Traditions of Simulated Folly in The Canterbury Interlude and Tale of Beryn

BOLENS, Guillemette

BEHAVING LIKE FOOLS
Voice, Gesture, and Laughter in Texts, Manuscripts,
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Guillemette Bolens

A fool figure is extant in all parts of The Canterbury Interlude and Merchant's Tale of Beryn. While the Interlude stages a sot in a fabliau, the Tale concerns the frantic foolishness of an anti-heroic Beryn, as well as the simulation of traditional signs of folly by Geoffrey, an expert in law and fiction. The concept of folly and the fool figure are radically transformed in the fifteenth century, when Beryn is written. The fool in high medieval literatures predominantly embodied a radical social and spiritual alterity. In contrast, the fool in late medieval and early modern cultural representations appears in groups and, instead of incarnating the Other, becomes Everyman. A sense of universal folly marks such cardinal works as Sebastian Brant's Ship of Fools (Narrenschiff, 1494) and Erasmus's Praise of Folly (Moriae Encomium, 1511). Fools appear in varied and innumerable cohorts, forcefully invading the social scene. Beryn stages types of fools which evince such changes in cultural representations.


A category of folly typical of the fifteenth century is the clique of sots. Sots are the main protagonists of French plays called sotties, central in late medieval and early modern theatre. In the Canterbury Interlude, the behaviour of foolish pilgrims arriving in Canterbury evokes that of sotties fools. Heather Arden explains that sotties are the clearest manifestation of the prevailing significance of folly in the fifteenth century. Folly, illusion, and theatre were incorporated during the fifteenth century in the figure of the sot, whose role was typically performed by members of joyous societies. Just as the Fêtes des Fous were dying out, the sociétés burlesques [or joyous societies] were developing, and the irreverent, topsyturvy attitudes of the celebrants of the Feast passed to the sots of the sottie. The genre of sotties is, however, specifically expressive of the fifteenth-century conception of folly as a permanent collective phenomenon rather than a momentary cyclical and ritualized disruption, as is the case with the Feast of Fools. It will lead to Renaissance representations that abound with revelling fools raiding the street, the stage, and all social manifestations. It will also influence English early modern drama, in which the figures of the sot and the fool manifest the impact of French productions.

Before proposing a new reading of Beryn’s Pardoner as the epitome of the fifteenth-century sot, I will discuss Geoffrey’s simulation of folly in the Tale, linking it, in the second section of this essay, to the figure of the tregetour. Tregetour is a word used in Middle English and medieval French texts to mean ‘illusionist’. Geoffrey’s skill at making illusions is most visible when he successfully fake insanity. I will compare the rhetoric of Geoffrey’s simulated folly to Tristan’s feigned madness in the twelfth-century Folies Tristan. According to Jean-Marie Fritz, Tristan represents the most achieved medieval hero type, whose cleverness manifests itself in his capacity to simulate folly. A theatricality typical of the late Middle Ages marks Geoffrey’s performance as a natural fool, but the cultural paradigm extant in Tristan’s faked madness in the Folies Tristan provides an indispensable framework to observe the evolution of folly’s style. The Tale of Beryn describes the

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5 Arden, *Fools’ Plays*, p. 20.
style of vocal and gestural delivery, the semiotics of disguise, and the rhetoric of irrationality of a protagonist, Geoffrey, whose acting is shown to be effective because it relies on traditional codes. Meanwhile, recurring tropes of transgression and folly, such as a claim to hybrid parturition and to beheading or hanging games, are remoulded and linked to the emergence of a novel literary figure, that of the player, who, I will argue, adumbrates the jiggling star jester of the early modern stage. In sum, the foolish behaviour of fifteenth-century Geoffrey is linked to both the medieval fool and the early modern jester, thus bridging the two periods and their representations of folly.

A destabilized and destabilizing use of language characterizes the various types of fools in Beryn. The foremost feature of the eponymous hero of the Tale, Beryn, is the fact that his father deprives him of all education, thus turning him into a madman, a compulsive gambler, incapable of channelling both his physical and verbal violence. In contrast, Geoffrey is knowledgeable and hence capable of playing with language. In this essay, I will focus on Geoffrey, the tregetour, and the Pardoner because all three figures bespeak a complex relation to language — verbal language and body language, the latter including kinesic and paralinguistic signals such as gestures and vocalizations.

Geoffrey knows how to manipulate the semiotic phenomenon of truth assessment in his audience by skilfully using cultural tropes and behavioural signs of nonsensicality. The correlated problem posed by the tregetour is that of verisimilitude and interpretation, connected with the figure of the clerk and his intellectual and possibly manipulative power. Finally, the Pardoner in Beryn performs an animal metaphor, he who is connotated in Chaucer’s portrait by means of two unsettling animal metaphors, gelding and mare. I will propose that an enacted metaphor in Beryn responds to Chaucer’s challenging figures of speech, which, to this day, keep defeating monological readings. My contention is that the central issue raised by Beryn’s Pardoner, in response to Chaucer’s poetics, is that of the figural. An analysis of Geoffrey, the illusionist, and the Pardoner will lead me to conclude that the function of the fool in some key medieval texts, including Beryn, is to perform verbal acts of semantic resistance through a destabilized use of figurality. This playful figurality frees language from its denotative function, thus making the vital game of fiction possible.

In her discussion of the ‘anxieties of exchange in The Tale of Beryn’, Jenny Adams contextualizes Beryn in ‘the increasingly trade-heavy culture of the

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fourteenth and fifteenth centuries', when a 'rapid yet uneven growth of commerce' was a source of economic instability. Interestingly, the Canterbury Interlude and Tale of Beryn map related 'anxieties about exchange through a discourse of gaming as well as through representations of actual games', namely dice and chess. Adams highlights the way in which both the Interlude and the Tale use 'a language of games' to 'describe a trade gone sour'. Even though she usefully stresses the significance of games in Beryn, Adams does not discuss the most unsettling instances of gaming in the text, such as Geoffrey's fictitious hanging game. What is more, she puts so much emphasis on the anxieties of exchange that she downplays the pervading humour and playfulness of the narrative. It is notable, in this respect, that she describes Geoffrey solely as 'a sage old man whose manipulation of the court cases both saves Beryn from jail and doubles Beryn's fortune'. This description is biased if we do not acknowledge the fact that 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. My purpose in this essay is thus to grapple with a sense of polyvocal and polymorphic folly in Beryn, which bears witness — notwithstanding the anxieties of commerce — to the vital role nonsensicality, fictionality, and a humorously destabilizing use of figurality played in late medieval literature.

The Simulating Fool and his Rhetoric of Nonsensicality

Folly in Beryn evinces the historical and cultural reality of Middle English literature. 'Anglo-French still dominated the royal court of Edward III [...] , and apparently later too; and it was French and Anglo-French literature that carried all the cultural capital.' In the fifteenth century, when Beryn is written, the cultural,
literary, and political status of English is undergoing considerable changes, but the influence of French literature remains significant. Beryn is evidence of this fact, as, on the one hand, it is an adaptation of the first part of the French prose romance Berinus, composed between 1350 and 1370, and, on the other, the influence not only of French fabliaux but also of French sotties is perceptible in the Interlude. Concerning the two extant versions of the Folies Tristan, it is notable that the Bern version is written in Norman and the Oxford version in Anglo-Norman: French was used on both sides of the Channel to tell the same story. This story was still part of the cultural capital of the authors of both the fourteenth-century French Berinus and the fifteenth-century English Beryn.

London, British Library, MS Harley 2253 also testifies to the historical proximity, rather, inextricability, of French and Middle English literary traditions. This remarkable mid-fourteenth-century Herefordshire manuscript contains some French fabliaux next to Middle English lyrics. One of the French fabliaux, entitled Le Roi d'Angleterre et le jongleur d'Ely (fols 107v-109v), is a dialogue in French between a jongleur and the King of England. Howard Bloch convincingly argues that language is often the central target of fabliaux. Le Roi d'Angleterre in particular raises the question of language over and over again: 'Given that the jongleur can never adequately name himself, how does he go about naming that impossibility?'

