reversal that turns the epithet of "fool" back toward Olivia: "The lady bade take away the fool, therefore I say again, take her away" (1.5.45-46). When Olivia retorts, "Sir, I bade them take away you," Feste replies, "Misprision in the highest degree! Lady, '*Cucullus non facit monachum*,' – that's as much to say as I wear not motley in my brain" (1.5.47-50). There is a subtle defensiveness in the verbal panache of this last asseveration, particularly in the faux-learned Latin aphorism, "*Cucullus non facit monachum*" ("The cowl does not make a monk"). Despite Feste's prefatorial remarks on his "lack" of wit, the success of his performance rests on donning the guise of fool, rather than being taken for one. For his performance to succeed, his audience must both revel in his display of mental acuity and buy the idea of mental deficiency as a charade.

In this early *Twelfth Night* scene, Malvolio is the only character so ill-humored as to suggest that Feste's mental deficiency is actual and not feigned. Furthermore, Malvolio strongly insinuates that Feste is mentally unsound, invoking the vocabulary of illness to characterize vocational fools: when asked by Olivia for an assessment of Feste's fooling, Malvolio says, "[I]nfirmitie, that decays the wise, doth ever make the better fool." Feste replies, "God send you, sir, a speedy infirmitie, for the better increasing your folly!" (1.5.66-68). By playing winkingly upon the fiction of "infirmitie" even while pushing it away, Feste always risks the possibility that his status as a licensed fool will be lost by serious misprision of his abilities. The risk of misprision is

all the greater because the “infirmity” in question is cognitive: invisible, illegible, and thus always available to his opponents’ invocations. His fooling makes it imperative that he challenge and play on culturally constructed fictions of normative cognition. Malvolio, undeterred, redoubles his insinuations, saying of Feste, “I saw him put down the other day with an ordinary fool that has no more brain than a stone,” thereby insinuating that Feste’s ability is inferior to a putatively witless natural fool’s (1.5.72–73). Though Malvolio’s statement acknowledges that Feste is held in higher esteem than other fools, it still calls Feste’s relatively high status into question.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, Feste clearly understands how precarious is his position. The fool must be keenly aware that his auditors construct their own notions of cognitive normativity in opposition to carefully parsed deficiencies in the various early modern categories of fools. His performance as a “foole artificiall” depends on holding himself above “fooles naturall” while still playing to the cultural fiction of cognitive impairment.<sup>56</sup>

Singing is a key way in which Feste plays on such fictions. In *Twelfth Night*, song is not merely an indicator of cognitive difference; it is also a mode of performance by which Feste himself embodies hypermarginality and plays with constructs of difference.<sup>57</sup> As the contextual surroundings of Feste’s other performances of song throughout the play show, his hypermarginality resides in the intersection of cognition, masculinity, and class. He traffics in fooling – that is, he performs verbal wit and song for hire. Of the four scenes in which he sings, in two he explicitly receives payment for his song (2.3 and 2.4), and in a third he is paid for his jests and then performs his song for the good will of the playgoers (5.1). In these scenes, his explicit commercialization of

his art sets him apart from the ideal of the gentlemanly artist valorized by writers like George Puttenham, and it identifies him as a member of a lower rank. Just as saliently, this very commercialization of his performances cordons him off from the activities of leisured male homosociality that are available to Orsino and even to Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek.<sup>58</sup>

Indeed, while Feste's relationship with Sir Toby and Sir Andrew has many elements of camaraderie, it should be noted that the legendary nocturnal singing and cavorting of act 2, scene 3 is prefaced by a monetary transaction. At the beginning of the scene, Sir Toby greets Feste convivially and suggests a "catch" – a round for several voices (2.3.16). However, Sir Andrew then asks Feste if the latter has received sixpence for the previous night's fooling and requests a song. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew each give Feste sixpence, and only then does Feste ask them what kind of song they would like to hear (2.3.22–27). Moreover, Sir Andrew accompanies the donation of his sixpence with the broken-off remark, "If one knight give a –," thereby emphasizing his and Sir Toby's rank and monied status in contradistinction to Feste's (2.3.31–31). Sir Andrew thereby sets himself and Sir Toby at the intersection of elite rank and masculinity, while he places Feste *and* Feste's impending song outside the boundaries of these forms of power.<sup>59</sup>

The subsequent scene, in which Orsino has Curio fetch Feste in order to bid him sing, similarly shows that Feste performs for hire – and in the social context of gendered forms of difference. Orsino bids Viola (as Cesario) to "[m]ark" the song:

ORSINO                    [I]t is old and plain;

The spinsters and the knitters in the sun,  
And the free maids that weave their thread with bones,  
Do use to chant it. (2.4.42–45)

Orsino explicitly associates the song he wants Feste to sing with women and women's work. Indeed, his designation of the song as an "old" one that is "chant[ed]" by women closely matches Gertrude's characterization of the songs Ophelia sings as she dies. In so doing, he associates Feste with women singer-workers: spinsters, knitters, and maids. The binary system he thereby invokes does not contrast masculinity with femininity; rather, it contrasts unmarked elite masculinity with other, marked forms of gender, which are implicitly associated with cognitive malleability. In order to capitalize on this system and make a living by his song, Feste must play into the world created by empowered men: Orsino, Toby, and Andrew, answering to their elite masculinity with his bought song. It is Feste's multiform difference – together with his artificiality, or artful skill – that enables his song, and it is his song that marks his multiform difference. At the same time, Andrew's designation as a "foolish knight" (1.3.12) compromises his masculinity in a different way: he invites the label "natural," which correctly indicates the way in which he has disabled his own cognition by failing to take advantage of the educational opportunities afforded him by his wealth and rank.

