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## 1. Introduction

Characters in a play are often influenced by traditional types. Two definitions account for types: they either constitute a part of the human species by representing a specific nation or class, or they stand above boundaries of nations and classes and reflect spheres of the affective life common to all human beings.

The Italian professional acting groups, *Commedia dell'Arte*, became famous all over Europe during the 16<sup>th</sup> century and were “the most energetic and successful productions of comedy”. For a few centuries, they were the main carrier of a wide range of stereotyped characters, e.g. the (young) lovers, the bragging soldier or captain, the cunning politician, the comic servants, and many others. These types influenced English Renaissance dramatists: Marlowe, Kyd, Peele and Shakespeare, to mention a few of them, have modelled a great number of their characters upon these well-known archetypes. It has to be noted, however, that especially Shakespeare modified these types and created highly individualised figures, chiefly in his major characters. Despite this, their archetypical background remains visible, as demonstrated by Marlowe’s plastic archetype Faustus, who was developed throughout the centuries.

Other characters, however, merely function as cogs in a machine, they are not individualised at all but only serve a certain purpose that advances the plot. This is the case with the messengers from Greek drama and the minor characters found in Shakespearean plays.

In this paper, a selection of types in drama will be described. Of course there can be no claim to be exhaustive, as a number of characters cannot be dealt with for reasons of space. Therefore, the focus will be on traditional male figures; classical female roles such as the long-suffering heroine or the shrew will not be described. First, the dramatic tradition and use of allegorical figures shall be outlined, followed by the development from stock figures and types to individual characters. The influence of some figures from the *Commedia dell'Arte* on English Renaissance Drama will be explored next, as exemplified by the Italianate set of confused lovers, Pantalone and the comic servants, the *zanni*. Closely related to the latter are the clowns and fools, who play a major part on the English stage at that time. The following

chapter is concerned with the multi-faceted character of the bragging soldier, *miles gloriosus* or, in the *Commedia dell'Arte*, *Il Capitano*, and his Renaissance successor, the Courtier. Other types to be dealt with are the Savage Man, the Overreacher, the Machiavel and his Tool Villain, and the Ruler in Disguise. Lastly, the specifically English personnel such as the Gentry and the comic Constable will be described.

## **2. Allegorical figures**

The medieval morality plays were still performed and worked on in early Renaissance England. Maybe the most impressive of these was *Everyman* (1475), which employed allegorical figures only. To give a short outline of the story: Death is sent by God to summon Everyman. Instead of feeling prepared for the day of reckoning, he is frightened, even more so because his earthly comrades Fellowship, Kindred, and Goods (i.e. Possession) refuse to accompany him, and likewise Beauty, Strength, and the Five Wits. Only Good Deeds can follow him into the grave. Contrary to this serious play, a large number of morality plays created a more cheerful atmosphere; they contained funny and satirical scenes hinting at fashions, social life, and politics. The personifications of virtues and vices struggle for the soul of the central character, often a representative of mankind like Everyman, but also kings and princes. A similar structure can be found in the fifteenth-century play *The Castle of Perseverance*: The hero Mankind contends with the powers of good and evil that appear as personified abstractions, e.g. the Good and the Bad Angels, the Seven Deadly Sins, and the Devil.

Basically, the framework of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* is that of "merely a highly developed medieval morality play". Marlowe keeps both the good and the evil angels and the devil, but elsewhere he subverts the conventions of the morality plays: Faustus as a typical Renaissance hero searches after infinite knowledge, and this struggle takes place within his mind. Faustus himself is an individualised figure with some archetypical characteristics about him.

In *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare uses the allegorical figure of Time as Chorus to bridge a gap of sixteen years.

### **3. From stock figures/types to individual characters**

Stock figures or types have always been popular in drama. They are recurrent figures, such as fools and clowns, and the characters in the *Commedia dell'Arte*. Being predictable fixed quantities, they help to advance the plot, as they can immediately be recognised by the audience without lengthy introductions or descriptions. These figures “come pre-packaged, complete with set personalities and motivations”.