As will become apparent, playing with the impossibility of denoting and naming is at the core of the rhetoric of folly in a number of medieval texts, ranging from Geoffrey of Monmouth's prophecies of Merlin to sixteenth-century sotties. These various texts evince a common stance vis-à-vis language, playing with the limits of referentiality and denotation.

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A telling example is a passage in *La Sottie du Roy des Sotz* (c. 1545), where the King of Sots and three other sots, Triboulet, Coquibus, and Sottinet, vainly try to make Guippelin speak:

**TRIBOULET**
Il cloche devant les boyteux
Et fait le sot devant les sotz.
Guippelin, réponds moy deux motz.
Dy moy, pourquoi ne parles tu?

**SOTTINET**
Il craint ainsi d’estre battu.

**COQUIBUS**
Non fait; mais il a le lempas.\(^2^2\)

**LE ROY DES SOTZ**
Non a, vrayement; il ne l'a pas;
Tu scès bien qu'il n'est pas cheval.

**SOTTINET**
Il a doncques quelque aultre mal.
A il point le panthagruel?\(^2^2\)

**LE ROY DES SOTZ**
On ne l'a jamais si cruel
Qu'il gardé de parler aux gens.

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21. Lempas, a mouth disease affecting horses.

22. The use of pantagruel as a noun points towards a popular motif famously developed by Francois Rabelais, who maintains the association between his hero, Pantagruel, and thirst. In *Pantagruel I*, chap. 2, 'De la nativité du très redouté Pantagruel', Pantagruel's birth takes place during a thirty-six-month drought which makes the earth sweat brine instead of dew. The baby comes out of his mother's womb preceded by a procession of mounts carrying salted food ('jam bons, langue de boeuf fumées, anguillettes, etc.'). The narrator explains that Gargantua names his son Pantagruel, for PANTA means *all* in Greek and GRUEL means *thirsty* ('alteres') in Arabic. Pantagruel will dominate the drunkards and salt eaters, whose thirst can never be quenched, who are never 'dès-altérés'. Francois Rabelais, *Pantagruel*, in *OEuvres complètes*, ed. by Huchon and Moreau, pp. 209-337.
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TRIBOULET
Il pourroit bien avoir les dens
De la gorge toute verrie.

LE ROY DES SOTZ
Tu le dis affin que je rie.

SOTTINET
Quoy doncques? a il l'esquinance.\textsuperscript{13}

MITTOUFLET
Par Nostre Dame! je le pense,
Car it beut hyer mon hypocras.\textsuperscript{24}

LE ROY DES SOTZ
Mais il a le gousier tout gras
Encore de caesme prenant. (lines 201–20)\textsuperscript{25}

TRIBOULET
He may have the teeth
Of the throat all brittle.

THE KING OF SOTS
You say that to make me laugh.

SOTTINET
What then? Does he have the esquinance.

MITTOUFLET
By our Lady! I think so,
Because he drank my hypocras yesterday.

THE KING OF SOTS
But his gullet is still greasy
From his pre-Lent feasting.

Guippelin is a chameleon-like fool who mimetically mirrors the persons near him. It will appear that the emergence of language is impeded in him by an allegorical net wrought by youth and poverty (lines 243–56). Meanwhile, the debate between the other sots revolves around ludicrous and laughable explanations for the hindrance of speech (\textit{You say that to make me laugh}), which are all based on stark physicality: unquenchable thirst, weak teeth, and a greasy throat from excess of food during Mardi Gras. The dialogue is triggered by silence, and the sots’ multifarious and extravagant explanations for speech deprivation bespeak the fundamental impossibility of accounting for language itself. In the lineage of \textit{Le Roi d'Angleterre et le jongleur d'Ely}, sotties address the question of fabliaux according to Bloch, that is: given that we can never adequately name, how do we go about naming that impossibility? The rhetoric of folly juggles with this impossibility, performing and carnivalizing it through verbal, vocal, and gestural excess and a declared nonsensicality.

\textit{Folly in medieval literature has been associated with the impossibility of accounting for language, as well as with the limits of the denotative power of language. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a madman such as Merlin possesses a

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Es}quinance, a throat disease.

\textsuperscript{24} Hypocras, a drink made of wine mixed with sugar, cinnamon, ginger, and cloves.

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prophetical power and an access to other realms of reality. The discourse of the fool possibly expresses superior, even supernatural, knowledge. Typically, Merlin's prophecies in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* articulate a type of wisdom inaccessible to everyman. The text conveys this idea by progressively defeating the readability of the prophecies, thus frustrating all efforts to translate Merlin's words into meaningful messages. For example, one section in the prophecies explains that 'an ass will call upon a long-bearded ram and will take his shape; the mountain ox will feel indignant; after calling upon the wolf, he will transfix the ass and the ram with his horn. After indulging in cruelty, he will devour their flesh and bones but he will be cremated on Mount Urien'. These images call to mind cryptic biblical passages, such as Daniel's vision. In contrast, however, Daniel's vision is ultimately explained in the Bible. Such is not the case with Merlin's prophecies, which remain impossible to translate into cogent denotations.

Thus, Geoffrey of Monmouth uses the prophetic genre to achieve conflicting semantic effects. It is a given of the genre that prophecies must be understood symbolically; usually the reader is called to translate them into an intelligible, literal content, and Merlin's prophecies do begin with relatively decipherable references.


Daniel's vision reads: 'And I lifted up my eyes and saw: and, behold, a ram stood before the water, having two high horns, and one higher than the other and growing up' (Daniel 8. 3). 'And I understood: and, behold, a he-goat came from the west on the face of the whole earth, and he touched not the ground: and the he-goat had a notable horn between his eyes' (Daniel 8. 5). The rams met in combat, and the second cast the first on the ground: 'he stamped upon him. [...] And the he-goat became exceeding great. And when he was grown the great horn was broken: and there came up four horns under it towards the four winds of heaven' (Daniel 8. 7–8). The vision continues until Daniel hears a voice say: 'Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision' (Daniel 8. 16), and it is explained to Daniel that the ram is the king of the Medes and Persians and the he-goat the king of the Greeks. The four horns are to say that 'four kings shall rise up of his [the Greek king's] nation, but not with his strength' (Daniel 8. 18–22, Douay Bible).
But the prophecies soon launch into a series of metaphors that defy all interpretation. The flamboyant and comical extravagance of the passage that follows the cremation of the ox illustrates this fact:

Feuille rogi mutabuntur in cignos, qui in sicco quasi in flumine natabunt. Deuorabunt pices in piscibus et homines in hominibus deglutient. Superueniente uero senectute, effici- entur submarini duces acque submarinas insidias machinabuntur. Summergent nautia et argentum non minimum congregabunt. (Historia regum Britanniae, §116: 48)

(The pyre’s ashes will transform into swans, which will swim on an almost-dry river. They will swallow fish after fish and engulf man after man. While growing old, they will dominate the bottom of the seas and will scheme underwater ambushes. They will submerge ships and gather up an appreciable amount of silver.)

While opacity is to be expected in prophecies, the text’s extreme treatment of Merlin’s discourse plays with the reader’s desire for meaning. Geoffrey of Monmouth confronts his reader with the impossibility of interpreting Merlin’s words, by means of such humorous images as that of anthropophagous swans scheming ambushes and pirating ships. Such a programmatically defeated, qua nonsensical, referentiality is characteristic of the rhetoric of folly throughout medieval literature, be the madman a bewildered prophet like Merlin or a cunning jester like the Jongleur d’Ely.

The *Roi d’Angleterre et le jongleur d’Ely* expresses semantic preoccupations when the main protagonist questions the principle of referentiality and disturbs the expectations of linguistic cogency assumed by his interlocutor, the King of England. The Jongleur is the epistemological descendant of a Merlin. Although one is a prophet and the other a jester, both are fools. Fritz and Philippe Ménard insist that a distinction between the truly bewildered man and the court fool must not be overstressed.29 Behaving like a madman was a prominent part of a jester’s repertoire, whence his label of fool,30 and the medieval language of folly is most clearly articulated when folly is simulated, verbally, vocally, and gesturally. Imitation enhances the salient features of the literary and cultural figure of the fool. Geoffrey in *Beryn* continues this tradition but as a fifteenth-century reveller. His rhetoric of insanity is based on traditional tropes, which are adapted to a physical and behavioural disguise typical of folly’s new style.