*Twelfth Night*, like the *Tale of Beryn*, separates the character of the artificial, vocational fool from that of the young man whose non-vocational folly results from his refusal of education. *Twelfth Night's* separation of "witty fool" from "foolish wit" contrasts with *Robert of Cisyle* and *The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art*, which

conflate these two types of character – a move that effectively impugns vocational fools for their alleged responsibility for their moral *and* educational deficits. By separating these types of folly and holding them in tension, *Twelfth Night* makes space for some celebration of the artificial, vocational fool at the expense of the dissolute, ill-educated young man. *Pace* those scholars who have adduced an Erasmian take on folly in Shakespeare’s later plays’ portrayals of vocational fools, *Twelfth Night* holds the “natural” fool up for ridicule – unlike the *Praise of Folly*, which sets apart natural fools as purveyors of aesthetic pleasure who need not worry about their salvation.

Several times, characters in the play distinguish Feste’s kind of songs and witticisms from Sir Andrew’s lesser cognitive and performative abilities. For instance, Maria and Sir Toby speak of Andrew as a kind of fool. Maria openly calls him a “foolish knight” (1.3.12).<sup>60</sup> She continues:

MARIA: He’s a very fool and a prodigal.

SIR TOBY: Fie, that you’ll say so! He plays o’ the viol-de-gamoys, and speaks three or four languages word for word without book, and hath all the good gifts of nature.

MARIA: He hath indeed, almost natural, for besides that he’s a fool, he’s a great quarreler. (1.3.19-25)

In his attempted rebuttal to Maria’s assessment, Sir Toby claims that Sir Andrew actually possesses the talents that a high-ranking young man might have cultivated with years of study: fluency in “three or four languages” and facility on the viola da gamba – a predecessor of the cello that would have theoretically suited highbrow musical tastes far more than the drinking songs in which Andrew, Toby, and Feste all indulge. Maria’s riposte deftly turns Toby’s “gifts of nature” into the mere adjective “natural” – i.e., the qualitative descriptor of both congenital folly and lack of education.

Sir Andrew himself corroborates Maria's skepticism. He meditates on his impaired wit and then belies the claim that he is a polyglot:

SIR ANDREW: Methinks sometimes I have no more wit than a Christian or an ordinary man has. But I am a great eater of beef, and I believe that does harm to my wit.

SIR TOBY: No question.

SIR ANDREW: An I thought that, I'd forswear it. I'll ride home tomorrow, Sir Toby.

SIR TOBY: *Pourquoi*, my dear knight?

SIR ANDREW: What is "*pourquoi*"? Do or not do? I would I had bestowed that time in the tongues that I have in fencing, dancing, and bearbaiting. O, had I but followed the arts! (1.3.70-79)

As in *The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art*, in which Moros is criticized for his lack of Latin, *Twelfth Night* uses Andrew's demonstrated ignorance of languages—here, French—to show his greater folly. Moreover, Andrew's lack of skill in "the arts" implicitly contrasts his abilities with Feste's artificial, or artful, abilities. Later, after Sir Toby haphazardly runs through a few lines from "Three merry men be we" and the ballad "The Constancy of Susanna," Andrew similarly contrasts his own singing with that of Sir Toby, to whom he attributes a "better grace":

FESTE: Beshrew me, the knight's in admirable fooling.

SIR ANDREW: Ay, he does well enough if he be disposed, and so do I too. He does it with a better grace, but I do it more natural. (2.3.68-70)

Following Feste's compliment of Toby's "fooling," Andrew offers a contrast between "grace[ful]" and "natural" performance. His "I do it more natural" functions as a taxonomy—if a silly, drunken taxonomy—of fooling.<sup>61</sup> If Sir Toby's song is more artful than his, he does not presume to put either on a plane with Feste's "mellifluous voice" (2.5.47). The perceived division between forms of fooling is sharp.

Feste's own songs, it is clear, are better performed than Andrew's or Toby's. Even so, Feste's songs serve as examples of stubbornly non-rational performance. In integrating music with the often-repetitive, non-disquisitive lyrics traditional in popular song, they introduce a mode of discourse different from the more rational rhythms of the play's dialogue – even its jests. Consider the first two stanzas of Feste's final song, which closes the play:

FESTE [*singing*]      When that I was and a little tiny boy,  
                                  With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,  
                                  A foolish thing was but a toy,  
                                  For the rain it raineth every day.

                                 But when I came to man's estate,  
                                  With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,  
                                  'Gainst knaves and thieves men shut their gate,  
                                  For the rain it raineth every day. (5.1.376–383)

The second and fourth lines – “With hey, ho, the wind and the rain” and “For the rain it raineth every day” – are repeated with little variation in each stanza.<sup>62</sup> Falling between the smooth continuity proffered by rhymed narrative lines, they disrupt the prosodic sound and the narrative sense of the verse. When Feste sings this song, then, he breaks up his narrative with strategically repetitive, non-rational interjections. Disruptive though they are, these interjections also add stasis to offset the forward pulse of the narrative first and third lines: the repeated disruptions ground both singer and listeners in the drumming constancy of the “rain [that] raineth every day.”