Role models for stock figures were for instance the parasites and clever slaves of Roman comedy, followed by the *zanni* and *Pantalone* of the *Commedia dell'Arte*. Another ancient character is the *miles gloriosus* in Roman drama, called *Il Capitano* in *Commedia dell'Arte* and the braggart soldier in English drama. A number of traditional figures which became very popular in England had developed by the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Among them are the courtier, the savage man, the overreacher, the Machiavel and his the tool villain.

Stock characters, however, have not been fixed throughout the centuries: instead, they became subject to alteration, which was highly indicative of changes in society and its values. During the age of Renaissance, a new understanding of character developed as the result of a new definition of identity, which arose from the new perception of the self as a unique entity – in contrast to the Middle Ages, where membership in groups, e.g. origin, race, family, party or corporation, defined the identity of an individual.

Although Renaissance dramatists began to create more individualised character, they still shaped them on types and stock figures, which were apt material especially for comedies, but also for tragedies. In comedy, characters remained constant, while changes occurred in plot. Before the beginning of the eighteenth century, there were hardly any individual characters in the whole literature.

Eighteenth century critics on Shakespeare praised the typical aspects in his characters: “In the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual: in Shakespeare it is commonly a species.” This view is not generally shared any more today, as the individuality of some of his major characters is broadly acknowledged. Nonetheless, even these characters incorporate ‘typical’ qualities that real human beings can recognise within themselves.

## **4. the Commedia dell'Arte And English Renaissance Drama**

The *Commedia dell'Arte* provides the “classical typology in Western tradition.” There are striking similarities of characters in English Renaissance plays to the particular qualities and behaviour of figures from the *Commedia dell'Arte*, which shows that Shakespeare and his contemporaries were familiar with its specific characters or ‘masks’. The fixed specific codes of dress and gesture of the figures of the *Commedia dell'Arte* allowed “ready-to-hand characterizations” of the major generic types, although variations and subtypes developed of most of them. They are divided into *parti gravi* (serious parts) and *parti comici* (comic parts). The *Capitano* figure is somewhere in-between, as he is less grotesque as the purely funny types.

The serious parts encompassed among others the first and second lovers from both sexes (*innamorato* and *innamorata*). Some of the characters of the comic parts are the *vecchi* (old men) Pantalone and Dottore, the *zanni* (servant buffoons), which appeared in a great number of variations.

A *Commedia dell'Arte* troupe at the Court of Henry of Navarre, c. 1578-90. A masked *zanni* indicates the horns of cuckoldry above Pantalone's head.

### **4.1 The Italianate Set of Confused Lovers**

The lovers, belonging to the serious parts, are not particularly interesting for their personality. In a sense, they are rather normative characters who make the colourful and grotesque comic figures stand out the more. Their importance is derived from their function in the play;

through their amorous relations, their “efforts to meet and marry”, they establish the starting-point and the object for all dramatic complications. Once the lovers have got (to) each other, the story is inevitably over.

In general the lovers are physically attractive and dressed like upper-class or noble people, and accordingly, their manners are sophisticated and graceful. They repeatedly utter their desire to be together in flowery language which often relishes “excessive verbal artifice and complex meaning.” Typical names for the men are: Flavio, Ottavio, Orazio, Leandro, Lelio, Fabrizio, and Silvio; for the women: Silvia, Lucretia, Beatrice, Flamina, Isabella, Flavia, Lucinda.

