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Method in madness: Deconstructing Shakespeare's fool

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Abstract

This research paper aims to deconstruct the character of the fool in Shakespeare's plays, Twelfth Night, King Lear, and As You Like It. The author argues that the fool is not just a comical character but serves a greater purpose in the play by offering commentary on the actions of the main characters, challenging social norms, and providing a voice for the oppressed. The paper employs Jacques Derrida's deconstructionist approach to analyze the language and actions of the fool and how they reveal deeper meanings in the plays. Through close readings of the text, the author uncovers the ways in which the fool subverts traditional power structures and challenges the authority of the ruling class. The paper also explores the relationship between the fool and the main characters and how their interactions reveal the underlying themes of the plays. Overall, this research paper provides a fresh perspective on the role of the fool in Shakespeare's works and highlights the significance of their contribution to the overall meaning of the plays.

Keywords: Shakespeare, fool, deconstruction, Derrida, king Lear, twelfth night, as you like it

Introduction

"That, of course, is the great secret of the successful fool – that he is no fool at all." (Asimov 1: 19)

The ubiquitous presence of the clown or fool in the dramatic works of Shakespeare perpetuates an enduring fascination among contemporary critics and modern audiences alike. This enigmatic stage character, woven intricately into the fabric of Shakespearean oeuvre, continues to captivate and intrigue with his whimsical antics and profound insights. Indeed, the enduring appeal of the clown or fool stands as a testament to Shakespeare's unrivalled ability to craft multifaceted characters that transcend time and cultural boundaries. This paper attempts to study William Shakespeare's King Lear, The Twelfth Night and As You Like It while trying to deconstruct the role of the fool in Shakespeare's plays.

Encyclopaedia Britannica provides a comprehensive approach to the fascinating character of the fool and defines him as a "jester, a comic entertainer whose madness or imbecility, real or pretended, made him a source of amusement and gave him license to abuse and poke fun at even the most exalted of his patrons." Throughout history, the "fool" has been conceptualized in a myriad of ways, often divided into two broad categories: natural fool and licensed fool. The natural fool is typically viewed as being inherently dim-witted, lacking in mental capacity, or even suffering from a form of mental illness. On the other hand, the licensed fool is granted a degree of leniency, often due to the court's decree or by special permission from those in authority.

It is intriguing to note that both types of fools are somewhat excused for their behaviour. The natural fool is seen as unable to control his actions due to his supposed lack of mental acuity. In contrast, the licensed fool is granted a certain level of immunity from social conventions, allowing him to act in ways that would otherwise be deemed unacceptable. In some cases, he even provides a means of social commentary or criticism, using humour and satire to challenge societal norms and conventions.

This notion of the licensed fool has been prevalent throughout history, with examples ranging from court jesters in medieval Europe to modern-day stand-up comedians. The fool's unique position within society is a testament to the power of humour and satire to challenge the status quo and provide a means of social critique. Whether natural or licensed,

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foolishness has continued to be a fascinating topic of inquiry and analysis, revealing insights into human behaviour and society at large. The word “fool” derives from the Latin word “follis” which means “a bag of wind.” This etymology hints at the transitory nature of foolishness, which like a gust of wind, is here one moment and gone the next. In the mystical realm of Tarot, the Fool is the first card in the Major Arcana, embodying the energy of new beginnings, potential, and the infinite possibilities of life. The card features a figure, often male but occasionally female, who is carelessly juggling or distracted, while a dog or cat follows at their heels. In an ironic twist, the Fool is depicted unknowingly wandering towards a cliff or precipice, about to fall off the edge into the abyss below. This image captures the essence of foolishness - the reckless abandon with which we sometimes approach life, disregarding the potential consequences that lie ahead.

In a strange pairing, Death is another prominent character in the Tarot, often depicted wearing the garb of a jester. This representation is not without reason, as death reminds us of the impermanence of life and the ultimate levelling force that reduces all to the same state of non-existence. Jesters, too, hold a similar position in society - they make fun of everyone, regardless of their social standing, thus, breaking down the barriers that would otherwise keep us apart. In both cases, we are reminded of the fleeting nature of life and the importance of finding joy in the present moment.

As we ponder the symbolism of the Fool and Death, we are reminded of the profound mysteries that lie at the heart of human experience. The Tarot serves as a window into these mysteries, offering us glimpses of the beauty and complexity of life. In the end, we are left to contemplate the enduring power of these archetypes, which continue to fascinate and inspire us to this day.