The second line (“With hey, ho, the wind and the rain”) is itself punctured by the adamantly non-signifying “hey, ho” that is characteristic of many English folk songs. The utter banality of the phrase obscures both its unavailability to rational, non-musical

discourse and the de-rationalizing work it performs in its native, sung environs: it resists logical parsing. Similarly, the fourth line (“For the rain it raineth every day”) refuses to be bundled up into neatly rational syntax. Its conjunctive opening word, “for,” gestures toward an explication of causality that is nowhere to be found: there is nothing the “for” is for. The repetition, the disruptions, and the toggling back and forth between narrative and static time seldom, if ever, appear in early modern dramatic prose or verse, yet in song they are sufficiently hum-drum to elicit little notice. Only in song is such non-rationality the norm.

In following his verbal performances of wit by singing such non-signifying words, Feste is playfully conflating the categories of “artificial” and “natural” fooling. His song leaves open the question of whether the singer is employing artifice or unthinkingly following the contours of any number of popular songs that might be performed “for a groat.” By smudging the lines between these kinds of fooling via the genres most insistently associated with fools – words and song – he shows how both kinds of fooling reside outside the demesne of early modern ideals of rational thought. When he performs his final song – both recalling for the audience the songs that have come before and breaking the fictive bounds of the play to solicit the playgoers’ approval (“we’ll strive to please you every day”) – he draws the play’s audience itself into the forms of aesthetic commerce that reinforce unmarked positions of power. His song now supplicates, not a gentleman character’s bounty, but our own.

It would be all too easy to celebrate Feste as a paragon of wit, as his longstanding association in the critical literature with Robert Armin’s “artificial” fooling attests. It is

true that Feste's own verbal witticisms and, particularly, his songs put into practice an aesthetic that valorizes novelty, pleasure, and freedom from the strictures of rationality. And, certainly, to celebrate Feste in this manner would hardly be out of keeping with his consummately virtuoso performances of wit. Nonetheless, to focus solely on this aspect of Feste's fooling would be to miss the ways in which Feste's fooling calls into question the celebration of cognitive ability in both early modern dramatic and later literary-critical contexts – and it would be to miss the ways in which “natural” fools like Sir Andrew are never marked for laudatory comment at all. By blurring the categorical boundary lines between natural and artificial fooling, ability and disability, truth and falsehood, rationality and irrationality, Feste's performances of verbal wit and songs locate meaning in the non-rational, resistant expressions of the characters who wear their motley with a difference.

<sup>1</sup> Amanda Bailey provides an important qualifier of this general point about masculinity vis-à-vis marginality, noting the “multiplicity of masculine identities” in the period. *Flaunting: Style and the Subversive Male Body in Renaissance England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 22. Similarly, Daniel Gates notes tension among varying early modern codes of masculine conduct, writing that “[T]he roaring boy is a noteworthy figure in early modern drama because he underscores resistance to the codes of civility in early modern London, revealing how masculinity [. . .] was defined in conflicting terms among men of various ages and social ranks.” Daniel Gates, “The Roaring Boy: Contested Masculinity on the Early Modern Stage,” *Journal of The Midwest Modern Language Association* 46.1 (Spring 2013): 43–54, p. 43.

For further discussion of masculinity in Shakespeare, specifically, see Gina Bloom, “‘Boy Eternal’: Aging, Games, and Masculinity in *The Winter’s Tale*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 40.3 (Autumn 2010): 329–56; and Bruce R. Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Leslie C. Dunn provides an extensive and persuasive reading of the relationship between marginality, especially gendered marginality, and performances of song in *1 Henry IV* and the Shakespearean corpus at large. Contrasting the Welsh Lady Mortimer’s marginality with the empowered status of her auditors, Dunn suggests that this gendering of both singers and auditors persists throughout the Shakespearean corpus: “[M]en who occupy positions of power, or who have the role of sympathetic hero, almost never sing or even have songs sung for them, unless, like Orsino, they are temporarily self-displaced, having abandoned themselves to some passion, or, like Edgar, they are deliberately feigning such abandonment.” Leslie C. Dunn, “The Lady Sings in Welsh: Women’s Song as Marginal Discourse on the Shakespearean Stage,” in *Place and Displacement in the Renaissance*, ed. Alvin Vos (Binghamton, New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995): 51–67, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Marcyliena Morgan, “No Woman No Cry: Claiming African American Women’s Place,” in *Reinventing Identities: The Gendered Self in Discourse*, ed. M. Bucholtz, A. C. Liang, and L. A. Sutton (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 27–29.

<sup>4</sup> The existence of many of these songs relies partly on material contingencies: the vocal properties and musical abilities of the actors available for early productions of the plays. There is ample reason to suspect material motivation behind the use of young boys and servants for set-piece songs: these characters frequently enter for the main purpose of singing, making it possible for both early modern and later playing companies to use actors whose voices fit the occasion but who may not be physically suited to or even have sufficient thespian talents for larger acting roles.

