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LANGUAGE OF THE FOOL

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Abstract

The fools played an important role in the Elizabethan courts as the Supremo's loyal and honest advocate. In Shakespearean dramatic discourses too, the fool played a prominent part in relieving the dramatic tension through his sarcastic and humorous dialogues. He was the only chosen one in the royal courtrooms to speak without inhibition. He could speak whatever he pleased, question the wisdom of the king and openly criticise his legal systems, policies, decisions and judgements. Most of the statements, although, carried satirical undertones. Truths were spoken loud and clear with the aid of metaphors and ironies. It is the endeavour of this research study to critically analyse the language of fool's spoken discourse in the play, King Lear. The study highlights the prominent features of his spoken discourse that occur recurrently. The fool's statements while engaging in interpersonal communication are linguistically characterised by a unique speech type which separates him from the rest. The way the fool structures his rhetorical utterances for prophetic foretelling to make the master aware of any imminent danger and his committed mistakes, is what distinguishes him from the rest. A critical discourse analysis of the fool's spoken discourse is carried out in this study to decipher the intended semantic purpose of his speech.

Keywords: Discourse, Fool, Elizabethan, Language, Speech

I. Introduction

The advent and the gradual prominence of the fools took place during the renaissance period with the nobility and the monarchs starting to employ them at their courts. The 16th century monarchs, particularly Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth I kept fools in their courts. The fools, contrary to their outward appearances, were embodiments of wise and logical critics of the then existing social constructions. Furthermore, besides providing comical relief, they were renowned dancers and musicians of the society which added to

the employability factor of the jesters. They were rarely direct in speech and majorly resorted to intelligent wordplays and metaphorical linguistic structuring in their spoken discourses.

The Shakespearean dramatic discourse is one of the most important sources of historical evidence that provides a key insight into the Elizabethan minds, the set of regarded moralities and follies in the society and beliefs and ideologies that defined the overall psychology of the people.

'Each of Shakespeare's histories serves a special purpose in elucidating a political problem of Elizabeth's day and in bringing to bear upon this problem the accepted political philosophy of the Tudors.' (Lily, Cambell 125)

William Shakespeare's unique ability to interpret and understand human psyche in relation to the existing social convention is unparalleled. The influencing factors in Renaissance England are essential to understand the behavioural pattern of the humans in relation to the established norms of the era. It is equally important to acknowledge the truths that stand firm irrespective of the diachronic timeline. Shakespeare is regarded as a master of both which is evident from his dramatic discourses and character representations. These not only provide a deep understanding of the minds but also help to critically analyse the characters. Coleridge writes,

'Shakespeare writes not for the past ages, but for that in which he lives, and that which is to follow. It is natural that he should conform to the circumstances of his day but a true genius will stand independent of those circumstances. It is a poor compliment to a poet to tell him that he has only the qualifications of an historian.'

In this paper, a linguistic discourse analysis of the utterances of the fool in the play King Lear has been conducted to decipher his mental framework which was distinct from that of others in a way that he spoke without inhibitions with everybody about everything which were essentially the hard to accept truths irrespective of all the social regulations that were in force.

II. Being the Fool

The fool's communicative discourse symbolises truth and sensibility. It is indeed true that 'it takes a wise man to make a fool'. The role of the fool in the king's court was majorly to provide comic relief with his sarcasms, witty insults and aphorisms and he had the right to speak without inhibition. The fool could point out the Supremo's mistake without any fear of being thrown away from the land. There are many inherent traits in the character of the fool

which can be deciphered only through an all-around linguistic analysis of his spoken discourse. The fools are not meant to merely look up to as figurines of foolery but more as individuals who had the audacity and power to interpret the practical realities of life and speak the truth openly. However, it must be noted that the fool's way of speaking the truth and communicating the same to concerned individuals was not always direct but majorly coded with various figures of speech as a prominent linguistic strategy. In this regard, Andrew Hadfield states, (2004)

'In such states, political comment and advice has to be carefully coded or it risks the 'dragon's wrath'...set against Kent's blunt attempt to advise the king while remaining loyal is the fool, whose own advice consists of a series of cryptic maxims, or allegorical fables.'

