

THE DIALOGIC IMAGINATION

Four Essays

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VI. *The Functions of the Rogue, Clown and Fool
in the Novel*

Simultaneously with forms of high literature in the Middle Ages, development took place in those low folkloric and semifolkloric forms that tended toward satire and parody. These forms tended to become cycles; parodic and satiric epics emerge. In the Middle Ages, this literature of the dregs of society features three prominent types, enormously significant for the later development of the European novel. These figures are the *rogue*, the *clown* and the *fool*. Of course, they are not in any sense new figures; both classical antiquity and the ancient Orient were familiar with them. If one were to drop a historical sounding-lead into these ar-

tistic images, it would not touch bottom in any of them—they are that deep. The cultic significance of the ancient masks corresponding to these figures is not far to seek, even in the full light of historical day: but the images themselves go back even further, into the depths of a folklore that pre-exists class structures. But here, as elsewhere in our study, the problem of genesis will not concern us. For our purposes, what is important is only those particular functions assumed by these masks in the literature of late medieval times, which will later influence the development of the European novel so crucially.

The rogue, the clown and the fool create around themselves their own special little world, their own chronotope. In the chronotopes and eras we have so far discussed, none of these figures occupied an essential place, with the possible partial exception of the everyday-adventure chronotope. These figures carry with them into literature first a vital connection with the theatrical trappings of the public square, with the mask of the public spectacle; they are connected with that highly specific, extremely important area of the square where the common people congregate; second—and this is of course a related phenomenon—the very being of these figures does not have a direct, but rather a metaphorical, significance. Their very appearance, everything they do and say, cannot be understood in a direct and unmediated way but must be grasped metaphorically. Sometimes their significance can be reversed—but one cannot take them literally, because they are not what they seem. Third and last, and this again follows from what has come before, their existence is a reflection of some other's mode of being—and even then, not a direct reflection. They are life's maskers; their being coincides with their role, and outside this role they simply do not exist.

Essential to these three figures is a distinctive feature that is as well a privilege—the right to be “other” in this world, the right not to make common cause with any single one of the existing categories that life makes available; none of these categories quite suits them, they see the underside and the falseness of every situation. Therefore, they can exploit any position they choose, but only as a mask. The rogue still has some ties that bind him to real life; the clown and the fool, however, are “not of this world,” and therefore possess their own special rights and privileges. These figures are laughed at by others, and *themselves* as well. Their laughter bears the stamp of the public square where

the folk gather. They re-establish the public nature of the human figure: the entire being of characters such as these is, after all, utterly on the surface; everything is brought out on to the square, so to speak; their entire function consists in externalizing things (true enough, it is not their own being they externalize, but a reflected, alien being—however, that is all they have). This creates that distinctive means for externalizing a human being, via parodic laughter.

Where these figures remain real-life people, they are fully understandable, and we take them so much for granted that they do not seem to create any problems at all. But from real life they move into literary fiction, taking with them all of the aforementioned attributes. Here, in novel texts, they themselves undergo a series of transformations, and they transform certain critical aspects of the novel as well.

In this essay we can only scratch the surface of this very complex issue—only insofar as is necessary for our subsequent analysis of several forms of the novel, in particular Rabelais (and to a certain extent Goethe).

The transforming influence of these images we are analyzing branched out in two directions. First of all, they influenced the positioning of the author himself within the novel (and of his image, if he himself is somehow embedded in the novel), as well as the author's point of view.

Indeed, compared with epic, drama and lyric, the position of the author of a novel vis-à-vis the life portrayed in the work is in general highly complex and problematical. The general problem of personal authorship (a particular problem that has arisen only recently, since "autographed" literature is a mere drop in an ocean of anonymous folk literature) is here complicated by the need to have some substantive, "uninvented" mask that would have the capacity both to fix the position of the author vis-à-vis the life he portrays (*how* and *from what angle* he, a participant in the novel, can see and expose all this private life) and to fix the author's position vis-à-vis his readers, his public (for whom he is the vehicle for an "exposé" of life—as a judge, an investigator, a "chief of protocol," a politician, a preacher, a fool, etc.). Of course such questions as these exist whenever personal authorship is an issue, and they can never be resolved by assigning the author to the category of "professional man of letters." By contrast with other literary genres (the epic, the lyric, the drama), however, questions of per-