Viable internal evidence in the late Shakespearean plays strongly implies that their fools sing because Robert Armin, believed to have played Feste and many of

Shakespeare's later fools, had a good voice. Indeed, there is ample evidence for Armin's vocal talents. In *Twelfth Night*, Sir Toby says, "By my troth, the fool has an excellent breast. I had rather than forty shillings I had [...] so sweet a breath to sing, as the fool has" (2.3.17–19). Following the song Toby requests in this scene ("O mistress mine, where are you roaming?"), Sir Andrew Aguecheek remarks, "A mellifluous voice, as I am true knight" (2.3.49). Given the numerous occasions on which other characters ask Feste to sing throughout *Twelfth Night*, there is no reason to assume that Toby and Andrew's judgment is as unreliable in matters musical as it seems to be in other domains. Moreover, while an actor with a good voice might certainly play a character who sings poorly, it seems unlikely that Feste's prominently featured, often lengthy songs would have been included if the actor meant to perform them could not sing well. The material contingencies of staging song in early productions remind audiences of the perils of performing song – and of performing wit. These reminders invite audiences to subject the fools' songs and verbal wit alike to analytical scrutiny.

For a discussion of developing male voices on the early modern English stage, see Gina Bloom, "'Thy Voice Squeaks': Listening for Masculinity on the Early Modern Stage." *Renaissance Drama* 29 (2000): 39–71.

<sup>5</sup> The issue of Shakespearean song's implication in questions of marginality has attracted substantial critical commentary in the last thirty years. Scholars of music and literature have produced a significant body of research on issues of embodiment, gender, and song in the early modern period. Much of this work takes up the concurrent questions of women's status and the role of music. I wish to build on these critical contributions by asking the related, if broader, question of how Shakespearean song indicates multiple forms of marginality, including marginal forms of gender, class, and cognitive ability.

See, for example, Linda Phyllis Austern, "Music and the English Renaissance: Controversy over Women," in *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music*, ed. Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), pp. 52–69; Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones, eds., *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Diana E. Henderson, *Passion Made Public: Elizabethan Lyric, Gender, and Performance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Amanda Eubanks Winkler, *O Let Us Howle Some Heavy Note: Music for Witches, Melancholics and the Mad on the Seventeenth-Century English Stage* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Gina Bloom, *Voice in Motion: Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Erin Minear, *Reverberating Song in Shakespeare and Milton: Language, Memory, and Musical Representation* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> For the sake of brevity, I am eliding many relatively less marginalized ethnic and national categories – e.g., Englishness, Italianness, Romanness – into "whiteness." While the Shakespearean corpus does not equate these categories, it does typically accord them a socially central, empowered position. Characters who occupy these categories

are often described in complementarily ethnicized terms, as when Juliet is called “fair.” In contrast, Shakespearean drama typically relegates characters of other ethnicities – e.g., Irish, Welsh, Jewish, and Moorish characters – to the social margins. Although several of these ethnicities are typically considered “white” today, they are not treated as undifferentiatedly white in the Shakespearean corpus. Irish and Welsh characters’ alterity is heavily marked; Jewish and Moorish characters are treated as distant from English and Italian characters in terms of both ethnicity and religion.

I am delineating *general* tendencies here. For accounts of the complexity of these ethnic positions in Shakespeare, see Emily C. Bartels, *Speaking of the Moor: From Alcazar to Othello* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Lara Bovilsky, *Barbarous Play: Race on the English Renaissance Stage* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), especially Chapter 2, “Exemplary Jews and the Logic of Gentility,” pp. 67–102, and Chapter 3, “The English Italian,” pp. 102–134; M. Lindsay Kaplan, “Jessica’s Mother: Medieval Constructions of Jewish Race and Gender in *The Merchant of Venice*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 58.1 (Spring 2007): 1–30; and Michael Neill, “Broken English and Broken Irish: Nation, Language, and the Optic of Power in Shakespeare’s Histories,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 45.1 (Spring 1994): 1–32.

<sup>7</sup> For an exemplary illumination of the critical necessity of recognizing unmarked positions, see Kim Hall, “‘Those Bastard Signs of Fair’: Literary Whiteness in Shakespeare’s Sonnets,” in *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, ed. Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 64–83.

<sup>8</sup> There is a rare quasi-exception to this general principle. After the climactic battle of Agincourt in *Henry V*, Henry himself suggests that Psalm 115 (“*Non nobis*”) and a *Te Deum* be sung (4.8.117). The Psalter’s and *Te Deum*’s cultural *gravitas* and liturgical function would certainly make it possible for a king to join the singing, but the play does not actually indicate whether Henry does so.

<sup>9</sup> See this project’s introduction.

<sup>10</sup> See my introduction’s reading of Dunbar’s “Master Andro Kennedy’s Testament.” The charge of fools’ feigning, or counterfeiting – the terms are synonymous in premodern fool literature – not only appears in the *Tale of Beryn* but becomes instrumental to Geoffrey’s work in the courtroom scene. As Chapter 1 discusses, Geoffrey softens the hostile relationship between fools and those who charge them with feigning by strenuously averring that he does *not* feign, even though this claim flies in the face of his subsequent donning of a disguise and performance as a fool.