The fool's characteristics is such that, although he is the voice of reason in the play, he makes use of metaphorical remarks to describe an individual or situation, preach the moralities of life through rhyming sentences and by uttering honest and deep truths with the aid of comical and coded linguistic structuring of words. Deceptive appearances accompanied with marked behavioural patterns are the key features of an Elizabethan fool.

Drawing parallel to the above features, the fool in King Lear entered the play and subsequently distinguished himself as he offered the king his coxcomb (general association with a fool). The fool handed it over to Lear to sarcastically draw attention to the fact that just as the way he conveys the truth and wise facts with an outer social image of himself being a fool, the king, on the contrary, acted foolishly, bearing the social image of being wise and noble. Furthermore, he continued his deceptive talks throughout the discourse of the play only to confuse Lear further and make him realise his mistakes towards the end. Much notably, when Kent regarded his talk about Lear's recent actions of dividing his entire kingdom between his daughters thoughtlessly as 'nothing', the fool, referring to 'nothing', metaphorically remarked (1.4.125),

'Then 'tis like breath of an unfeed lawyer- you gave me nothing for't. Can you make no use of nothing, Nuncle?'

Soon after Kent gradually saw through the apparently fool man's remarks and accepted his intelligence and wisdom.

'This is not altogether fool, my lord.'

III. The Language of the Fool

III. I. Revealing Impotency through Linguistic Gustatory Imageries.

The fool's spoken discourse instantly conveys to the listeners his ability to perfectly analyse and perceive the situations surrounding him. His statements are wise and prophetic which not only introduce a comical element superficially but also address the complexities in the society. The fool is arguably the most ideal character to represent the Elizabethan sense of comedy, wisdom and predictions through the implementation of powerfully coded linguistic devices in his utterances. It is astonishing to actually observe how statements with funny semantic undertones convey truth and realities of life. The fool in King Lear is "an 'all-licensed' critic who sees and speaks the real truth about the people around him" (Welsford, 1966, 256). Being employed as jesters in the courtrooms for the purpose of entertainment with their provocative and witty commentary on and about the ongoing affairs of the society, the fools were the only individuals who had the authority to criticize and point out the injudicious actions done by their master. Their criticism was direct but characterised by linguistic wordplays of metaphors, imageries, rhymes and allegories.

In King Lear, there are many instances of gustatory imageries in the fool's spoken discourses to draw comparisons with actual contemporary social events. The main purpose of employing such imageries is to take the aid of humour while criticising and revealing the characters. The wise fool resorted to such wordplays to not only expose the actual features of the characters of Lear and his daughters but also to convey words of prophetic wisdom that gradually created an impact in the minds of Albany, Edgar and Kent, apart from King

Lear himself. However, he had no authoritative power to alter the existing political and social setup. He could only employ his linguistic devices to convey sarcastically, humorously or in a tone of ridicule about the possible effects of a decision, the king's current state of being and uphold the characteristic features of the members of the king's close circle to which the king was blind to or chose to overlook. In King Lear, the fool had resorted frequently to the language of food to convey his interpretation of the above aspects. The semantics of the imageries range from indicating the incapability, inefficiency of the Lear to the fright, supernaturality and terror associated with any event that the supremo was directly or indirectly part of.