sonal authorship in the novel are posed on a philosophical, cultural or sociopolitical plane. In other genres (the drama, the lyric and their variants) the most contiguous possible position of the author, the point of view necessary to the shaping of the material, is dictated by the genre itself: such a maximal proximity of the creator's position to the material is immanent in the very genre. Within the genre of the novel, there is no such immanent position for the author. You may publish your own real-life diary and call it a novel; under the same label you may publish a packet of business documents, personal letters (a novel in letters), a manuscript by "nobody-knows-who, written for nobody-knows-who and who-found-it-and-where nobody knows." For the novel the issue of authorship is not therefore just one issue among others, as it is for the other genres: it is a formal and generic concern as well. We have already touched upon this question in connection with forms for spying and eavesdropping on private life.

The novelist stands in need of some essential formal and generic mask that could serve to define the position from which he views life, as well as the position from which he makes that life public.

And it is precisely here, of course, that the masks of the clown and the fool (transformed in various ways) come to the aid of the novelist. These masks are not invented: they are rooted deep in the folk. They are linked with the folk through the fool's time-honored privilege not to participate in life, and by the time-honored bluntness of the fool's language; they are linked as well with the chronotope of the public square and with the trappings of the theater. All of this is of the highest importance for the novel. At last a form was found to portray the mode of existence of a man who is in life, but not of it, life's perpetual spy and reflector; at last specific forms had been found to reflect private life and make it public. (We might add here that the making-public of specifically nonpublic spheres of life—for example, the sexual sphere—is one of the more ancient functions of the fool. Cf. Goethe's description of carnival.)

The indirect, metaphorical significance of the entire human image, its thoroughly allegorical nature is of the utmost importance. For this aspect is, of course, related to metamorphosis. The clown and the fool represent a metamorphosis of tsar and god—but the transformed figures are located in the nether world, in death (cf. in Roman Saturnalia and in Christ's passion the analo-

gous feature of the metamorphosis of god or ruler into slave, criminal or fool]. Under such conditions man is in a state of allegory. The *allegorical state* has enormous form-generating significance for the novel.

All this acquires special importance when we consider that one of the most basic tasks for the novel will become the laying-bare of any sort of conventionality, the exposure of all that is vulgar and falsely stereotyped in human relationships.

The vulgar conventionality that pervades human life manifests itself first and foremost as a feudal structure, with something like a feudal ideology downplaying the relevance of spatial and temporal categories. Hypocrisy and falsehood saturate all human relationships. The healthy "natural" functions of human nature are fulfilled, so to speak, only in ways that are contraband and savage, because the reigning ideology will not sanction them. This introduces falsehood and duplicity into all human life. All ideological forms, that is, institutions, become hypocritical and false, while real life, denied any ideological directives, becomes crude and bestial.

In *fabliaux*^y and *Schwänke*,^z in farces, in parodic and satiric cycles, a battle is launched against this feudal backdrop, vulgar convention and the falsehood that has come to saturate all human relationships. Opposed to convention and functioning as a force for exposing it, we have the level-headed, cheery and clever wit of the rogue (in the form of a villain, a petty townsman-apprentice, a young itinerant cleric, a tramp belonging to no class), the parodied taunts of the clown and the simpleminded incomprehension of the fool. Opposed to ponderous and gloomy deception we have the rogue's cheerful deceit; opposed to greedy falsehood and hypocrisy we have the fool's unselfish simplicity and his healthy failure to understand; opposed to everything that is conventional and false, we have the clown—a synthetic form for the (parodied) exposure of others.