<sup>11</sup> For more on the vocational fool’s minstrel ancestors, see David Wiles, *Shakespeare’s Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Wiles argues that “[t]he term ‘minstrel started to become redundant in Tarlton’s time because the type vanished. In Ipswich, for example, from 1556 to 1573, William Martin and four fellow ‘minstrels’ were retained by the town in order to play at ceremonial functions. Records refer variously to their music, to ‘a play at the Moot hall,’

and to their 'playing the fools in the hall.' By the 1580s the town 'waits' under new leadership are simply identified as a company of musicians. Across the country, acting and music-making were tending to become specialized activities" (p. 19). While this separation of acting from music-making seems generally to have been true of players like William Kemp, it was notably not the case with Robert Armin, for reasons that will be discussed in Part II of this chapter.

<sup>12</sup> Sandra Billington astutely observes how, in *Piers Plowman*, distinctions between the cognitive abilities of fools result in categories associated with specific moral appraisals. She writes:

The type of Fool Langland was most concerned with was the idiot's mimic, who earned his living by this impersonation. [...] In *Piers Plowman* [...] Langland unequivocally sees the secular, artificial fool as the devil's agent. [...] In [the *A*, *B*, and *C* Texts] Langland stresses that children and witless men need the protection of society. In the *A* Text in particular he stresses their innocence and the impossibility of their damnation, no matter what mischief they get up to: "In children and in fools the devil has no influence over what they do, whether wicked or not[.]" In Passus 10 of the *B* Text, "folis" are divided into those "that fauten (lack) inwitte" and those who feign a lack of wit to gain access to great houses. The latter are unremittingly attacked. Firstly, Langland argues that they can't even entertain properly. "Those who pretend to be fools and live by pretence know no more music or songs than a miller." These men are at first called "fooles sages," or knowing fools, to distinguish them from the witless man. However, once the identity of the artific[i]al Fool is established in the text, Langland drops "sages" and relentlessly affirms that "lordes and ladies and legates of holy chirche" who keep these men are destined for hell, since "flatterers and fools are the fiends disciples to entice men through their stories to sin and harlotry." Thus, in one work the meaning of "fool" changes from the innocent guaranteed eternal salvation to the devil's disciple equally sure of eternal damnation.

Her analysis thus suggests a prehistory of the Shakespearean "artificial" fool in which the fool is strongly linked to deceit, to moral lassitude, and to musical performance (but *not* musical ability) – a tantalizing web of connections whose loose threads may well have trailed into Shakespeare's cultural milieu. Sandra Billington, *A Social History of the Fool* (Brighton: Harvester Press; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: J. M. Dent, 1995), p. 3, ll. 35–37.

<sup>14</sup> Also noteworthy is the more subtle implication that "synnelees" minstrels genuinely lack wit and the ability to take up other employment.

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<sup>15</sup> Tomaso Garzoni, *The hospitall of incurable fooles: erected in English as neer the first Italian modell and platforme, as the unskilfull hand of an ignorant architect could devise*, trans. E. Blount, Early English Books Online (London: 1600).

<sup>16</sup> For a more comprehensive introduction to this work, see Monica Calabritto, introduction to *The Hospital of Incurable Madness / L'hospedale de' pazzi incurability (1586)*, trans. Daniela Pastina and John W. Crayton (Tempe, Ariz.: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2009), pp. 1–33.

<sup>17</sup> William E. Miller, "The Hospitall of Incurable Fooles," *Studies in Bibliography* 16 (1963): 204–207, p. 206.

<sup>18</sup> Tomaso Garzoni, *The hospitall of incurable fooles: erected in English as neer the first Italian modell and platforme, as the unskilfull hand of an ignorant architect could devise*, trans. E. Blount, Early English Books Online (London: 1600), "Prologue of the Author to the beholders," n.p. (EEBO image 5). This chapter generally retains the spelling found in early modern editions, but for ease of reading I have occasionally changed initial *i* to *j* and substituted *u* and *i* for each other.

<sup>19</sup> Tomaso Garzoni, *The hospitall of incurable fooles*, "Not [sic] to the wise Reader," n.p. (EEBO image 8).

<sup>20</sup> Carol Thomas Neely suggests that "madness" is an early modern umbrella term for many kinds of mental alterity, including "any excessive expression of emotion: anger, especially, but also lust, jealousy, folly, stupidity" (Carol Thomas Neely, *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture*, [Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004]). Neely's delineation of the many slippery associations with "madness" does much to throw into relief the complexity of early modern descriptions of mental infirmity. And, indeed, Feste's assertion that "you are mad indeed, if you be no better in your wits than a fool" suggests an early modern conceptual pairing between folly and madness (4.2.82–3).

<sup>21</sup> Tomaso Garzoni, *The hospitall of incurable fooles*, p. 72 (EEBO image 44).

<sup>22</sup> Monica Calabritto, *The Subject of Madness: An Analysis of Ariosto's Orlando Furioso and Garzoni's L'hospedale de' pazzi incurabili*, Ph.D. dissertation (The City University of New York, 2001), p. 376. See also Calabritto's second chapter, "Medicine and rhetoric: the popularization of medical language in Garzoni's *L'hospedale de' pazzi incurabili*," pp. 81–165.

<sup>23</sup> Monica Calabritto, *The Subject of Madness*, p. 379.

<sup>24</sup> Tomaso Garzoni, *The hospitall of incurable fooles*, p. 73 (EEBO image 44).