In accordance with his established character, the fool entered the play criticising Kent 'for taking one's part' in King Lear's state of depravity. He offered him his 'coxcomb'- a cap which is a symbolic part of a fool's professional garb. The fool advised the disguised Kent to adapt to political changes of the country which otherwise would cause much trouble to his life. Referring to the disturbed state of affairs of the kingdom after Lear's foolish decision to divide his kingdom among his two daughters, the fool made use of his linguistic inventory and brought in the image of 'cracked egg' to symbolise Lear's current state of impotence and powerlessness. He began by saying 'give me an egg and I'll give thee two crowns', which is an emphasis on how Lear was responsible for giving away his authority and control over the land by breaking his royal crown, essentially the kingdom, between his two daughters, Goneril and Regan. He explained further the imagery,

'...after I have cut the egg i' th' middle and eat up the meat—the two crowns of the egg. When thou clovest thy crown i' th' middle, and gavest away both parts, thou borest thy ass o' th' back o'er the dirt. Thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou gavest thy golden one away...' (1.4. 151-156)

The fool's linguistic play of words is essentially motivated towards pointing out the grave mistake in Lear's decision, the consequent and unavoidable shift of control and finally his inevitable downfall. The layered composition of the structure of an egg is considered by the fool to refer to and provide a

symbolic representation of the state's current affairs. The shell and the yolk carry distinct semantic values for significant imageries to be drawn to parallel the King's then state of being and the effects of his decision to divide the kingdom. The fool remarked on cracking of an egg into two parts similar to the division of King's power between his daughters, Goneril and Regan. The spiked texture of the cracked egg shell on the upper lining corresponds to the visual image of a crown. This, however, is much different from the actual crown which denotes royalty. It is more of a shadow of the real golden crown which has undergone dissection, resulting in a yolk and two shells. The yolk symbolises power which is lost once the egg is cracked into two. Quite similarly, the king, Lear, lost not only his political power but also his personal one too, essential for sustenance and survival. The 'golden one', the crown, is represented through the 'yolk' portion of the egg, which like power, once cracked or divided, is lost and unprotected. What is left is only the outer covering but not the actual substance which defines power in true sense. The linguistic implantation of the food imagery of 'cracked egg' by the jester in his spoken discourse was to convey to the king how his unthoughtful decision had left him impotent from a political and power implication point of view. Furthermore, Lear had been criticised for giving his 'golden one away' and that he had 'little wit in thy bald crown' to take such a drastic decision. These metaphors highlight the king's foolishness which made him lose his power. The use of 'bald crown' by the fool was to solely reassert how the bald egg shell correlates with Lear's falling sense of judgement. Additionally, it implies Lear's natural baldness due to old age which has ensued his loss of 'wit'. Therefore, it is Lear's incapability that is highlighted through these food imageries. The king was left powerless post bifurcation of power just as the egg loses much of its significance without the yolk. Divesting himself of any power, minimum sustenance needs and any probability of continuity of royal treatment, Lear paved the path for his own downfall and loss of social position.

Adhering to Lear's gradual loss in power, prestige and status, the fool, too, chose to draw

comparison with the imagery of a food that was not only considered socially inferior but also lacked nourishment value and filing factor. The very fact that the fool chose not to address Lear directly but to point out using third person pronouns and saying, 'That's a shelled peascod' indicates decline in Lear's control over social mechanisms, political attributes and also his own personal being. The choice of food which holds association with poverty, weakness and depravity was a deliberate attempt by the fool to bring to Lear's notice the reality of his condition of existence. Besides the slow loss of political power as indicated by the cracked egg metaphor, the 'shelled peascod' referred to complete loss and emptiness of not only the political power but also sexual potency. The image of seedless peascod symbolically suggested the old king's inability to further his royal blood. Lear was therefore left with neither the capacity to rule nor to procreate. Taking the usage of gustatory imageries into consideration, the fool's spoken discourse, therefore, does carry the sarcastic undertones of warning and fate, if observed critically.