The novel continues this struggle against conventionality, but along lines that have a deeper significance and are more complexly organized. The primary level, the level where the author

y. *Fabliaux*, of which almost 150 are still extant, are short satiric tales in octosyllabic verse dating for the most part from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries.

z. *Schwänke*, satiric verses chiefly associated with folk tradition.

makes his transformation, utilizes the images of the clown and the fool (that is, a naïveté expressed as the inability to understand stupid conventions). In the struggle against conventions, and against the inadequacy of all available life-slots to fit an authentic human being, these masks take on an extraordinary significance. They grant the right *not* to understand, the right to confuse, to tease, to hyperbolize life; the right to parody others while talking, the right to not be taken literally, not "to be oneself"; the right to live a life in the chronotope of the entr'acte, the chronotope of theatrical space, the right to act life as a comedy and to treat others as actors, the right to rip off masks, the right to rage at others with a primeval (almost cultic) rage—and finally, the right to betray to the public a personal life, down to its most private and prurient little secrets.

The next stage in the transformation of the rogue, clown and fool occurs when they are introduced into the content of the novel as major protagonists (either in direct or transformed guise).

Quite often the two levels on which these images function come together into one—all the more so because the major protagonist is almost always the bearer of the authorial point of view.

In one form or another, to one degree or another, all the aspects we have analyzed appear in the "picaresque novel," in *Don Quixote*, in Quevedo,^{aa} Rabelais, in German humanistic satire (Erasmus, Brandt,^{bb} Murner,^{cc} Moscherosch,^{dd} Wickram),^{ee} in Grimmelshausen, Sorel (*Le Berger extravagant*^{ff} and to a certain extent in *Francion*),^{gg} in Scarron, Lesage, Marivaux; later, during the En-

aa. Reference here is to *El Buscon* (written in 1608, but not published until 1626), one of the most heartlessly cruel books ever written.

bb. Sebastian Brandt (1458?–1521), author of the *Narrenschiff* (1494).

cc. Thomas Murner (1475–1537), German satirist, author of *Die Narrenbeschwörung* (1512); but his masterpiece is *Von dem grossen Lutherischen Narren* (1533).

dd. Reference here is to Johann Michael Moscherosch (1601–1669), German satirist whose *Gesichte Philanders von Sittenwald* (1641–1643), modeled on Quevedo's *Sueños*, gives a graphic picture of the ravages of the Thirty Years War.

ee. Jörg Wickram (1520–1562), author of probably the best collection of *Schwänke*, *Das Rollwagenbüchlin* (1555).

ff. Charles Sorel's *Le Berger extravagant* (1627).

gg. *Francion* (cf. footnote n).

lightenment, in Voltaire (especially successfully in *Le Docteur Akakios*),^{hh} in Fielding (*Joseph Andrews*, *Jonathan Wild*, somewhat in *Tom Jones*), occasionally in Smollett and, after his own special fashion, in Swift.

It is characteristic that *internal man*—pure “natural” subjectivity—could be laid bare only with the help of the clown and the fool, since an adequate, direct (that is, from the point of view of practical life, not allegorical) means for expressing his life was not available. We get the figure of the *crank* [čudak], who has played a most important role in the history of the novel: in Sterne, Goldsmith, Hippel, Jean Paul, Dickens and others. A personalized eccentricity, “Shandyism” (Sterne’s own term), becomes an important means for exposing the “internal man” and his “free and self-sufficient subjectivity”—means that are analogous to the “Pantagruelism” that had served in the Renaissance to reveal a coherent external man.

The device of “not understanding”—deliberate on the part of the author, simpleminded and naive on the part of the protagonists—always takes on great organizing potential when an exposure of vulgar conventionality is involved. Conventions thus exposed—in everyday life, mores, politics, art and so on—are usually portrayed from the point of view of a man who neither participates in nor understands them. The device of “not understanding” was widely employed in the eighteenth century to expose “feudal unreasonableness” (there are well-known examples in Voltaire; I mention also Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes*, which gave rise to a whole genre of analogous exotic letters portraying French social structure from the point of view of a foreigner who does not understand it; Swift, in his *Gulliver’s Travels*, makes use of this device in a great variety of ways). Tolstoy employs it very widely: for example, the description of the Battle of Borodino from the point of view of an uncomprehending Pierre (the influence of Stendhal is felt here), the depiction of an Election of the Nobility or a session of the Moscow Duma from the point of view of an uncomprehending Levin, the portrayal of a theatrical performance, a court, the famous description of the mass (in *Resurrection*) and so forth.

hh. Voltaire’s *Diatribes du docteur Akakia* (1752) is a satirical attack on the president of the Berlin Academy, Maupertuis. It was consigned to the flames by Frederick II.