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- <sup>25</sup> Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia, written by Sir Philippe Sidnei*, Early English Books Online (London: Printed by John Windet for William Ponsonbie, 1590), p. 156 (EEBO image 160).
- <sup>26</sup> Tomaso Garzoni, *The hospitall of incurable fooles*, pp. 61–62 (EEBO images 38–39).
- <sup>27</sup> Tomaso Garzoni, *The hospitall of incurable fooles*, p. 73 (EEBO image 44).
- <sup>28</sup> Thomas Dekker, *The Guls Horne-booke: Stultorum plena sunt omnia*, Early English Books Online (London: R. S., 1609).
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> Tomaso Garzoni, *The hospitall of incurable fooles*, p. 75 (EEBO image 45).
- <sup>31</sup> Tomaso Garzoni, *The hospitall of incurable fooles*, p. 76 (EEBO image 46).
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> For instance, “counterfeit” often means simply a portrait or image; see “counterfeit,” n. 3a, in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The OED cites Bassanio’s rhapsodizing over Portia’s portrait: “What find I here? / Fair Portia’s counterfeit! What demi-god / Hath come so near creation?” (*The Merchant of Venice*, 3.2.117–19). “counterfeit, n. 3a.” *OED Online*, December 2013 (Oxford University Press). Available at: <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/42787?rskey=Zdme8b&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>. Accessed on: July 23, 2014.
- <sup>34</sup> “Artificial fool” and “counterfeit fool” are near-synonyms in early modern English literature: they typically have the same denotation but different connotations.
- <sup>35</sup> George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 3.24, p. 372.
- <sup>36</sup> E.g., in discussing freak shows of the nineteenth through twenty-first centuries, Michael M. Chemers writes, “Prior to the advances in civil rights thinking of the 1960s, the discourse in opposition to freak shows was primarily founded in a sense of ‘social decency,’ which did not direct itself to the needs and concerns of marginalized persons performing as freaks but to the sensibilities of the able-bodied and ableist public. The minority opposition to freakery, which tended in the final analysis to be a conservative one, was offended not by the nature of the freak performance but by the very sight of persons with unusual bodies or behaviors, and wished them removed from the public view and isolated in attics and asylums.” Michael M. Chemers, “Staging Stigma: A Freak Studies Manifesto,” introduction to *Disability Studies Quarterly* 25.3 (Summer 2005): no pagination.
- <sup>37</sup> The stage direction for act 4, scene 2 merely specifies, “*Malvolio within.*” The designation of “dark house” is drawn from Malvolio’s description in act 5, scene 1.

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David Carnegie astutely traces the staging history of act 4, scene 2 in “‘Maluolio within’: Performance Perspectives on the Dark House.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52.3 (Autumn 2001): 393-414.

<sup>38</sup> E.g., Winfried Schleiner quotes Feste’s “would I were the first that ever dissembled in such a gown” (4.2.5) and notes, “The primary function for using the gown is to generate this comment charging it with significance for the entire scene.” Winfried Schleiner, “The Feste-Malvolio Scene in *Twelfth Night* against the Background of Renaissance Ideas about Madness and Possession,” *Deutsche Shakespeare Gesellschaft West: Jahrbuch* (1990): 48-57, p. 54.

<sup>39</sup> In *Twelfth Night: Text and Performance*, ed. Lois Potter (London: Macmillan, 1985), p. 71.

<sup>40</sup> The song’s tale of betrayed love also offers a sly counternarrative to Orsino’s wishful hints that music might be “the food of love” (1.1.1).

<sup>41</sup> George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, 2.10, p. 173.

<sup>42</sup> This term is borrowed from the historian Carlos Eire, who suggests that literature often explores “certain kinds of cognition and intuition [that ...] are perfectly sound and logical, but not on the same terms as what normally passes for ‘reason.’” Eire often works with religious texts and art that make the case “that one must derail the rational mind and even leave language behind in order to attain the best knowledge of all.” Here, I contend that song often plays a similar, if secular, role in early modern drama. Carlos Eire, personal communication with author, 29 July 2013. See also Eire’s interview on *Fresh Air*, National Public Radio, WHYY, Philadelphia, 22 November 2010, <http://m.npr.org/story/131449904>.

<sup>43</sup> Claude V. Palisca, *Humanism in Italian Renaissance Musical Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 333.

<sup>44</sup> For more on the friction between early modern musical theory and musical practice, see Joseph Ortiz, *Broken Harmony: Shakespeare and the Politics of Music* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011).

<sup>45</sup> George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, 2.10, p. 172.

<sup>46</sup> The surrounding context makes it clear that Puttenham is discussing harmonic rhythm, rather than the treatment of dissonance—a distinction that is not immediately apparent from the excerpt I have quoted here.

<sup>47</sup> One example of such complex sixteenth-century music is Thomas Tallis’ motet, “Spem in alium,” which relies on a slow harmonic rhythm as a vertical framework for the great horizontal complexity created by the forty independently contrapuntal parts. The slow harmonic rhythm renders the verbal “concord” of the text quite “far

asunder,” and the forty-part texture makes it quite easy for listeners to “lose the tune” of words and melodies alike, as Puttenham fears.

<sup>48</sup> George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, 2.10, pp. 172-3. The emendation and literal interpretation of “*cantabanqui*” are borrowed from Whigham and Rebhorn’s footnotes.

<sup>49</sup> George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, Early English Books Online (London, 1589), 2.10, pp. 68-69.

<sup>50</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, et al., 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), B<sup>2</sup> 2120.