Deconstruction is a literary and philosophical theory that originated in the work of French philosopher Jacques Derrida. It is a critical approach that emphasizes the complexity and instability of language, and seeks to expose the underlying assumptions and contradictions in a text. Deconstruction views language as inherently unstable and open to multiple interpretations. It suggests that meanings are not fixed, but rather are constantly shifting and depend on context. Deconstruction also argues that language is always marked by a lack or absence, which means that it can never fully capture or represent the world it seeks to describe.

While deconstructing a text, one examines the language and structure of the text in order to reveal the contradictions, ambiguities, and underlying assumptions that the text relies on. This involves questioning the assumed meanings of key terms, identifying binary oppositions and the ways in which they are constructed, and examining how the text itself undermines its own claims.

I attempt to view the role of Shakespeare’s fool from different angles by deconstructing his character and his function in the plays. The fool is much more than an element of comic relief. In Shakespearean plays, the fool is a character who serves as comic relief, but also provides sharp commentary on the action of the play. The fool is typically a witty and insightful character who uses wordplay and puns to reveal the truth about the other characters and their situations. The fool is often portrayed as an outsider, with the freedom to speak the truth that other characters do not have. While the fool's jokes and quips can be

entertaining, they also provide a deeper commentary on the themes and conflicts of the play, and the character's insights often serve to move the plot forward.

Shakespeare's fool is the ultimate truth-teller, using wit and humour to reveal the hidden depths of his fellow characters. With a tongue as sharp as his wit, he exposes their follies, their vanities, and their insecurities. Yet despite his biting commentary, the fool is a beloved character, his humor and insight endearing him to audiences and readers alike. He is a character who speaks truth to power, challenging the social hierarchies of the play with his outsider status. And while his jokes and quips may be light-hearted, they also carry a weight of meaning, driving the plot and themes of the play forward with their insights and observations.

The character of the fool in William Shakespeare's tragedy *King Lear* has long been a subject of critical interest, with scholars offering various interpretations of his role and significance within the play. Applying the literary theory of deconstruction to the fool's character can offer new insights into his portrayal and function within the play. The Fool's language in *King Lear* is rife with puns, paradoxes, and contradictions, which reveal the instability of meaning and the inadequacy of language in capturing the complexities of human experience.

One example of this can be seen in the fool's exchange with Lear in Act 1, Scene 4, in which the fool quips, "Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise" (I.iv.142). This line highlights the ambiguity of the term "old," which can refer to physical age, but also to wisdom or experience. By implying that Lear is old but not wise, the fool exposes the gap between appearances and reality and challenges the idea that age necessarily brings wisdom.

Another example can be found in the fool's song in Act 3, Scene 2, in which he sings, "And I'll go to bed at noon" (III.ii.37). This line is both nonsensical and paradoxical, as going to bed at noon is the opposite of what is expected. The line can be read as a critique of the social norms and expectations that govern behaviour, as well as a commentary on the sense of disorder and chaos that characterizes the play.

The fool's language is also marked by a sense of irony and cynicism, which can be seen in his remarks about the nature of human existence. For example, in Act 3, Scene 2, he tells Lear, "The reason why the seven stars are no more than seven is a pretty reason" (III.ii.116-117). This line can be interpreted as a comment on the arbitrary and meaningless nature of human knowledge and understanding.

There have been different explanations and analyses provided by critics regarding the part played by the Fool in the play. Some see him as a voice of reason and sanity amidst the chaos of the play, while others view him as a symbol of the absurdity and futility of existence. For example, critic Harold Bloom has argued that the Fool is a "negative Christ figure," who embodies the despair and nihilism of the play.

In Shakespeare's works, the unlikely character of the fool is bestowed with the greatest depth of wisdom and insight. The bard masterfully employs this narrative device, as the fool's position as a peripheral character enables him to act as a sagacious and astute narrator, highlighting the tomfoolery and imbecility transpiring around him. Despite his raunchy and comical demeanour, he remains ever observant, and his witty perspective offers an unparalleled vantage point into the serendipitous and capricious madness that pervades the

entire play. Indeed, he was the sole character who enjoyed the unmitigated freedom of a life unrestricted, unbound by the strictures of propriety, decorum, and self-consciousness that demanded perpetual social acceptability. He was unencumbered in his actions and words, a privilege that none of the other characters could claim, for fear of punitive reprisal. In a veritable sense, he was the only one who lived a democratic life under a monarchy.