The court fool is an entertainer and may be a minstrel or a jongleur. The role he enacts is often used as a source of impunity. In Wace’s *Roman de Brut* (1155), the kinship between harper, jongleur, and fool is made explicit. In order to enter the fortress of Everwic (York), held by his brother Colgrim and besieged by Arthur, Baldulf disguises himself as a jongleur, hanging a harp around his neck, and shaving half his head, mustache, and beard, ‘Bien sembla lecheiir u fol’ (line 9109; he looked much like a lecher or fool). A shaved head constitutes a privileged sign in the semiotics of folly. As the story of Baldulf shows, folly can be used as a disguise, and its most blatant physical expression is a foolish shaving, in this instance of half the head and face. One way to denote a mask in medieval French was by the phrase ‘fol visage’ (mad face). When blended with the fool figure, the minstrel, harper, or jongleur is protected by his assumed role. Baldulf, once seen as a fool, has no difficulty entering the fortress. The immunity conferred by the simulation of folly can be used to violent ends, whether rhetorical or physical. The violence is physical in the case of Baldulf. It is both physical and rhetorical in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as well as in its literary forerunner, Saxo Grammaticus’s *Gesta Danorum*, where Amleth’s faked folly enables the latter to murder his uncle. Folly as a mask proves particularly relevant in a study of Geoffrey’s simulated madness in *Berinus* and *Beryn*.

Hanybald looked on Geoffrey as he were amazed,
And beheld his countenance and howe he was i-rased [shaved],
But evermore he thought that he was a foie,
Naturell of kynde, and had noon other tooel,
As semed by his wordes and his visage both,
And thought it had been foly to wex with hym wroth. (*Beryn*, lines 2933–38)

Folly confers immunity, for one would be mad to be upset by a fool’s nonsensical chatter, countenance, and facial expressions.

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Thus, a clear physical token of folly in medieval texts is a head shorn crudely. The gesture to shear a man's head roughly — not in a tonsure — turns the latter almost automatically into the representation of a fool. In the *Folies Tristan*, the hero, in order to appear a fool, cuts his hair with a pair of scissors Queen Yseult once offered him. This disguise gives him access to King Mark's forbidden castle and thus to Yseult. Tristan fulfills the Queen's expectation implied in her gift: he must be willing to shave his head like a fool and thus forsake all sense of pride and knightly honour in the name of their mutual passion. In the Oxford *Folie*, Tristan shears his hair "en croiz". Jacqueline Schaefer explains that the 'ambiguity of the phrase has led the editors of the Oxford *Folie*, Bédier and later Hoepffner, to imagine the former a tonsure in the shape of a cross, the latter a haircut shaped so as to leave two hairlines crossing one another. But she argues that the phrase [...] was a fixed one, with equivalents in other languages, not an invention of the author of [the Oxford Folie]. Also, far from referring to the precise pattern of the cross, which might lead to a symbolic interpretation, it refers to the absence of pattern, a haphazard crossing of the scissors, nicking here and there. The Spanish equivalent, 'Trasquilar a cruces', was in common usage and meant cutting the hair without order, irregularly and crudely as was the custom for fools and other social outcasts.

36 See Jacqueline T. Schaefer, 'Specularity in the Medieval Folie Tristan Poems or Madness as Metadiscourse', *Neophilologus*, 77 (1993), 355–68. In *Le Tristan en prose* (c. 1240), used by Thomas Malory in his *Book of Tristram de Lyones* (1470), Tristan is genuinely mad and his shaving is inflicted upon him by shepherds, who humiliate and molest him daily: "Et la cose ki plus laidement le desfigura si fu que li pastour le tondirent et k'i li taignoient le vis casun jour u d'une couleur u d'autre" (And the thing that disfigured him most badly was that the shepherds sheared him and that they stained his face every day with one colour or another). *Le Roman de Tristan en prose*, ed. by Philippe Ménard (Geneva: Droz, 1987), I. xii, p. 248, lines 29–31. Malory's version reads thus: 'And so they [herdemen and sheperdis] clypped hym with sherys and made hym lyke a fool'. *Malory: Works*, ed. by Eugène Vinaver, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 305, lines 14–15.


38 Jacqueline Schaefer, 'Tristan's Folly: Feigned or Real?', *Tristania*, 3 (1977) 3–16 (pp. 4–5).

39 Schaefer, 'Tristan's Folly', p. 5. Schaefer is assuredly right to insist that the shape of a cross is not implied in the fool's haircut. However, the expression 'en croiz' occasionally suggested to some authors that the 'cross/ing' qualified the shape of the haircut rather than the shavee's gestures — witness the anonymous *Kyng Robert of Cicyle*, composed at the end of the fourteenth century in a south-east Midlands dialect: 'He heet a barbur him bifore, | That a fool he schulde be shure | Al around, lich a freste, | An honed-brede boue either ere, | And on his croune make a croiz' (lines
In *Berinus*, Geoffrey is shorn 'en croix' (§95) and in *Beryn*, the operation is performed in haste and with crude instruments ('lewd tole', line 2917), which suggests the same type of rough shearing. Geoffrey's new look is sufficient to turn him into the epitome of the fool ('There was no man alyve bet like to a folie', line 2918). Whilst the shaving of all hair could conceivably be seen as revelatory of facial features and therefore of the person's identity, a shorn head is a sign of such a strong and widely understood significance that it functions as a mask, veiling in fact the person's identity.

After cutting his hair, Tristan pulls out a pole from a hedge, or finds a club, and makes it hang from his neck. The pole and the club are other traditional signs of folly. They link the fool with the figure of the wild man. With them Tristan behaves like a lunatic and strikes whoever comes near. In contrast to Tristan's wild rage, Geoffrey's madness is that of a late medieval fool, that of a reveller acting like a sot. His behaviour is immediately interpreted as folly because he gambols and twirls, he speaks with a high-pitched voice and an idiotic expression (lines 2930–32). Eccentric behaviour within the general grammar of folly remains topical, but the style of eccentricity has been refashioned:

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The Romeyns went to barr, and Geoffrey al tofore
With a nyce contenaunce, bare-fote and totore,
Pleying with a yerd he bare in his honde
And was ever wistlyng att every pase comand.
The steward and the burgeyses had game inowghe
Of Geoffreyes nyce comyng, and hertlich lowghe,
And eche man seyd, 'Gilhochet, come nere.' *(Beryn, lines 3413–19)*
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40 In Layamon's *Brut* (London, British Library, MS Cotton Caligula A IX), the phrase 'to crosse' is used to explain that Baldulf shears his head so as to look like a fool (line 20307) *(Layamons Brut or Chronicle of Britain: A Poetical Semi-Saxon Paraphrase of The Brut of Wace*, ed. by Sir Frederic Madden, 3 vols (London Society of Antiquaries of London, 1847; repr. Osnabrück: Otto Zeller, 1967), II, 428, line 20). In his glossary (vol. iii), Madden translates crosse, crosse by 'fool' with a question mark. W. R. J. Barron and S. C. Weinberg translate 'makede hine to crosse' by 'made himself seem a half-wit' *(Layamon's Arthur: The Arthurian Section of Layamon's 'Brut', ed. and trans. by W. R. J. Barron and S. C. Weinberg (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2001), line 10132). I propose that the phrase 'to crosse' in Layamon corresponds to the French 'en croix' and the Spanish 'a cruces'.

41 'un pel': *Oxford Folio Tristan*, line 222; 'une masque': *Berne Folio Tristan*, line 134.
Geoffrey walks barefoot, his clothes are torn, and he carries a yard, 'rod, staff'. So far, the portrait could fit an unkempt Tristan. Geoffrey's rod, however, is a late medieval version of the wild man's weapon. Instead of waving a club to strike, the fool plays with a staff and flourishes it while hopping and whistling. The tokens of madness have been reinterpreted. The wild man is now a jester, the fool a player, who deliberately triggers a general 'hertlich' laughter.