<sup>51</sup> The term “fit” – which designates a canto, stanza, or other measurable segment of a song or poem – is also used by Chaucer in *Sir Thopas* to proffer the tale in portions and to acknowledge, rather explicitly, that the educated, well-born members of his audience might not wish him to continue:

Loo, lordes myne, heere is a fit!  
If ye wol any moore of it,  
To telle it wol I fonde.

*The [Third] Fit*

Now holde youre mouth, *par charitee*,  
Bothe knyght and lady free,  
And herkneth to my spelle. (B<sup>2</sup> 2078–83)

While a speaker-singer might conventionally ask an audience to *listen* for charity’s sake, Chaucer’s request is more modest: he simply requests that his auditors hold their mouth and refrain from interrupting his tale with pleas that he stop (Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*). Puttenham refers to Chaucer reverentially in all three books of the *Arte* and notes approvingly that in Chaucer’s poetry the “tunes are never lost, nor out of the ear” (George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, 2.11, p. 175).

<sup>52</sup> Puttenham’s use of the term “fit” in the *Arte* does not always carry pejorative connotations, but this passage clearly disparages the monetized performance of portions of sung poems.

<sup>53</sup> Robert Greene, *Greenes Groats-Worth of witte, bought with a million of Repentance: Describing the follie of youth, the falshood of make-shift flatterers, the miserie of the negligent, and mischiefes of deceiving Courtezans*, Early English Books Online (London: William Wright, 1592).

<sup>54</sup> Editorial stage direction omitted and First Folio’s capitalization of “Lady” reinstated.

<sup>55</sup> Furness' variorum edition cites Howard Staunton's note that "[a]n *ordinary* fool may mean a *common* fool; but more probably, as Shakespeare had always an eye to the manners of his own countrymen, he referred to a jester hired to make sport for the diners at a public ordinary" (Shakespeare, *A New Variorum Edition*, vol. 13, p. 70). Either of these readings would dovetail with my interpretation, in which Olivia's distinguishing Feste as an "allowed fool" sets him theoretically – and, to a certain extent, vocationally – apart from other kinds of fools (Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* [Norton], 1.5.80).

<sup>56</sup> Armin, *Foole*, p. B2r.

<sup>57</sup> The First Folio's representations of Feste's songs both register the loss of the sound of his "mellifluous voice" and hint at the manner in which early performances of *Twelfth Night* would have foregrounded Armin's considerable talents as a solo performer. See Tiffany Stern's account of the material lives of songtexts in early modern printed play editions, which discusses the separation of early modern play editions' songs from their musical notation and argues that such songtexts simultaneously gesture toward early modern performance practices and function as sites of loss. Tiffany Stern, "I Have Both the Note, and Dittie About Me': Songs on the Early Modern Page and Stage," *Common Knowledge* 17.2 (Spring 2011): 306-20.

<sup>58</sup> The negotiation of masculine position would have been complicated for all of these men of differing ranks. In writing about early modern conduct manuals for men, Alexandra Shepard suggests some of these complexities:

In attempting to fix the terms of manhood according to patriarchal principles, the excesses associated with youth were universally condemned. Yet while all adult males were expected to pay the price of self-government for manhood, the rewards were not unilaterally extended to all adult males. Conduct books belied the degree to which the patriarchal dividends were unevenly distributed since the autonomy and influence to which young men could aspire was considerably affected by social status as well as behaviour. The youth-manhood dichotomy was a useful device for the general attribution of rational behaviour to adult males, but it also masked the fact that the scope for and rewards from such action varied extensively.

Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 38.

<sup>59</sup> Even so, Sir Andrew and Sir Toby's cavorting complicates their own performance of masculinity. As Amanda Bailey and Roze Hentschell show, "The yoking of moderation and proper masculinity mean that vicious behavior, associated with various forms of excess, was by definition a challenge to and potentially a departure from manhood." Amanda Bailey and Roze Hentschell, ed., *Masculinity and the Metropolis of Vice, 1550–1650* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 4.

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<sup>60</sup> Malvolio applies the same term to Andrew. In imagining the lecture he will give to Sir Toby once he, Malvolio, has married Olivia, he says:

Malvolio: “[Y]ou waste the treasure of your time with a foolish knight –”

Sir Andrew: That’s me, I warrant you.

Malvolio: “One Sir Andrew.”

Sir Andrew: I knew ’twas I, for many do call me fool. (2.5.62–6)

Perhaps Andrew’s sole form of wisdom is his amiable willingness to acknowledge his folly – a quality that sharply contrasts him with characters like the young Beryn (Chapter 1) and Robert of Cisyle (Chapter 2).

<sup>61</sup> Gina Bloom posits that in early modern London there existed an “urban drinking culture that produced a *recreational discourse* of binge drinking, a discourse that competed with moral condemnations of the vice to provide an alternate view of the relationship between excess and masculinity.” Perhaps most pertinent to Sir Andrew’s situation is Bloom’s suggestion that, for early modern men, “[d]rinking fantasies provide [. . .] an imaginative forum through which to negotiate the challenges of masculinity that cannot be so easily managed in reality.” Gina Bloom, “Manly Drunkenness: Binge Drinking as Disciplined Play,” in *Masculinity and the Metropolis of Vice, 1550–1650*, ed. Amanda Bailey and Roze Hentschell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010): 22–39, pp. 22, 39.