Shakespeare's fool is quite close to the clown of the theatre in many aspects. The roles of the clown and the fool in society share certain similarities, as they both occupy positions on the margins of power and social status. The clown in the theatre, like the fool in society, often functions as a kind of social critic or commentator, using humour and satire to expose the absurdities and injustices of the world around them. However, while the clown may be seen as a subversive force within the confines of the stage, the fool's position in society is more complex.

The fool, as a figure of the medieval and early modern period, occupied a unique position in society as an entertainer and advisor to the aristocracy. Unlike the clown, who exists outside of society and its hierarchies, the fool was intimately connected to the power structures of his time, serving as a court jester and often wielding significant influence over the rulers he served. As such, the fool's role in society was not simply that of a critic or outsider, but rather that of a shrewd observer and manipulator of power dynamics.

Despite these differences, however, the clown and the fool both share a common function as bearers of truth and wisdom. The clown's humour is often born of a deep understanding of life's inequities and transience, just as the fool's wit and insight were often rooted in a keen awareness of the paradoxes and contradictions of the world around him. In this sense, both the clown and the fool serve as a kind of counterbalance to the dominant ideologies of their respective spheres, challenging the status quo and inviting us to see the world in a new light.

The role of the fool, both as a literary figure and as a social persona, is one that has endured throughout history. The fool's license to speak truth to power has the potential to force change in society. Similarly, the mythological figure of the trickster is a force of change in the world, disrupting the established order with his amoral and comic antics. The trickster is a complex figure, embodying both human and divine characteristics, often with an exaggerated physique and biological drives. This mythic figure can be found in many cultures, including Native North Americans, South Americans, and Africans. Like the fool, the trickster is a teacher and a hero, moving through the world with outrageous cunning, foolishness, and wisdom. Despite his mischievous nature, the trickster often manages to do good, even if it is unintentional. In both the fool and the trickster, we see a figure that challenges the status quo, inviting us to view the world in a new and transformative way.

The trickster is a paradoxical figure found in the folklore of many cultures worldwide, revered as both a cultural hero and a destructive force. Known by various names such as Coyote, Anansi, Hermes, Iktomi, Maui, Loki, Monkey, Nanabozho, and Br'er Rabbit, the trickster is a ubiquitous presence in literary texts. Far from being a simple character, the trickster is also a rhetorical agent, imbuing narrative structures with energy and humor, and injecting a politically radical subtext. The trickster is a survivor and a transformer,

a figure of great complexity, capable of embodying both the highest aspirations and the darkest impulses of humanity, making him an enduring and essential figure in the human experience. "The trickster is a rebel against authority and the breaker of all taboos. He is at the same time imp and hero - the great culture bringer who can also make mischief beyond belief, turning quickly from clown to creator and back again." (Erdoes and Ortiz 335).

Therefore, the fool is similar to the picaro or the rogue protagonist of the seventeenth century picaresque novels. Both the trickster and the rogue were intelligent and witty, survived in the unsympathetic world by their tricks, satirized the society, had a moral in their stories, included comic elements so as not to make the stories boring, were the representatives of their cultures, were unconventional and rebellious, subverted authority and helped others. Belonging to the lower strata of the society, the picaro, lives by his wits and cunning tricks.

The trickster, in his ceaseless quest for novel paradigms of comprehension, displays an unyielding defiance of orthodox authority. Eschewing classical precepts and dominant institutions as sources of wisdom, he forges his own path through practical experience and material privation. By deploying the capacious potential of his lived experiences, he deftly fashions manifold subject positions, strategically harnessing cultural instability to his advantage. The trickster's subversive tendencies and audacious ingenuity reflect his deep-seated quest for liberation and self-realization, making him a captivating and endlessly fascinating figure across a wide spectrum of cultural contexts.

The character of the wise fool was employed by Shakespeare as a crafty tool to manipulate the comic genre. The Bard, a master of his craft, created plays that catered to diverse audiences with varying social strata and levels of intellect. Thus, his works possessed characters with unpretentious dispositions that appealed to the working classes, whilst simultaneously presenting intricate plots that would sate the appetites of the aristocrats in attendance. The Fool, in particular, played an instrumental role in fusing the worlds of the upper and lower classes on stage. The prime players of the action were the noble characters - lords and ladies who believed themselves to be embroiled in some great tragedy, melodrama, or romance. On the other hand, the alternate world, transpiring concurrently, was the world of realism, often embodied by lower-class servants or soldiers who confronted the nitty-gritty, deriving mirth from ridiculing themselves and the highfalutin lords and ladies. The audience was composed of people who were influenced by and influentially impacted by the drama of their times. Shakespeare's comedy, in essence, transcended class discrimination and the fool was able to gain popularity in both the court and the tavern. This was due to the relatable notion that everyone has a rebellious nature lurking beneath their exterior. (Wiles 23)