Geoffrey's pseudonym is Gilhochet. The French Berinus has 'Guinehochet' (§§ 91, 101). This name is extant in the thirteenth-century Parisiana Poetria, in which John of Garland expounds upon the nature of comedy. Garland chooses to illustrate the genre of comedy with a story depicting a spirit hidden in a well in France. The author first gives a professedly mediocre example, followed by an improved version. In the first case, Guinehochet is a 'Spiritus malignus in partibus Gallie cuidam se immisit sisterne' (lines 422-23; 'An evil spirit settled in a certain well in a part of France'). In the second version Guinehochet is introduced thus:

Est ex Plutonis foves prolata colonis Gallica vox, leta, iocunda, novella, faceta:
'Hac in cisterna lateo, terreque caverna
Hospitor et ludo; venetra laencia nudo.
Ginnehochet Baratri me vulgus nominat Atri.' (Garland, lines 433-36)

[From Pluto's pit to the farmers comes a French voice, fun-loving, full of jokes, novel, witty:
'I hide in this well, I sojourn in this hole in the earth, and I play; I lay bare the hidden future. The mob calls me Guinehochet of Black Hell.]

The learned reference to the classical god Pluto leads away from an indefinite 'evil spirit' and towards a refreshing French voice. Garland's Guinehochet is metamorphosed on the spot, for pedagogical purposes, from a malevolent spirit into a merry voice in the vein of future French sotties fools. Fear and spectrality are turned into tricks and jokes. The voice coming from the well is novel. It is not threatening: it is joyful, facetious, and witty. Guinehochet says he is playing, ludo; he is leta, fun-loving. Similarly, Geoffrey, while relying on traditional signs of folly, is not frenetic and enraged: he cavorts and frolics. For folly as frenzy has been replaced by folly as revelry.

41 John of Garland, The 'Parisiana Poetria' of John of Garland, ed. and trans. by Traugott Lawler (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974). John of Garland was an Englishman who taught grammar and literature at the University of Paris during the first half of the thirteenth century. The point of Garland's demonstration is that the level of style must fit the matter, e.g. high style for high sentiments and low style for comedies — 'provided that in treating a low subject we be not too lackluster and unfigurative, confusing that style with inarticulateness' (lines 416-21; all translations of Garland are Lawler's).
The *Canterbury Interlude* opens with a comparison between the Canterbury pilgrims and Hurlewayne's *mesnie*. Hurlewayne is the Hellequin of Adam de la Halle's *Jeu de la Feuillee* (1276), one of the earliest achievements of French secular theatre and the first medieval play to give a voice to folly in the person of a *derve*.45 According to Ginzburg, the Hellequin *mesnie* originally personified the throng of the dead restlessly roaming about the earth.46 The cultural significance of the legend was progressively transformed into a dramatized folly, of which disruptive drive became urbanized. Instead of evoking the presence of the dead, the manifestation came to satirize the society of the living in scenes played through city streets, leading to the early modern stage and the commedia dell'arte in particular. The disruptive Hellequin was transmogrified on stage into the comic type Harlequin, whose traditional black mask was a residue of his original link with the world of the dead.47 As in Garland, spectrality was progressively replaced by comedy. The fact that the *Canterbury Interlude* begins with a comparison between the troop of pilgrims and Hellequin's company indicates that *Beryn* ought to be appraised within this larger network of associations.

To return to Tristan, it is interesting that he should darken his face by means of an herb.48 Evocative of Harlequin's black mask, Tristan's dark face and disguise are entirely successful. Nobody recognizes him, not even Yseult, who says she would love a noble and handsome man, but certainly not a fat, hideous, and ugly fool.49 In *Beryn*, the Steward feels equally secure that he is dealing with a fool, and thus fails to identify Geoffrey (lines 3257-62). Geoffrey used to hide his true identity by faking lameness. He now replaces his former disguise with the new one, and his shorn head and foolish gait are enough to veil his former identity.

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43 Also spelled *dœve*, *desve*, *desvez*. A synonym is *forsenez*. The *desverie* or *desverie* is a folly which partakes of mental torment, furor, and frenzy.


47 'Puis ennerci, muid culur': Oxford *Folie Tristan*, lines 212-16.

48 'E tu es gros, hidus et laiz': Oxford *Folie Tristan*, line 369.
While a shorn head and an eccentric body language serve as tokens of Geoffrey's madness, the mask of folly is further authenticated by a correlated discourse typical of a fool. Traditional dialogues between a fool and a wise man often concern genealogies and origins — witness Salomon and Marcolphus's contest of wit. Marcolphus replies to Salomon's lengthy and prestigious genealogy by bluntly stating: 'Et ego sum Marcolphus Follus' (And I am Marcolphus the Fool). Similarly, in the *Roi d'Angleterre et le jongleur d'Ély*, the king asks the jongleur about his origins.

— Responsez à droit, daunz Joglours;
De quele terre estez vus?
— Sire, esez vos tylwers ou porters
 Quý si folament demaundez?
Purquoi demandez de quele terre?
Volez vus de moy potz fere? (*Le Roi d'Angleterre*, p. 247)

The fool plays with the double meaning of *terre* in French ('land' and 'clay'), insinuating that the king might foolishly be inclined to make a clay pot out of him. In the same way, both Tristan and Geoffrey are questioned on their origins and identity. The answers lead to a contest of wits between the pseudo-fool and the figure of authority, a recurring element in the tradition of feigned folly. In the *Folies Tristan*, the hero speaks with King Mark; in *Beryn*, Geoffrey converses with the local Steward.

In the *Tale of Beryn* we find three main dialogues between Geoffrey and Hanybald besides the trial of Beryn, during which Geoffrey pleads successfully. In the first, Geoffrey states that he is the progenitor of his interlocutors. In the second, Hanybald tests Geoffrey's knowledge of the sailor's craft. The third is an exchange on Geoffrey's origin and identity:


49 This passage calls to mind Tristan in the Oxford *Folies* proving his expertise as a hunter and angler, 'launching in the description of his totally absurd technique': Schaefer, *Tristan's Folly*, pp. 8–9.
But yeit he [Hanybald] axed of Geoffrey, 'What is thy name, I prey?'
'Gilhochet,' quod Geoffrey, 'men cleped me yisterday.'
'And where were thow i-bore?' — 'I note, I make avowe,'
Seyd Geoffrey to this Hanybald; 'I axe that of yewe,
For I can tell no more but here I stond nowe.' (Beryn, lines 3045–49)

Geoffrey's origins are summed up by his sheer presence here and now. Geoffrey's stance evokes Marcolphus's blunt statement. The fool simply exists, standing here and now, unanchored to a genealogy traceable through memorized names.

Another important trope in the rhetoric of folly is hybridity. In response to King Mark's questions, Tristan refers to animal origins:

Mark l'apele si li demancé:
'Fous, con as non? — G'e non Picous.10
— Qui t'angendra? — Uns galerous.
— De que -
— D'une balaine. (Berne Folie Tristan, lines 155–58)

[Mark called him and asked:
'Fool, what is your name? — My name is Picous.
— With whom? — A whale.]

Hybrid origins also appear in Berinus and Beryn when Geoffrey explains to armed men ready to capture him that in fact he himself fathered them the day before with — as will later appear — a mouse. Despite a notable contrast in size with Tristan's maternal whale, hybridity is a central feature in both cases.

'Where art thow now, Beryn? Com nere, behold and se!
Here is an huge pepill i-rayed and i-dight.
All these been my children that been in armes bryghe,
Yesterday I gate hem! Is nat mervall
That they been hidez i-com to be of our counsaill
And to stond by us and help us in our ple?
Al myne own children, blessed mut ye be!
Quod Geoffrey with an high voise, and had a nyce visage,
And gun to daunce for joy in the forestage. (Beryn, lines 2924–32)

Geoffrey's high voice, silly expression, and foolish dancing substantiate a rhetoric of madness that interconnects traditional motifs, already extant in the Folies Tristan, with a new sense of theatricality. Here Geoffrey uses the ship's forecastle as a stage for his antics. Later, he will perform a histrionic number after climbing upon a platform in order to be seen by everyone (lines 3077–80).