Disguise plays an important role in comedy and for its set of confused lovers, as for example in *Twelfth Night*. The traditional stage device of disguise allows characters to play two different parts; it brings to the fore the conflict between appearance and reality. Twins are also frequently connected with this device, as it is likewise the case in *Twelfth Night*: Viola, a gentlewoman who has landed on Illyria’s coast after being shipwrecked while travelling with her twin brother, Sebastian, whom she thinks dead. She disguises herself as a pageboy, which makes her look like Sebastian. Naming herself Cesario, she becomes Duke Orsino’s servant. Orsino, lovesick for the countess Olivia, sends Cesario/Viola to court Olivia who has so far rejected him. In the meantime, Viola has fallen in love with Orsino, but she agrees to bring Olivia his declaration of love. Olivia refuses Orsino, but on her part begins to pursue Cesario/Olivia. Later on, she mistakes Sebastian for the pageboy she loves. Even though he cannot understand her affection for him, he is ready to marry her anyway. After a series of further complications, Olivia arrives at Orsino’s court and feels betrayed when Cesario/Viola denies being married to her. Finally, Sebastian appears, looking exactly like Cesario/Viola, and all confusions are disentangled; Orsino learns that his page is really a woman and proposes marriage to her.

Orsino and Olivia show typical features of the traditional set of lovers: they are of high social standing, probably of Italian origin, as indicated by their names. They use elaborate, poetic language to voice their feelings. Beyond this, Orsino represents the courtly lover reflecting the system of romantic love that flourished in the Middle Ages. According to this system, a man falls deeply in love with a beautiful woman who often refuses his love, at least in the

beginning. She is then considered beautiful but cruel (Orsino II, iv, 80-86). The lovesick courtly lover suffers terribly and withdraws from human company: "I myself am best / When least in company" (I, iv, 37f.). He also spends much of his time debating the nature of love (cf. II, iv, 29-41; 89-109).

## 4.2 Pantalone

Pantalone (1618)

The prototypical *Pantalone*, also called *Il Magnifico*, impersonates the grotesque caricature of the elderly Venetian merchant. He has a pointed beard, wears red tights and vests, and Turkish slippers. In *As you like it*, Jacques in his description of the seven ages of man refers to the sixth age as the "lean and slipper's pantaloone, / With spectacles on nose, and pouch on side; His youthful hose well sav'd, a world too wide / For his shrunk shank" (II, vii, 158-61). Obviously, Shakespeare was well aware of the typical attributes of this figure.

*Pantalone* is normally the head of a household and sometimes the deceived father of the innamorata. This is the case with Brabantio, Desdemona's father, who is a Venetian magnifico, a prominent landowner, who is outraged at the news that Othello has stolen his daughter. He plays only a small part in the play which does not suffice to give the impression

of a rounded character. However, this outline and constellation mentioned are reminiscent of the *Pantalone* figure.

To characterise him further, he typically is

a decrepit old man who in spite of his age, wishes to pose as a youth. [...] a man ripe in years who is so ridiculous in that, whereas he ought to be a person of authority and good example and moral behavior for others, he is seized by love and acts like a child.

The *senex* figure from the classical comedies of Plautus and Terence also helped to shape this type who often loses dignity in his pursuit of love.

### 4.3 Zanni

*Zanni* are comic servants, “Always of humble station, usually the servant and confidant of a principal character, sometimes a rascal, sometimes a dunce, oftenest a complex mixture of the two, almost always the chief plot-weaver, his main function was to rouse laughter, to entertain at all costs”. Some of the funniest situations in the *Commedia dell’Arte* arose between *Pantalone* and his *zanni*, as “the opposition between *zanni* and the old man can substitute for the rigorous comic mechanisms, and the inventive play of comic dialogue.”

The *zanni* are divided into two contrasting groups; one is astute and clever, whereas the other is clumsy and foolish. The first *zanni* is active, quick-minded, his jokes are always intentional, he is never unconsciously funny.