Using contemporary references that are familiar to the audience, the clown employs the oral tradition to communicate the underlying themes explored by the court-dominated characters in the play. This is where the clown, according to Bakhtin, employs "heteroglossia" - using the speech and language of others to not only accomplish his own purpose but also to convey the author's purpose and perspective (324). By using colloquial language that

resonates with the common man, the clown is able to appeal to the audience.

In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the character of the Fool serves a multifaceted purpose that goes beyond the typical court jester of the time. The Fool serves as a trickster, a picaro, and a "Greek Chorus" all in one. Through his witty banter and songs, he not only entertains the court but also informs the audience of the play's events. Welsford considers him "the sage-fool" and whose emotional presence and importance far outweighs his intellectual weightage. (256) Unlike traditional court jesters, the Fool does not simply entertain King Lear and his court. Instead, he takes on the role of a confidant and advisor to Lear, speaking to him as an equal and criticizing his poor judgment of his daughter, Cordelia. As Lear's madness deepens, the Fool acts as his conscience, guiding him to realize the folly of his decisions. It would be difficult to fully develop the character of Lear without his presence in the story. He plays a crucial role as a reference point for the other characters, reflecting their most important and profound characteristics. In essence, he acts as a mirror that allows the other characters to see themselves more clearly. (Hudson 128)

What sets the fool apart is his ability to soothe Lear's troubled mind, rather than using his position to ridicule and humiliate the King. The fool's words and actions help Lear navigate the chaos around him, leading him to a greater understanding of himself and the world. Ulrici is of the opinion that Shakespeare has successfully blended the comic and the tragic in this particular work in a way that is unparalleled in his other works. The boldness of this attempt is matched only by its success. This combination of tragic and comic elements is unique to Shakespeare's work. (114) Through his multifaceted role, the fool adds depth and complexity to the play, challenging traditional expectations and forcing the audience to re-interpret his role and function. As Lear's closest confidant, the fool embodies the themes of wisdom, morality, and loyalty, making him an indispensable character in the play. "The Fool does not follow any ideology... Lear, insisting on his fictitious majesty, seems ridiculous to him... But the Fool does not desert his ridiculous, degraded king, and accompanies him on his way to madness. The Fool knows that the only true madness is to recognize this world as rational." (Kott 202)

A fool merely plays the role of a fool in the royal court. Hence, he fulfils his professional duty but is not really foolish. It can be said that fools are the wisest characters that Shakespeare created. It is the king and the aristocrats who are the real fools. He provides comic relief but also serves as a sounding board for King Lear's thoughts and emotions. Through the fool's interactions with Lear, Shakespeare detaches him from the conventional role of a court jester and uses him as a tool to help the audience understand Lear's conundrum.

The fool criticizes Lear's actions, pointing out the foolishness of dividing his kingdom without any consideration for the consequences. The fool's words are prophetic, as Lear's decision leads to chaos and tragedy. Throughout the play, the fool serves as a voice of reason and truth-telling. He is the only character who is not afraid to challenge Lear's decisions and actions. This is particularly evident in Act III, Scene 2, when the Fool tells Lear that he has made a "great fool" of himself by giving away his power to his daughters. The fool's blunt honesty forces Lear to

confront the reality of his situation and the consequences of his actions. The Royal Shakespeare Company writes of the fool: "The Fool acts as a commentator on events and is one of the characters (Kent being the other) who is fearless in speaking the truth. The Fool provides wit in this bleak play... the Fool in *King Lear* ridicules Lear's actions and situation in such a way that audiences understand the point of his jokes." His comments prove prophetic later as his "'mental eye' is the most acute in the beginning of the play: he sees Lear's daughters for what they are and has the foresight to see that Lear's decision will prove disastrous."

Welsford sees the fool as "an all-licensed critic who sees and speaks the real truth about the people around him." (256). In addition to serving as a confidant and advisor to Lear, the Fool in *King Lear* also acts as a Greek chorus. In ancient Greek theatre, the chorus served as a group of performers who commented on the action of the play, provided background information, and offered moral or philosophical insights. Like a Greek chorus, he offers philosophical and moral observations that add depth and complexity to the play.