Several elements in Geoffrey's speech call to mind traditional motifs. Geoffrey fathered the audience threatening him. This idea evokes the nonsense images of the Revesby Mummers' Play, in which a fool is father to the group of men that is about to behead him. A beheading game is the climax of the majority of Mummers' plays and is central to the fourteenth-century *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. A similar game, this time by hanging, as for Geoffrey, is alluded to in the fifteenth-century *Mankind*, when New Guise enters with a severed halter around his neck: ‘I was twychyde by the neke; the game was begunne’ (line 616). A mock beheading in another scene suggests a close connection with folk games.

After Mankind has driven off New Guise, Nowadays, and Nought by hitting and injuring them with his spade, there is a comic scene in which Mischief acts as a parody of the consoling mother towards the three crying babes and goes through a comic mime, which historians of drama have suggested was taken over from traditional Mummers' plays, of supposedly chopping off Nowadays's head and restoring it whole.

In Beryn, Geoffrey explains that the begetting of the citizens took place while he was hanging by the neck during a game:

> 'Yisterday,' quod Geoffrey, 'pleying in the strete
> Atte gentill game that cleped is the quek,
> A long peny-halter was cast about my nekk
> And i-knet fast with a ryding knot
> And cast over a perche and haled along my throte.'
> 'Was that a game,' quod Hanybald, 'for to hang thyself?'
> 'So they seyd about me, a thousand ech by hymself.'

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'How scapeddest thou,' quod Hanybald, 'that thou were nat dide?'
Thereeto can I answere without eny rede.
I bare thre dice in myne owne purs,
For I go never without, fare I better or wors.
I kist hem forth al thre and too fil amys-ase.
But here now what fill after, right a mervolouse case!
There cam a mows lepe forth and ete the third boon,
That puffed out hir skyn as grete as she myght goon,
And in this maner wise, of the mouse and me,
All ye be i-com my children fair and fre.' (Beryn, line 2942–58)

The mother is a mouse, which ate one of the three dice Geoffrey cast while being hanged by the neck. Thus inseminated, the animal swelled up, puffed out its skin to its limits, and in this fashion gave birth to their offspring, that is, Geoffrey's very audience (see also Berinus, § 88). The surreal quality of this passage is remarkable and serves a specific purpose. In order to convince his audience and prove that he is a fool, Geoffrey fashions and controls his discourse so as to sound chaotic and irrational. By definition, rhetoric's function is to persuade. In his performance, Geoffrey applies an elaborate and persuasive rhetoric of folly, fuelled with popular motifs, traditional codes, all immediately recognized as signs of insanity. He uses hybrid parturition as a prominent trope because it constitutes a manifest transgression of natural laws. Similarly, parricide — no matter how playful — is an obvious social transgression. Transgression is a rule in the grammar of folly, and the specific motifs of hybridity and parricide are favoured tropes in the fool's rhetoric, tropes emblematic of the rule of transgression.

Folly's grammar and tropes have been linked to nonsense popular poetry and topsy-turvydom. Sandra Billington praises Mankind's playwright for 'the skill with which he included popular foolery' in his pre-Lent play. Highlighting the fact that popular poetry is known to us through clerks' writings, Richard Axton argues that one is tempted to see Mankind 'as the Shrovetide jeu d'esprit of a group of Cambridge clerks'. The same dynamic mixture of popular rhetoric and clerical wit in a carnivalesque context characterizes Beryn. However, an important distinction between Beryn and Mankind must be stressed. Mankind uses folk references

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58 The *Canterbury Interlude* ends with a mock battle evocative of carnivalesque mock jousts.
in association with the unquestionably negative, allegorical figures of the Vices. Such is not the case in Beryn, where Geoffrey is a vital character for the very reason that he is able to shift registers with a freedom and ease that are clearly cast in an appreciative light. In contrast to the conflict of linguistic and metaphysical registers between the folk-like Vices and the clerical, salvific Mercy in Mankind, Beryn stages a character who is positive because ambiguous, salutary because cunning, truly clerkly because capable of deliberately making a fool of himself. Beryn praises clerkliness by being self-parodic in its use of clerical knowledge — a stance typical of clerks' self-derisive acumen. The function of allegorical personifications in Mankind is to make the sharp antagonism between virtue and sin blatantly perceptible. Instead, Geoffrey's mouse plays with the audience's semantic efforts. The force of nonsense poetry consists in checkmating interpretations that contain language within teleological meanings. Meanwhile, the effect of nonsensicality is laughter, that is, the paralinguistic and kinesic expression of elation and semantic success — one laughs if he or she grasps the nonsensicality of the utterance. But this effect, in turn, can be used as a powerful semiotic weapon.

While semantic resistance is a central feature of the fool's discourse, its paradoxical correlative is the possibility to voice one's truth uncensored. Tristan proclaims his passion for the Queen, and Mark fails to hear the scandalous truth: he enjoys the joke. Similarly, everyone laughs to tears when Geoffrey announces that he is about to overcome the citizens in Beryn's trial. Geoffrey claims that he will defeat Beryn's adversaries at their own judicial game. Such a truth is less romantic than Tristan's passionate love, but the process is the same. The grammar of folly is correctly reckoned by the audience and, for this very reason, truth is not heard when declared. The rhetoric of folly consists in producing a discourse and a series of signals, the grammar and semiotics of which are readily recognizable. The codes are properly used and interpreted and consequently produce a sense of verisimilitude. The correct reading of the fool's performance induces, however, a truth assessment programmatically mistaken. Misreading is the semantic effect intended and achieved by the appropriate application and perception of folly's grammatical rules, semiotic signals, and rhetorical devices.

Geoffrey's discursive and physical simulation may be linked to the tradition of clerical misrule that makes 'language play an instrument of power'. The simulation

59 'Lawghed of Geoffrey that water on hir leres | Ran down from hie eyen for his mased wit' (Beryn, lines 3200–01). I discuss Beryn's trial in Bolens, 'Narrative Use'.
of folly serves as a weapon whereby power relationships are reversed. The fool fools his audience and outwits the wise: "They held hym for a very folly, but he held hem wel more, | And so he made hem in breff tyme, although they were nat shore" (Beryn, lines 3423–24). Geoffrey turns the citizens into fools, although their heads are not shorn. Geoffrey's unimpeachable legal defence at Beryn's trial strikes the Steward with consternation: 'The Steward sat as still as who had shorne his hed' (line 3777). Geoffrey masterfully uses the sign of the shaved head to induce the idea of madness; the correct reading of this sign reverses the positions of power, and Geoffrey overcomes his opponents and metaphorically shaves their heads. Thus, Beryn shows a preoccupation with destabilized semantic processes and ambivalent truth-making assessments that evokes Chaucer's heterodox poeties.61 It is through such issues that Chaucer's impact on his fifteenth-century follower ought to be measured. I make the hypothesis that Beryn's author chose to translate Berinus into Middle English and add it to the Canterbury Tales because this association was relevant in his reception of Chaucer's work and, as I will argue in the last section of this essay, because it offered a meaningful background to his Interlude. Before reading the Interlude, a study of the tregetour in the Tale will help me further assess the significance of Geoffrey in Beryn as clerkly jester.