The picaresque novel by and large works within the chronotope of the everyday-adventure novel—by means of a road that winds through one’s native territory. And the positioning of the rogue, as we have said, is analogous to the position of Lucius the Ass. What is new here is the sharply intensified exposure of vulgar conventions and, in fact, the exposure of the entire existing social structure (especially in *Guzman Alfarache* and in *Gil Blas*).¹⁰

Characteristic for *Don Quixote* is the parodied hybridization of the “alien, miraculous world” chronotope of chivalric romances, with the “high road winding through one’s native land” chronotope that is typical of the picaresque novel.

Cervantes’ novel has enormous significance in the long history of literature’s assimilation of historical time—a novel whose significance is not, of course, exhausted merely by this hybrid of two already familiar chronotopes—and all the more so because the very process of hybridization radically changes their character; both of them take on metaphoric significance and enter into completely new relations with the real world. In this essay, however, we cannot undertake an analysis of Cervantes’ novel.

In the history of realism, all forms of the novel linked to a transformation of the rogue, the clown or the fool have enormous significance, but to the present day this significance has not been grasped in its essence. A profounder study of these forms would require first of all a genetic analysis of the meaning and functions of worldwide images of the rogue, clown and fool—from the deep recesses of pre-class folklore up to the Renaissance. We must take into account the enormous (in fact, incomparable) role they have played in folk consciousness; we must study the differentiation of these images, both national and local (there were, no doubt, as many local fools as there were local saints), and the particular role they play in the national and local self-consciousness of the folk. Furthermore, the problem of transforming these images, while at the same time appropriating them for literature in general (nondramatic literature), and especially for the novel, presents particular difficulty. It is a fact not usually fully appreciated that at this point in literary history, literature’s sundered tie with the public square is re-established, by means both special and specific. Here, moreover, we encounter new forms for making public all unofficial and forbidden spheres of human life, in par-

10. There is, of course, a huge common store of motifs.

ticular the sphere of the sexual and of vital body functions (copulation, food, wine), as well as a decoding of all the symbols that had covered up these processes (common everyday symbols, ritualistic ones and symbols pertaining to the state religion). Finally, there is real difficulty with the problem of *prosaic allegorization*, if you will, the problem of the prosaic metaphor (which of course has nothing in common with the poetic metaphor) that is introduced into literature by the rogue, clown and fool, and for which there is not even an adequate term ("parody," "joke," "humor," "irony," "grotesque," "whimsy," etc., are but narrowly restrictive labels for the heterogeneity and subtlety of the idea). Indeed, what matters here is the allegorized being of the whole man, up to and including his world view, something that in no way coincides with his playing the role of actor (although there is a point of intersection). Such words as "clownishness," "crookedness," "*jurodstvo*" [holy-foolness], "eccentricity" take on a specific and narrow, experiential meaning. Thus the great practitioners of this prosaic allegorization created their own terms for the concept (taken from the names of their heroes): "Pantagruelism," "Shandyism." Together with this allegorical quality, a special complexity and multi-layeredness entered the novel; "intervalic" chronotopes appeared, such as, for example, the chronotope of the theater. We have an especially lucid example of this new element in the novel (one of many) in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. At the heart of *Tristram Shandy* lies the intervalic chronotope of the puppet theater, in disguised form. Sterneanism is the style of a wooden puppet directed and commented upon by the author himself. (Such is the hidden chronotope in Gogol's "Nose" and "Petruška.")

In the Renaissance, the above-mentioned forms of the novel violated that other-worldly vertical axis along which the categories of a spatial and temporal world had been distributed and had given value to its living content. Novels of this kind paved the way for a restoration of the spatial and temporal material wholeness of the world on a new, more profound and more complex level of development. They paved the way for the novel's appropriation of that world, a world in which simultaneously America was being discovered, a sea route to India was being opened up, new fields in natural science and mathematics were being established. And the way was prepared for an utterly new way of seeing and of portraying time in the novel.

In our analysis of Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* we hope

to provide concrete examples of all the basic suppositions in this section.