It is conceivable that the incessant repetition of the daughter's fates by the fool may have acted as a catalyst in precipitating the King's descent into madness. Assuming a dual role as both confidante and commentator, the fool provides the audience with a tantalizing insight into the underlying causes of the King's mental deterioration. Furthermore, fool's songs and rhymes serve as a kind of poetic commentary on the events of the play. In Act III, Scene 2, for example, the fool sings a song about a man who "went to bed at noon and woke at night" - a clear reference to Lear's own descent into madness. The fool's songs and rhymes provide a sense of structure and rhythm to the play and help to tie together its various themes and motifs. Lear towards the end says, "jesters do oft prove prophets." Welsford says,

"Shakespeare makes the fullest possible use of the accepted convention that it is the Fool who speaks the truth, which he knows not by ratiocination, but by inspired intuition. The mere appearance of the familiar figure in cap and bells would at once indicate to the audience where the 'punctum indifferens,' the impartial critic, the mouthpiece of real sanity, was to be found." (269)

Similarly, Paul de Man, another prominent deconstructionist, emphasizes the role of language and rhetoric in shaping meaning. In the case of the Fool, his witty remarks, songs, and rhymes are all forms of language that shape the meaning and interpretation of the play. Through his language, the Fool adds depth and complexity to the play, and forces the audience to grapple with the ambiguity and indeterminacy of meaning. William Willeford says, "The Fool is, in short, a silly or idiotic or mad person...the 'natural' fool and the 'artificial' fool, the latter being the person who 'professionally counterfeits folly,' either could serve as a jester or clown." (10)

Feste in *Twelfth Night* and Touchstone in *As You Like It* also play an essential role as elements of satire, change, wisdom, morality, comedy, humour, wit, truth, and also hold up a mirror to the society of their times similar to the trickster and the picaro. In the medieval miracle morality plays the character of the fool acted as a link between the world of reality and the world of the stage; a function performed by

the Shakespearean fools. Touchstone and Feste may be viewed as a version of these pranksters the difference being that instead of the Devil the fool gets the better of the King and his courtiers.

Twelfth Night can be deconstructed through the lenses of various deconstructionist theories, including Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction, Judith Butler's theory of performativity, Michel Foucault's theory of power, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of language and power. Derrida's theory posits that the meaning of a text is not fixed but is instead constantly shifting, and that words and concepts are inherently unstable and subject to interpretation. In *Twelfth Night*, this instability and fluidity are particularly evident in the theme of gender.

At the beginning of the play, Viola disguises herself as a man named Cesario, and throughout the play, she navigates her relationships with Duke Orsino and Olivia while concealing her true identity. Derrida would argue that this performance of gender destabilizes traditional gender roles and calls into question the very concept of gender as a fixed, essential category. As Derrida writes about "Différance," "the idea of a stable, self-identical meaning is a metaphysical illusion." (10) Viola's performance of gender reveals the constructed nature of gender identity and challenges the audience's assumptions about what it means to be male or female.

Another deconstructionist perspective on *Twelfth Night* can be drawn from Judith Butler's theory of performativity. Butler argues that gender is not an inherent quality but rather something that is performed and constructed through language and social norms. In *Twelfth Night*, Viola's performance of gender can be seen as an example of the performativity of gender. Viola's adoption of the male persona of Cesario is not just a costume but a performance that produces a particular effect on those around her. Butler believes that "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being." (33) Viola's performance of gender highlights the ways in which gender is a performance that is constructed through social norms and expectations.

Another deconstructionist perspective on *Twelfth Night* can be drawn from the work of Michel Foucault, who explored the power dynamics of society and how they shape individual subjectivity. In *Twelfth Night*, the character of Malvolio can be seen as an example of the ways in which power and subjectivity are intertwined. Malvolio is a puritanical steward who serves Olivia, and he is subjected to various forms of humiliation and ridicule throughout the play. Foucault would argue that this subjugation of Malvolio's subjectivity by the other characters in the play reflects the broader power structures of society that seek to control and regulate individual behaviour. As Foucault writes in *Discipline and Punish*, "Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society." (93) Malvolio's subjugation can be seen as an example of the ways in which power operates to control and regulate individual behaviour.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explored the intersection of language, power, and subjectivity. In *Twelfth Night*, the character of Feste the clown can be seen as an example of

the ways in which language is used to create and reinforce power dynamics. Feste is a jester who serves Olivia, and he frequently engages in wordplay and puns that highlight the ambiguity and instability of language. Spivak would argue that Feste's use of language reveals the ways in which language can be used to both create and subvert power dynamics. As Spivak writes in "Can the Subaltern Speak?", "The struggle is to keep at bay the ubiquitous assumptions of power that undergird any one discourse that purports to be totalizing." (293) Feste's use of language highlights the ways in which language is a site of struggle between different discourses and power structures.