<sup>62</sup> In the subsequent stanzas of the First Folio, these lines are represented by the traditional abbreviations “*With hey ho, & c.*” and “*for the rain, & c.*” The last stanza alters the final line to “*and wee’l strive to please you every day*” (William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night, Or what you will*, in *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies, Published according to the True Originall Copies*, London, 1623, *Internet Shakespeare Editions* (University of Victoria), p. 275. Available at: <http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/facsimile/overview/book/F1.html>. Accessed on July 21, 2014.

## Conclusion

This project's consideration of premodern English literature of fools and fooling uncovers that literature's deep engagement with the period's theories of cognitive alterity. In contrast with previous scholarship's emphasis on the traditional Shakespearean-Erasman trope of the "wise fool," this study shows how the full corpus of premodern fool literature represents the fool's wits as both hyper-able and disabled – sometimes alternately, sometimes at the same time. This study uses theoretical insights and models from disability studies to uncover how often premodern literature emphasizes that fools' hyper-able and disabled wits produce socially *disabling* performances of wordplay and song; fools' wits are portrayed not merely as a celebrated cognitive faculty, but also as a vexatious and disruptive force.

Premodern literary representations of fools have more far-reaching ambitions than the isolated examination of fools and their wits. In my reading of the *Tale of Beryn*, the fool's hyper-able powers of language and wit force his audience to re-conceive their own lack of epistemological insights as a form of widespread cognitive disability.<sup>1</sup> This reading contravenes both Geoffrey's audience's expectations and modern scholars' tendency to read literary representations of disability as portraits of individuals' differences against the backdrop of a societal norm. The other witty fool in this project, *Twelfth Night's* Feste, performs similar verbal feats, but he sings and jests against the backdrop of late-sixteenth-century handbooks that read his songs and his social

position as the inverse of their masculine ideals. His songs and verbal sparring win over audiences, as they have done for centuries, despite the disdain for fools' cognitive alterity in circulation in Shakespeare's day.

In contrast to Geoffrey and Feste, the two less able fools in this project – the eponymous Robert of Cisyle and Moros in *The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art* – exhibit the failures in cognition and moral judgment that are common to the anti-fool strain in premodern English literature. Yet specific concerns about what the fool's cognitive and moral failure *entails* differ in each of these texts. The medieval romance, *Robert of Cisyle*, evinces a keen anxiety about what may happen if a king turns fool and endangers the institution of monarchy and, by extension, the body politic itself. Accordingly, the poem devotes nearly its entire length to telling its readers, not *why* Robert is foolish, but *that* he merits punishment and *how* this punishment's restorative intentions are entirely, conclusively efficacious. *The Longer Thou Livest*, on the other hand, concerns itself not in the slightest with the potential failure of institutions; rather, it turns a sharp focus on how, through the fool's persistent rejection of education and embrace of folly, language itself may fail.

The concerns of these four texts which this project touches are not singular in premodern English fool literature, nor does the conclusion of my study indicate their *terminus ad quem*. Rather, thematic analogues abound throughout medieval and early modern England. To take only one example, each of the aspects of folly I investigate in these four chapters is taken up in *King Lear*. This project's introduction has already noted the play's concern with the physical embodiment of cognitive faculties, especially

in their decline. This interest abuts the *Tale of Beryn's* investment in the topos of the five wits: when Edgar, disguised as Poor Tom, meets the deranged Lear railing in the storm, Edgar cries, "Bless thy five wits!" (3.6.14). It is both an allusion to the window-like faculties that both guard from and admit peril and, as in *Twelfth Night*, another Shakespearean juxtaposition of the problems of madness, folly, and mutability of wit. Edgar, perhaps Shakespeare's most overt *performer* of cognitive alterity, follows this remark by uttering doggerel accompanied by the kind of nonsensical, quasi-solfège syllables that characterize Moros' ineffectual attempts at song: "Do, de, de, de. Sese!" (First Folio, 3.6.29). The Quarto substitutes for these lines "Loudla, doodla," suggesting that what matters about the words of Edgar-as-Poor-Tom is not their precise phonemic content, but their disruptive non-rationality (Scene 13, l. 64).

And, as scholars of *Robert of Cisyle* have long noted, there is no text more obsessively occupied than *King Lear* with the implications of the turning of a king's wits to folly. A brief moment that illustrates the finesse with which Shakespeare and his collaborators re-oriented their materials toward this theme occurs in Act 3, Scene 2, when Lear's Fool sings the song that Feste uses to close *Twelfth Night*. Feste sings: "When that I was and a little tiny boy, / With hey, ho, the wind and the rain, / A foolish thing was but a toy, / For the rain it raineth every day" (5.1.376-9). Chapter 4 of this project has already argued for the stubborn non-rationality of this song, taken in its entirety. To the extent that the song does hint at a narrative arc, it alludes to the coming-of-age theme that pervades so much fool literature: the next line is "But when I came to man's estate" (5.1.380). Toward the end of Act 3, Scene 2 of *King Lear*, following Lear's



finally, not a model of cognition, not a symptom or diagnosis of cognitive lack – but a particular wit with a particular body, features, verbal habits, abilities, and loyalties.

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<sup>1</sup> Readers might debate whether the *Beryn*-poet has successfully conveyed Geoffrey's hyper-ability, but we are clearly meant to believe in it.

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