III. II. The Bestial Motifs

The fool's spoken discourse is composed of prominent linguistic traits which metaphorically represent the barbaric, treacherous and betraying features of Goneril and Regan. The adaptation of such imageries in speech during conversation is majorly directed towards revealing the daughters' devilish and ungrateful ways of being. In exposing such features through metaphors across his speech discourse, the jester strategically accused Lear of his decisions that had led to the rise of cannibalistic tendencies in his daughters who would inevitably exploit the newly acquired power and leave their father completely consumed. Referring to Lear's status of being entirely ripped off from any entitlements that a powerful retired king deserved to enjoy, the fool stated,

*'For you know, nuncle,
The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long,
That it's had it head bit off by its young.'*
(1.4.205-07)

The cuckoo bird generally 'lays its eggs and has them hatched in the nests of other birds' (Dent.

45). The hedge sparrow is one such bird which feeds the young cuckoos and grows them with its fullest effort. This is quite unnatural as there are no familial ties and yet the affection and obligation expressed through parental actions is worth noting. The unusualness of this theme is what the jester drew parallel with Goneril and Regan's actions. Lear grew both his daughters with love and care, provided necessities and luxuries and even granted them everything according to the law of inheritance. The daughters' extreme hunger for power and betrayal of their father were linked to the idea of unnaturalness expressed through the fool's metaphorical imagery of the cuckoo bird. The fool brought direct reference and drew similarity of the daughters' betrayal with the hedge sparrow's head being 'bit off' by the cuckoo bird. The intensity of the unnaturalness and the horrifying nature of the king's daughters which grew with the newly acquired power are much more fearful than that of the linguistic implantation of the imagery presented through cuckoo bird's action. It is more inhuman and unnatural on the part of Goneril and Regan, being Lear's legitimate daughters and provided with royal powers as per the laws of descent. It is still understandable if an adopted child with no blood relation causes harm to his/her guardian. But the legitimacy of the Goneril & Regan-Lear bloodline, unlike the cuckoo bird-hedge sparrow relationship, further intensifies the horrifying shade of their character. In addition to highlighting the careless and gruesome features of the daughters post power-acquisition, the linguistic wordplay of the jester indicates their cruel hunger of multiple forms. The appetite not only encompasses the attitude of craving for more power as indicated on the surface level of the utterance but also indicates sexual needs and one's own nourishment. Goneril and Regan's romantic interests over Edmund, in spite of being married to two powerful men, proves the ever-growing appetite towards sexual favours. Like power and food, sexual hunger, once developed, is a difficult urge to control. The appetite continues to grow and is never satisfied. It is rightly pointed out that *'sex, like hunger, is regarded as a powerful urge that must be tightly controlled or society as we know it will be destroyed: paternity of children would*

be unknow; women would have no need to establish a family with one man; adults would prey upon children; life would be sacrificed in pursuit of pleasure' (Lukanski. 114). It is not only the inherent characteristic feature of the daughters that are highlighted through this linguistic metaphor of gustatory imagery but also Lear's over kindness and materialistic favour for Goneril and Regan that had worked in a negative way in their upbringing. Their greed knows no bounds and as a result the parent-child emotional bondage never built up in true sense. The continued appetite for power made them ferocious and cruel with least humanistic sensitivities. The fool, therefore, chose to refer to beast-like consuming traits while conversing about Goneril and Regan.

The fool resorted to yet another alimentary imagery to emphasise the daughters' gruesome and beast-like behaviour. Having been disappointed and deeply hurt again by his second daughter Regan, King Lear bursted out in emotional and mental torment,

'O me, my heart! My rising heart! But down!
(2.2.310).

The fool lost no time and immediately responded to Lear's statement by drawing a metaphorical correlation suggested through the actions of unruly eels. He stated rather humorously with a tone of sarcasm which further augmented the freakishness of the daughters' actions. The fool said,

'Cry to it, nuncle, as the cockney did to the eels When she put 'em i' the paste alive: she knapped 'em O' the coxcombs with a stick and cried 'Down, wantons,down!' (2.2.310-312)