As a work of literature, *As You Like It* can be deconstructed through the lenses of various deconstructionist theories. Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction is particularly relevant, as the play challenges the idea of stable and fixed identities. In *As You Like It*, the character of Rosalind adopts a male disguise, highlighting the performative and constructed nature of gender identity. Derrida would argue that this reveals the ways in which language and discourse shape identity, as well as the instability of meaning and the impossibility of a fixed identity. As Derrida writes in *Of Grammatology*, "There is no outside-text. [...] there is nothing outside the text." (158)

Judith Butler's theory of performativity is also relevant to *As You Like It*. Butler argues that gender is not an innate or fixed characteristic, but rather something that is performed and constructed through language and social norms. The character of Rosalind's gender performance in the play exemplifies this idea, as her identity is constructed through language and performance. As Butler says, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender... identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results." (25)

Furthermore, the play can be deconstructed through the lens of Michel Foucault's theory of power, which explores the pervasive nature of power and its effects on individual subjectivity. In *As You Like It*, the character of Duke Frederick can be seen as an example of the ways in which power operates to control and regulate individual behavior. Duke Frederick exiles his brother Duke Senior and seeks to maintain his own power through various means, including the regulation of speech and the punishment of those who disobey his authority. As Foucault opines, "Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society." (93)

Touchstone and Feste, in *As You Like It*, are the archetypal trickster and picaro characters of the play. With their wit and wisdom, they bring levity and merriment to the proceedings. Their humour, whether subtle or overt, serves to enlighten the audience about the events unfolding on the stage. The manner in which the other characters interact with these figures is revealing of their own individual perspectives.

The picaro possesses an insightful perspective of society and its inhabitants but lacks awareness of his own limitations. Touchstone and Feste, as creatures of mirth and merriment, serve as guides to their protégés, eliciting an expansive, self-expressive nature. Touchstone and Feste, through their humour and good-naturedness, embody a deep-seated facet of human nature, provoking the characters and the audience alike to recognize the flaws and foibles of society. They inspire a revelry that expands beyond the stage and spills out

into the audience, inviting all to participate in their subversive yet ultimately healing playfulness.

The character of the fool is always inconsistent as he has to amuse people around him and yet he is himself when in isolation. He is sometimes merry, sometimes witty, sometimes humorous, sometimes wise and sermonizing, and sometimes melancholy while reflecting on the vices of the world. Touchstone says: "A fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool." (Act V, Sc i)

Touchstone, the beloved jester in Shakespeare's plays, provides ample comic relief while also delivering insightful commentary that runs deeper than the surface. His name, Touchstone, is a deliberate allusion to the eponymous rock that was used to test the purity and value of precious metals. Although the touchstone itself had little intrinsic value, it was able to reveal the true worth of metals through comparison. Similarly, Touchstone's value lies in his ability to scratch at the surface of others with his words and reveal their true character, whether good or bad. In this sense, he serves as a litmus test for the purity and goodness of those around him.

Touchstone is akin to the Fool in *King Lear*, another Shakespearean character who possesses the rare ability to impart wisdom in a humorous and engaging manner. Indeed, Touchstone himself professes a fondness for fools and extols the virtues of foolishness on more than one occasion. Ultimately, Touchstone's wit and humour serve to highlight the deeper truths and complexities of the human experience, revealing insights that might otherwise remain hidden.

The quintessential Shakespearean clown is readily distinguished by the fusion of the age-old practices of physicality and colloquial language, which serve to alleviate tensions and disrupt the established reality with familiar and pertinent jests. Drawing from the rich tapestry of societal mores, the clown adeptly summons the appropriate set of connotations and denotations to lend weight and meaning to his discourse. Moreover, the fool fulfills a multifaceted role in Shakespearean drama, serving as a purveyor of truth, equilibrium, play, recreation, destruction, creation, and change. As an agent of change, the fool is a force that both dismantles our well-ordered world and engineers the creation of the new through the medium of play.

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