The Illusionist: From Tregetour to Star Player

In Magic on the Early English Stage, Philip Butterworth explains that the etymology of tregetour, as provided by the OED, appears to be mutually supported by Old French and Latin sources. The English word is derived from the twelfth-century French word 'tre(s)geter(a)e', with its meanings as 'a juggler, mountebank, agent-noun of tre(s)geter to cast across or to and fro', and the Latin 'tra(ns)jectare', which is combined from trans and jactare, meaning 'to throw, cast'.62 Butterworth argues that this definition 'enabled the uncomfortable understanding to arise that "to throw, cast" is the same as "throwing up objects". This is a misleading interpretation and it is wrong'. Rather, casting and throwing in tre(s)geter have to do with 'the implicit concern for misdirection in the production of sleight of hand'.63

63 Butterworth, Magic on the Early English Stage, p. 191.
Geoffrey in Beryn refers twice to tregetours, a word used by Chaucer in the House of Fame (lines 1260, 1277) and the Franklin’s Tale (lines 1141, 1143). Chaucer’s tregetour have been ‘glossed as jugglers or magicians’. However, a more specific translation is ‘illusionist’, in the sense of he who misdirects his audience’s sight by inducing misperceptions. Chaucer in the Franklin’s Tale links the ‘subtile tregetoures plye’ (line 1141) to the clerkly power (learned in books) ‘to maken illusioun’ (line 1264), such as ‘To remoeven alle the rokkes of Britayne, | And eek from Gerounde to the mouth of Sayne’ (lines 1221–22). In the House of Fame, the narrator names a tregetour ‘Colle’, claiming that he saw him carry a windmill under a walnut shell (lines 1277–81). Butterworth notes that the fictional ‘Colle tregetour’ is indicative of other evidence of the word tregetour as a surname and/or a role. Albeit fictional, the naming of a particular tregetour gestures towards the personalization of the early modern star player.