The other group of *zanni* is passive, stupid, and oaf-like, as represented by some variations of the *Arlecchino* figure, who is “Not so much witty in himself as a cause for wit in others”. They are perhaps predecessors of the type of foolish person we find in the ‘genuinely English’ constable. *Pulcinella* is another representative of this group; he is stout, boastful, egocentric, foolish, jealous, impudent, voracious, sentimental, and he has a thick skin. Up to a certain degree, Malvolio shows some of the characteristics of *Pulcinella*; he is the resentful servant in *Twelfth Night*. In keeping with this, his name means “I wish ill”. He is full of self-importance; Olivia reproaches him for being “sick of self-love”(I, v, 89). Being a humourless killjoy, Malvolio forms the counterparts to Sir Toby and to Feste. A *zanni* figure is often found

between the couple of lovers and falsely believes the signals of love from one of the lovers to be aimed at him. This pattern is also followed in *Twelfth Night*: With a faked letter, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Maria trick him into believing that Olivia loves him and wants him to prove his love for her by appearing in yellow stockings with crossed garters and smiling all the time – actions which are in reality guaranteed to irritate Olivia. In following these instructions, Malvolio makes a fool of himself, which gives rise to a very comical scene. However, some aspects about him do not match *Pulcinella's* attributes: His Puritan attitude that opposes all fun and makes him stand for law and order in surrounding that cherishes and encourages revelry is not typically implied in the figure of *Pulcinella*.

Female counterparts are the *zagne*, later named *fantesche* (maids) or *servette* (Soubrettes), who were usually unmasked and dressed in bonnets, skirts, and aprons. They are clever, resolute, experts at quick changes and disguises, frequently putting on different costumes during a single act.

These actresses [...] were remarkable for their sharp and malicious wit or gossip gaiety, and their performances for its sprightliness and rhythm. Always quick to give a helping hand to the lovers, the servette were capricious and coquettish with the man-servants, whom they often ended up marrying; the dialogues of the zanni and the zagne were witty parodies of courtly love. The servette might be called: Franceschina, Oliva, [...], Colombina, and others

*Colombina* is one of the most popular *zagne*. She embodies common sense, is quick at repartee, makes saucy comments and is often subject to the advances of elderly love-crazed men. She is sometimes the maid of the female lover, the *inammorata*, and helps her through ruses and stratagems to solve the most entangled problems. Some of these features are found in Olivia's gentlewoman Maria, who is witty and never at a loss for words. She sees through other characters and sharply comments on their flaws, e.g. on Malvolio:

The devil a Puritan that he is, or anything constantly, but a time-pleaser, an affectioned ass, that cons state without book, and utters it by great swarths: the best persuaded of himself, so crammed (as he thinks) with excellencies, that it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him: and on that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause to work.

(II, iii, 146-153)

She thinks up the practical joke played on Malvolio. By dropping “some obscure epistles of love” (II, iii, 155-156) in his way, she deludes him into believing that Olivia loves him. In the end, she marries Sir Toby who is superior in age and social status.

## **5. Clowns and Fools**

Although clowns and fools traditionally played a prominent role before Renaissance times, the English stage fool was ‘a true child’ of the Elizabethan drama. Their first appearance goes back to the times of the moralities, where the buffoonery of the Devil as the “original trickster” and the Vice provided comic diversion that was felt to be necessary, as moralities tended to become a bit too serious and wearisome. The Vice figure as the witty mischief-maker was one of the most popular characters in the morality plays and can be seen as the ancestor of many Shakespearean figures, e. g. Puck in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Feste in *Twelfth Night* hints at his descent from the “old Vice” figure (IV, ii, 127). One of the earliest and coarsest clown figures is represented by ‘Robin, called the Clown’ that appears in one scene (II, iii) of *Dr. Faustus*.

The English stage fool has likewise been influenced by the ‘variety entertainers’ that roamed Europe during the Middle Ages. To these belonged jugglers, minstrels, who had a broad repertory of songs and ballads, and jocolators, whose jokes were often crude and obscene.