It is quite evident that the fool used the jumping eels imagery to actually indicate Lear's 'rising heart' which was in utter shock on being cold heartedly rejected by his daughters. The unnaturalness of the revolting eels is similar to the actions of children who defy to take care of their aging parents. The heart metaphor in Lear's dialogue is inclusive of his daughters who he believed had risen in revolution against him. This is quite emphatic as he quite often referred to his daughters as parts of his anatomy. The

specific choice of eels to denote the circumstances is impactful in the sense that it had contradictory notions. On one hand, eels were part of the royal banquets and on the other, the same was considered unhealthy. It is therefore very deliberate on the part of the fool to express the characteristics of the daughters alike to the eels who, in spite of being part of the royalty, had huge prospective chances to bring danger to not only Lear's life but also the entire political framework of the kingdom. Moreover, the fool also tried to point out the similarity between the cook and Lear. The eels were meant to be served by the cook and bring sustenance to the hungry people in the same way Goneril and Regan were trusted to look after the kingdom efficiently by King Lear. Contrary to the expectation of both the cook and Lear, the eels and daughters respectively chose to rise against their masters. Additionally, Lear's loss of power and his gradual inability to arrange food even for himself are considered to be symptoms of effeminacy. Thus, the fool made the lexical choice of 'cockney' while narrating the imagery of a cook and the eels to indirectly define Lear in a tone of mockery. A Cockney, in Old English, was contemptuously used to refer to a native or resident of the city of London with effeminate features (Webster Dictionary). It also is evidently derived from the word *coquere*, which means 'to cook' (Etymology and Origins). The rebellious traits of the daughters linked to the gustatory imageries featuring the eels and the cuckoo birds are not only prophetic to make Lear aware of the imminent downfall but also to exclusively point out his gradual loss of control over everything and the fact that he once as the king ruled with prowess and confidence.

The attribution of such traits to the daughters was being deliberately done by the fool to expose them before King Lear and other characters '....to emphasize the ferocity and bestiality into which human beings can fall' (Heilman. 93). The cannibalistic motif was divulged through the attitude towards their father and also Cordelia and Gloucester who were seemingly served on a dish for the barbaric daughters to devour. The realisation of being consumed was strongly evident as Lear himself addressed his daughters as 'sea-monsters'

and 'detested kites' after being banished of his royal rights in his own kingdom. This attitudinal change of the persons in ultimate power of the land indicates a transition of politics from that of the monarchy to a machiavellian system. The voracious and powermonger daughters' lack of sense of morality is rightly brought to the forefront by the fool's imagery of the cruel cuckoos. They had shrunk down the glorifying image of their father to a mere piece of meat they could gorge onto. It intensifies the visible change in cruel power-politics. Through the introduction of the hedge sparrow- cuckoo & cockney-eels images in his speech discourse, the fool had very successfully highlighted the evil and illegitimate measures of Goneril and Regan. The discourse metaphorically emphasises the ungrateful and unruly attitude of the successors towards their parents and thereafter indicates the gradual entry of machiavellian politics through the hands of Goneril and Regan.

IV. Conclusion

The fool's major motif across the discourse of the play was to make his master, King Lear realise his current state of being and thereby persuade him to understand the realities his life was witnessing or was about to. The fact that he was above any punishment strengthened his ground further. He could gather up the courage to speak what he actually believed, even if it meant pointing towards the mistakes and decisions of the King of the land. This study has tried to deal with the fool's dialogues which are linguistically distinct from the rest and dominate in imageries, sarcasms, metaphors and tricky word plays drawing comparisons with general truths of life. The fool essentially reminded Lear of his great folly & how he was unable to understand the characteristics of his two elder daughters, Goneril and Regan. Influenced by sweet words of affection and ignoring the daughter who loved him truly and honestly, King Lear brought his own downfall. Little did he realise that daughters who were able to overpower him through the use of powerful words of love and emotion, were ultimately aiming to reduce Lear only to a helpless and weak being. The fool was wise enough to capture the motifs of the cruel daughters and expose the pitiful state Lear has been reduced to.

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