Similarly, in his Dance Macabre, John Lydgate adds to the translation of his French source Henry V’s tregetour, named ‘Maistir John Rikele’, in the list of characters called upon by Death:

```plaintext
Death to the Tregetour
Maistir John Rikele / some tyme Tregetour
Of noble Harry / kying of Engelond
And of fraunce / the mighty conquerour
ffor alle the sleightes / and turnyng of thin hond
Thou must come ner / this daunce to vnderstond
Nought may auail / al thi conclusions
ffor deeth shortly / nouther on see ne lond
Is nought deceived / by none illusions. (Dance Macabre, stanza 65)
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Death may not be deceived by a tregetour’s illusions. This statement suggests that, in contrast to Death’s irrepressible power, man’s sight is unable to see through such illusions. While, in Lydgate’s text, these illusions are produced by the tregetour’s

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66 The glossary to the Riverside Chaucer gives as a translation of tregetour ‘illusionist, sleight-of-hand artist’.
67 Butterworth, Magic on the Early English Stage, p. 190.
'sleightes / and turnyng of [his] hond', other *tregetours*, such as the jongleur d'Ely, are capable of equally confounding *semantic* illusions:

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Devant nostre sire en pleniere cour
Sunt meint jogleur e meint lechour;
Molt bien sevint de tricherie,
D'enchauntemenetz e genglerie,
E font parroistre par lur gyomoire
Voir come mençonge, mençonge come voire.
Prions la doulece benoicte Marie
Qe des Engleis ele eie merci,
Prions que ele vueille semoigner
Cil tregetours a sermoner
E à nostre sire donner conseil
Tiel come le loiax menestrel. *(Le Roi d'Angleterre, p. 242)*
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In these lines, lexical proliferation blurs the distinction between deceiving *tregetours*, jongleurs, and a loyal minstrel who, oddly, is set on a par with either his sire or the Virgin. Indeed, 'tiel come' in the last line of the passage suggests either that Mary should preach to both the sire and the minstrel, or that the minstrel preaches to his sire as Mary does. Further, he who prays for the Virgin to have mercy on the English is himself a jongleur, and he states that jongleurs know how to deceive, to make the false appear true and vice versa. Such a stance is based on a self-reflexive semantic contradiction and is evocative of the liar paradox.

The jongleur's dialogue with the King of England continues in the same vein, playing with semantic ambiguities and double entendre. Finally,

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— 'Sire Roi,' feit le Jogler,
'Quei val sen ou saver?
Arant vait vivre en folye
Come en sen ou cortesie.' *(Le Roi d'Angleterre, p. 249)*
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[— 'Sire King,' says the Jongleur,
'What is the value of sense and knowledge?
To live in folly is as good
as to live in sense and courtesy.]

To argue cleverly against the importance of knowledge and sense shows \textit{a contrario} a preoccupation with knowledge, redolent of clerks' \textit{subtilitas}.\footnote{On clerks' \textit{subtilitas}, see Jacqueline Cerquiglini, \textit{Un Engin si soutit: Guillaume de Machaut et l'écriture au XVe siècle} (Paris: Champion, 1985).} This posture evokes Erasmus's \textit{Praise of Folly}, which presents a smart and 'sophisticated mock defence of foolish behaviour as preferable to rational acts'.\footnote{Clifford Davidson, 'Introduction', in \textit{Fools and Folly}, ed. by Davidson, pp. 1–8 (p. 5).} The fool, the jongleur, and the illusionist are linked insofar as they destabilize their audience's perceptual and semantic sense of control thanks to their cognitive and gestural litheness.

Further, clerk \textit{sapientia} was often associated with unusual, even supernatural, powers and with necromancy. While Kitt in the \textit{Interlude} toys with the assumption that clerks have the power to conjure up whom they wish to control (and possess sexually), Geoffrey in the \textit{Tale} refers to \textit{tregetours} when he explains to Beryn that he must walk through a heavenly garden to reach King Isope's chamber in his palace. Through his clerical learning, Isope created a garden that induces the illusion that one stands in paradise (\textit{Beryn}, lines 2748–50). This garden is permanently watched and protected by eight \textit{tregetours}, who are 'perfite [expert] of nygramance' (line 2773). These guards have the power to control man's sight, a fact expressed via the concepts of \textit{tregetrie}. The power of Isope's \textit{tregetours} confers on them a strangely ominous weight, as the visual illusions they produce have radical effects, including death: more than five hundred men were devoured by lions conjured by their \textit{tregetrie} (line 2781). In \textit{Berinus}, the garden's watchmen are called 'folets de Syrie' (§ 78), but Beryn's poet translated the French \textit{folets} with the term \textit{tregetours}, thus emphasizing the impact the watchmen have on their victims' sight.

Interestingly, the word \textit{tregetour} occurs also in the blind man's accusation against Beryn. The claim pressed by the blind man is that Beryn stole his eyes to go and see illusionists in town ('To se the tregitours pley, and hir sotilte', line 3178). It is surely designedly ironic that the surreal accusation of stealing a blind man's eyes is supported by a reference to \textit{tregetours}, since the latter play with people's sight. Geoffrey's legal defence against the blind man's accusation consists of a vast amplification of the theft story, which is proper to \textit{Beryn}, not \textit{Berinus}. In it, the numerous \textit{tregetours} of the blind man's claim become one outstanding public performer — a 'player' whose subtlety turns him into a star performer (lines...
The success of this outstanding jongleur is so considerable that people in the region would not feel content unless they saw his mirth and game. The player announces a date for people to come to the big city and attend his show. Crowds gather to see the player's subtility, impatient to see him perform ‘merveilles’. *Merveilles*, a French word evocative of Arthurian enchantments and fairies’ interventions in lavish castles and mysterious forests, is now used to denote a successful public performance in a big city. This narrative amplification attests to the advent of a new type in literature, that of the star performer. Further, the *tregetour’s* skill is qualified with the significant late medieval concept of *subtilitas*. In *Beryn* the French word *sotilte* is used, which happens to contain the word *sot*. Polysemy here points towards *Beryn’s* literary and cultural outlook, in a passage reflecting the fifteenth-century development of theatricality in an increasingly urban environment. The *sotilte* of the *sot* points towards the dramatized folly of the fifteenth century, where simulating *sots* acting *with subtility* in *sotties* are the applauded imitators of society’s folly on city stages.

The unique and subtle player in Geoffrey’s discourse is a new type of *tregetour* — an illusionist described by a simulator, Geoffrey, whose style of foolery is typical of late medieval players. This literary representation stages and multiplies the player figure: the text refers to a player, Geoffrey, who stages himself enacting the player while speaking of a player — who is himself an illusionist, a *tregetour*, a star performer. The simulating fool in *Beryn* foreshadows the emergence of a social protagonist of great importance in early modern culture. Geoffrey’s player plans his show so that ‘all maner of pepill’ will come to town and attend it (line 3697). This aspect evokes the popular success of the early modern star jester. For example, the most famous star performer of the early Shakespearean era was Dick Tarlton, whose sharp wit and popular jig ‘made him the favourite of labourer, city burgher, nobleman, and Queen alike’. Tarlton brought to the early modern stage parodies of legal and religious forms associated with the jig, and developed the potentials of burlesque action in his role as a clown. Geoffrey’s foolish gestures before Beryn’s trial and his legal parodies during it are not far behind. Religious behaviours are also parodied in *Beryn*, as will soon appear.

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72 *Beryn* is clearly marked by the growing importance of *subtilitas*, as the French word *sotilte*, along with the anglicized adjective *subtle*, appear more than thirty times in the *Tale* alone.


Animal Metaphors and the Pardoner’s Sottise

Scholars generally deem Beryn’s author, at best, an obedient but mediocre student of Chaucer and, at worst, the reactionary corrector of the subversive fi gure of the Pardoner. Robert Sturges sums up the pervasive consensus that all post-Chaucerian continuations, including Beryn, attempt to ‘normalize’ the Pardoner. The main reason given for this assertion is that Beryn’s Pardoner is said (by himself and the narrator) to have heterosexual desires. Beryn ‘fails to make good on Chaucer’s sodomical suggestions about the Pardoner (though he still associates with the Summoner), and the impulse is toward normalization in that sense’. The idea that reactionary normativity must be read in the Pardoner and hence in the Interlude is commonly accepted. This interpretation, which systematically leaves out the Tale, dominates Beryn’s critical reception. I wish to propose a different perspective, acknowledging the use of fi gurality and folly in the entire text, as well as the author’s choice to combine his Interlude with his adaptation of Berinus in his Tale.

Beryn’s cultural network is typical of the fifteenth century. Chaucer’s preacher proclaiming his evil intentions is, in Beryn, a fi fteenth-century fool resembling a sot of French sottises and mock sermons. The Pardoner’s sottise is explicit in the pilgrims’ visit to Becket’s shrine. This scene is farcical and can hardly be seen as a spiritual climax. The text focuses on protagonists called sots — including the Pardoner — who behave stupidly, misreading pictorial representations on a stained glass window and stealing pilgrim badges. The truly elusive signs of this scene are the sots themselves, whose blatant inadequacy opens up in front of the reader the trap of simplicity. Indeed, pious devotion has been read in ogling pilgrims — called ‘lewd sots’ and compared to stupid goats — once they kiss relics on their knees (lines 147–148, 163). Rather, the text suggests that fools do not stop being fools

76 Sturges, Chaucer’s Pardoner and Gender Theory, p. 154.
78 Whatever subversions of propriety and authority these actions [the kisses] represent on the part of their Chaucerian instigators, the Prologue [Interlude] makes sure they are erased and
when kneeling in a cathedral, and the fact that the focus of the shrine episode is on foolish pilgrims makes it difficult to read the scene as an expression of piety.

Much like Sebastian Brant’s numerous and polyvalent fools, foolish pilgrims in Beryn are sots whether in a cathedral or a tavern. The asinine yodeling of the ‘compaingnon’ in Le Jeu de la Feuillée, considered to be the first sottie play, is echoed by a passage in the ‘Sottie des sots triumphans’ that stages comedians loudly singing with ‘gueulle bee’ (line 184; wide open mouths). It is with such scenes in mind that we need to read the description of hollering pilgrims in the inn of the Canterbury Interlude, among whom the Pardoner: ‘And stoden so holowing, for nothing wold they leve / Tyl the tyme that it was wel within eve’ (lines 417–18). While the honourable members of the pilgrims’ company go to bed early, others noisily misbehave like sots of joyous confraternities.

Another scene in the Interlude evokes a French mock sermon, evincing Beryn’s propensity to play with language’s denotative function. The Pardoner in the Canterbury Interlude is intent on having sex with Kitt the Tapster and walks towards the barmaid’s bedchamber in the still of the night, acting like the lover styled ‘chien à la lune’ in the French mock sermon entitled ‘Sermon Joyeux et de Grande Value’: he whines at a moonlike and already busy mistress. Developing the dog simile to the full, the Pardoner in Beryn ‘scraped the dorr welplich and wyned with his mowth’ After a dogges lyden [manner], as nere as he couth’ (lines 481–82). Wanting to be let in, the Pardoner chooses the dog metaphor to signify sexual desire. This passage is never considered in critical interpretations of the Interlude. Yet it matters that the Pardoner imitates an animal. All modern readings of the Pardoner’s problematic gender in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales are, after all, based on a double animal metaphor in the General Prologue: the narrator thought the Pardoner was a gelding or a mare (line 691). In Beryn the Pardoner deliberately impersonates yet another animal metaphor. Beryn’s writer is sensitive to questions of figurality and reception. His entire text indicates a sharp awareness of linguistic and literary manoeuvres. In this sense, his performing Pardoner may be a jocular