Illuminated manuscript of c. 1340 from Flanders; medieval entertainers in fools' dress

Olivia's professional clown Feste in *Twelfth Night* combines both the qualities of a minstrel and a jocolator. He is a representative of the Renaissance professional fools that were retained

by monarchs and a number of aristocrats. Their task was to entertain through practical jokes, songs, and witty comments. Being apart from ‘ordinary men’, fools were exempt from the rules of tact which apply to the rest of society; they were allowed and even expected to make saucy comments and to tell home truths that nobody else dared to admit. Apart from being a humorous entertainer, he was the “licensed critic of his master and his fellows”. In drama, the fool frequently assumes the role of a detached commentator who remains aloof from the intrigue and parodies the foibles of the main characters, which may serve to direct the point of view of the audience. Launce in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, a young servant in the tradition of the *zanni*, appears as a rustic buffoon who spends his time jesting around with his fellow-servant Speed, but he has also plenty of natural wit and intelligence. He comments on central themes and characters of the play, i.e. he assumes the function of the Chorus in ancient plays, but alters it with his comic and ironical remarks. This is a typical feature of most clowns and fools in Shakespeare. Furthermore, Launce parodies serious matters, e.g. romantic love and idealised notions of friendship.

The fool’s garb is composed of disproportionate elements that symbolise his tendency to disorder and chaos, his subversive idiosyncratic view of the world that does not follow logic standards: “This lumpishness suggests chaos registered by consciousness as a mere, crude fact: the audience is confronted with something relatively shapeless, yet material—there, with a human presence”. Although Feste is often called upon to sing and jest, i.e. to entertain in the fool’s tradition, he explains that “I wear not motley in my brain” (I, v, 57). Like other Shakespearean fools, he only pretends to be foolish, but in fact he is the wisest character in the play, who has a keen eye for the shortcomings and vanities of the other characters. Accordingly, some of his songs that seem to be pure entertainment have got a deeper meaning to them that touches almost philosophical issues. Most of his songs deal with the harsh effects of time on love, beauty, and youth. When Sir Andrew and Sir Toby ask him to sing a love-song, he starts off with a merely entertaining and unambiguous meaning. The second part of it contains a kind of *carpe diem* motive, as it emphasises the urgency of enjoying love and youth for the short time that it lasts:

What is love? ‘Tis not hereafter,  
Present mirth hath present laughter:  
What’s to come is still unsure.  
In delay there lies no plenty,

Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty:  
Youth' s a stuff will not endure.

(II, iii, 47-52)

Sir Toby and Sir Andrew possibly miss this slightly melancholic meaning. Viola, however, to some extent sees through Feste and his skilfulness; he appears as a conventional stage clown, but behind his foolish facade, he has to be perceptive to the needs and attitudes of his audience:

This fellow is wise enough to play the fool,  
And to do what well craves a kind of wit.  
He must observe their mood on whom he jests,  
The quality of persons, and the time;  
And like the haggard, check at every feather  
That comes before his eye. This is a practice  
As full of labour as a wise man's art:  
For folly that he wisely shows is fit;  
But wise men, Folly-fall'n, quite taint their wit.

(III, i, 60-68)

Feste is also given the epilogue in which he sings about another 'philosophical-melancholic issue', the passage of time.

While the clowns in Shakespeare's early plays resemble each other and are famous for their "special comic turns", his later court fools like Feste, Touchstone (whose meaning is implied in his telling name) and the nameless fool in *King Lear* are often funny on the surface only; there is something serious about their wit that pervades the whole play and likewise affects the other characters. Although they are certainly not "mere personifications of wisdom", they are witty and ironical "wise men under camouflage" that are able to see "through the illusion to the real." In this respect, Shakespeare's fools are unequalled by other fools in Renaissance drama concerning their importance and impact on the action.