81 Geoffrey Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales, in The Riverside Chaucer, ed. by Benson.
response to Chaucer's heterodox and playful figures of speech. John Ganim argues that Chaucer's best, albeit problematic, defence to an accusation against literature is in a meaning that is 'enacted, even performed, in the self.\textsuperscript{41} Beryn's Pardoner is a fictional character who enacts an animal metaphor. In Chaucer's portraits, protagonists are characterized by means of unsettling figures of speech; in Beryn they enact figures of speech.

In her chamber, Kitt lies with her lover, who pretends to take the Pardoner's animal impersonation literally, with comical effects (line 483). This simulated misreading makes the Pardoner immediately understand that he lost the upper hand, that 'his beard has been made'.\textsuperscript{42} This colloquial expression evokes Chaucer's famously beardless Pardoner as well as a passage in the \textit{Roi d'Angleterre}. In the latter, the Jongleur complains to the King of England that signs are systematically decoded and interpreted with inappropriate excess by Everyman.

\begin{quote}
Si j'ay la barbe long pendaunt:
'Est cesti chevre ou pelrynaunt?'
E si je n'ay barbe: 'Par seint Michel!
Cesti n'est mie male, mès femmel.'
E si je su long e graunt,
Je serroi apelé geaunt;
E si petitz sei de estas,
Serroi apelé naym et mat. (\textit{Le Roi d'Angleterre}, p. 255)
\end{quote}

[If my beard hangs low:
'Is this a she-goat or a pilgrim?'
And if I am beardless: 'By Saint Michael!
This one is not male but female.'
And if I am tall and big,
I shall be called a giant;
And if I am of small stature,
I shall be called dwarf and down.]

Beardlessness, according to the Jongleur, is sufficient to induce the reading—presented as preposterous—that a person's gender is necessarily female. In the \textit{Roi d'Angleterre} this misreading is made by Everyman, a moot and misjudging figure. In the \textit{Canterbury Tales} this man is Chaucer-the-narrator, who \textit{thinks} (\textit{troue}, line 691) that the Pardoner is a 'non-man' since he cannot grow a beard. The possibility that Chaucer parodically stages a typical misreading—typical in view of the tradition

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{footnotes}
41 Ganim, \textit{Chaucerian Theatricality}, p. 52.
42 "Al!" thought the Pardoner tho. "I trow my berd he made!" (line 485).
\end{footnotes}
\end{footnotesize}
extant in the *Roi d'Angleterre* — should not be disregarded. The *Roi d'Angleterre* toys with the inadequacy of postlapsarian language and the ambivalence of sign interpretation, and so does Chaucer throughout his works. In the *Pardoner's Tale* in particular, the specific act of misreading metaphors is thematized, when the three revellers mistakenly interpret a metaphor (death as a thief) as an actual denotation and look for the criminal — a mistake that leads them to their actual death.

With this literary network in mind, it is noteworthy that *Beryn's* Pardoner should be bitten by a dog and forced to lie with the beast until dawn, after his farcical and carnivalesque battle with the paramour and the hosteller. In short, he chooses an animal metaphor, enacts the trope, and then meets with the real thing — which bites him. Chaucer's revellers, while seeking an actual thief, find death when they kill each other. *Beryn's* Pardoner ends up spending the night with a dog, he who behaved like one in order to elicit sex. The dog episode in the *Interlude* must be read in relation to the Pardoner's dog imitation. A trope or figure of speech is performed and becomes bitingly real. At the same time, lexical choices play with a sense of unreliable verisimilitude. Indeed, the dog is first a *whelp*, then becomes a *great Welsh dog*, and ends up a *monster*, a 'warrok', which catches the Pardoner by the thigh (lines 652–40). The dog's denotations fluctuate in relation to the perception of an increasingly worried Pardoner. In Wolfgang Iser's words:

> the area of indeterminacy as a play space is no longer organized in accordance with a given set of rules [in early modern literature], as was the case in allegory, typology, and the system of correspondences. Instead, it takes shape according to the viewpoints of those concerned.

The reading grid of animal symbolisms, often pertinent in medieval texts, is inapplicable in the *Interlude*. Such aspects indicate that *Beryn* anticipates a treatment of verisimilitude, which, according to Iser, marks early modern literature.

Further, the burlesque sexual innuendo of the scene is conspicuous in the image of the Pardoner with a bitten thigh, wishing to please the animal — albeit with bread — and come closer to it. But the dog growls, ready to snatch, and the Pardoner waits for dawn, still as a stone ('Wherfor the Pardoner durst nat with hym

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84 I do not wish to imply that Chaucer necessarily knew *Le Roi d'Angleterre et le jongleur d'Ely*, although it is possible that he did; cf. Carter Revard, 'From French "Fabliau Manuscripts" and MS Harley 2253 to the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales*, Medium Ævum, 69 (2000), 261–78.


mache, | But lay as styll as eny stone', lines 652–53). Finally, the narrator remarks that when the other pilgrims get ready to leave Canterbury in the morning, the Pardoner does not have much to do, save shake his ears a little ('Saff shake a lite his eres', line 660). The text plays with the boundary between the literal and the figural, and the writer of Beryn is skilled at achieving comic effects with situations, dynamics, and postures, be it a character holding his breath in a kennel and shaking his ears like a dog when getting up or, as in the Pardoner's mock battle, running as fast as possible in a pitch-dark kitchen, brandishing a ladle, and with a helmet-pan falling off his head. Humour is an important cue in this text, and if overlooked induces misleading interpretations.

In his article on folly and madness in Beryn, Stephen Harper rightly claims that Beryn 'represents a turning point in the literary use of the theme of folly at the end of the Middle Ages'. Harper's analysis of folly in Beryn differs, however, from mine in that he situates folly in the context of medieval didactic literature, where folly is associated with sin, vice, and spiritual turpitude. His main emphasis is on a parallel he draws between Kyng Robert of Cicyle, Sir Gouther, and Beryn. In the former romances, the main protagonist is a sinful ruler à la Nebuchadnezzar, cast down by divine punishment and forced to live like a dog. After a suitable period of abjection, however, he becomes "Godes child". Referring to the Pardoner, Harper writes: 'his unfortunate association with the watchdog, in particular, identifies him with the fool-sinners Robert of Sicily and Sir Gouther, who must also lead a "dog's life" for their sins.' Given the openly farcical mood of the Interlude, I find it difficult to read a sense of spiritual atonement in the Pardoner's posture in the kennel. After all, the Pardoner is lying with a dog because he was trying to have sex with a barmaid whose boyfriend had the upper hand, not because of a divine intervention. Moreover, the Pardoner's posture is unlikely to cause the salvation of his soul. The pilgrim's sole achievement during the night is to catch a cold, a result of his profuse sweating: 'For after his here, he caughte a cold thurh the nyghtes eyr' (line 630). Rather than religious didacticism, Beryn is concerned with fiction and play in the form of clerk parodies and a farcical folly.

88 On this concept of folly, see Penelope Doob, Nebuchadnezzar's Children: Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).
In the final mock battle between Kitt’s lover, the innkeeper, and the Pardoner, the latter uses kitchen utensils — a pan for a helmet, a ladle for a sword. To turn weapons into food and to use kitchen utensils as weapons are carnivalizing subversions. Interestingly, the popular motif of the frying pan survived through centuries in the topsy-turvydom of Mummers’ plays. For example, in the Mummers’ play of Ovingdean (Sussex), Beelzebub’s head is not just helmented with a pan, as is the case with Beryn’s Pardoner: pan and head have coalesced.

Weimann’s discussion of the influence of popular rhetorical traditions on Renaissance drama shows the significance of such motifs. The topsy-turvy or nonsense speech which so frequently appears in the Mummers’ Plays is the most characteristic of all folk humor.

In the 1490s, Henry Medwall uses carnivalesque imagery in his humanist interlude Fulgens and Lucres. A mock joust between two servants in Fulgens echoes the Pardoner’s parodic battle in the Canterbury Interlude. The contest’s elusive prize is Kitt’s sister in spirit, cunning Joan, who is hailed thus by one of her suitors: ‘Corn for the, ye flower of the frying pane, I Helpe ye to array us as well as ye can’ (Fulgens, 91).

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95 Fulgens and Lucres is the earliest wholly secular play that has survived to this day. It was published c. 1513–19 by John Rastell, brother-in-law to Thomas More, ‘in whose circle Medwall mixed’ (Tydeman, English Medieval Theatre, p. 138).
96 On the contestants’ fighting mode in Fulgens, see Peter Meredith, “Parke Pryke in Cule” and Cock-Fighting, Medieval English Theatre, 6 (1984), 30–39.
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lines 1170–71). The mock-epic epithet bestowed upon Joan, flower of the frying pan, points towards the carnivalesque association of kitchen utensils and parodic battles. So does the Pardoner, helmeted as he is with a pan flying off his head. Beryn intermingles popular nonsense poetry with a complex, albeit playful, use of figuration, and fools in this text are the vectors of this association.

According to Peter Travis, late medieval philosophers, and Chaucer as well, were particularly concerned with the question of the figural. I propose that the Pardoner’s performance in Beryn may be seen as a response to Chaucer’s play with the figural. Kathryn Lynch stresses the relevance of philosophical and linguistic questions in Chaucer’s works, which accounts for the poet’s interest in issues debated in his intellectual milieu, such as referentiality and denotation. Chaucer’s gelding or mare double metaphor evokes an example offered by the nominalist philosopher William of Ockham: ‘nam eadem facilitate dicerem, quod homo, si consideretur sec, est asinus; si alter, est bos; si tertio modo, est capra’ (‘For with the same case I could say that a man considered in one way is an ass, considered in another way he is an ox, and considered in a third way he is a she-goat’). An ox, like a gelding, is castrated. The gelding or mare association strangely echoes Ockham’s example, bos or capra, ‘ox’ or ‘she-goat’. Both cases bespeak the possibility of using metaphors of castrated or female animals to denote a man. The Pardoner’s enacted animal metaphor in Beryn is admittedly neither female nor castrated. But it is foolish. It is through foolishness performed by a sot that Beryn poses the problems of figularity, referentiality, and denotation, calling for a rich network of associations which range from the Jongleur d’Ely’s jocular chiwre to Ockham’s erudite capra. It is thus that Beryn raises the issues of conceptual categories, such as human and animal, and hierarchical binarisms, such as high vs. low culture.

In this essay I have considered a variety of fools sharing a common language of folly. In many instances, destabilizing animal metaphors suggest a pervading, unsettling use of figurality. The indignant ox and greedy swans in Merlin’s prophecies, Tristan’s parental walrus and whale, Geoffrey’s imploding mouse in Berinus and Beryn, Chaucer’s gelding or mare, the Jongleur d’Ely’s goat or pilgrim, and the Pardoner’s performance as a whining whelp in Beryn’s Interlude, when read in

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connection, indicate that 'the fool' in these texts has a vital literary role — that of juggling with language's capacity to defeat its own denotative function. This, according to Iser, is a fundamental quality of fictionalizing acts. Language is all we have to name the impossibility of naming, and this very impossibility is in fact the matrix of fiction. The fool figure, present in so many different guises in *Beryn*, is crucial in that he incarnates and performs language's power to transgress its own intrinsic limitations. The power of language to dysfunction and destabilize denotation creates the play space in which the imaginary — by definition indeterminate — can be cast into unforeseen determinate forms, thus giving shape to the hybrid and surprising faces of new literatures to come.