## **6. Miles Gloriosus, Capitano, And Courtier**

The character of the *miles gloriosus* first appeared in a comedy by Plautus (254-184 BC). This type is also called the braggart soldier: he boasts of honourable and courageous deeds, but at heart he is a coward. This prototype of a stock character belongs to the comic tradition; other characters often poke fun at him. In English drama, this figure has also been influenced by the

Capitano from the *Commedia dell'Arte*. He mirrors the hated military presence of Spain in Italy. The resemblance he bears to the *miles gloriosus* figure is evident: “the Braggart Captain boasts of conquests, great strength, and sexual prowess, only to display cowardice at the slightest confrontation.” With his exaggerated manners and rhetoric, *Il Capitano* pretends that he is the quintessence of cruelty and passion; and sometimes he actually falls in love. Huanebango in George Peele’s *The Old Wives’ Tale* is the spitting image of the bragging soldier and captain type.

Il Capitano, in Venetian glass from Murano, second half of the sixteenth century

This type points to the figure of the courtier, that could be described as its Renaissance successor. Both raise the question of ideal courtly behaviour and honour.

The type of the courtier plays an essential role in Renaissance drama. He is a young man of high social standing, a gentleman or even a prince, who lives at court and devotes himself to political service. If he is the hero of a play, he often sets up the standards of proper social conduct that others are supposed to adhere to. Ideals of refined manners and courtly behaviour were widely discussed in Renaissance England, which saw a great number of manuals on social conduct; Baldassare Castiglione’s *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (The Courtier), originally published in 1528 and translated into English in 1561, and Thomas Elyot’s *Boke of the Governour* (1531) were the most famous and influential treatises on education. They focus on different aspects: Castiglione emphasises the importance of style and grace, which, in his

view, mirror an inner refinement and braveness, but also a certain degree of recklessness. Elyot, on the other hand, stresses “serious dedication, strict application, and sound moral training” as the courtier’s main features. Nonetheless, both Castiglione and Elyot draw similar pictures of desirable characteristics in a Renaissance gentleman: benevolence, affability, liberality, noble bearing, courage, good education, which includes ample knowledge of all fields of art and literature. According to this advice on desirable courtly conduct, Renaissance playwrights created heroes that embodied differing notions of perfect behaviour.

In Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part One*, presents differing views of desirable courtly behaviour of the perfect prince or courtier and points to the conflict that emerges from the juxtaposition of these contrasting views. Prince Henry, mostly called the Prince or Hal, first seems to be quite the opposite of a courtier: as Falstaff’s disciple, he behaves like an unprincipled and crude rogue. Yet soon he reveals in a soliloquy that he “will awhile uphold/ The unyok’d humour of [their] idleness” (I, ii, 190-191) but will one day throw off this “loose behaviour” (202). He says that his rude behaviour will only make his reformation to come the more striking and impressive:

By how much better than my word I am,  
By so much shall I falsify men’s hopes;  
And like bright metal on a sullen ground,  
My reformation, glitt’ring o’er my fault,  
Shall show more goodly, and attract more eyes  
Than that which hath no foil to set it off.

(I, ii, 205-210)

In fact, he proves to be patriotic and loyal and becomes the ‘king of courtesy’, living up to most of Castiglione’s criteria and ideals of noble birth, eloquence and wit, gallantry, merriment and grace. His ease and charm perhaps even surpass Elyot’s principles of ‘affability’ and ‘placibility’; he seems to correspond to Italian ideas of courtly manners rather than to the more sober contemporary English view. Nonetheless, his most distinctive quality is honour, which both English and Italian authorities regard as fundamental for a gentleman’s social conduct. He demonstrates the “growth from undisciplined youth to the measured, self-controlled dignity he would need as king”.

Contrary to Henry, Hotspur as a 'king of honour' comes closer to the medieval chivalric idea; he is representative of an age that is already past. The code of conduct that "the gallant Hotspur" (I, i, 52) values is defined in military terms: he seeks public acclaim and honour by living up to the Elizabethan standards of a soldier and true warrior: he is honest, fearless, and quick-tempered. Throughout the play, he is concerned with honour and glory in battle. Characteristics of a wholehearted, honourable soldier can also partly be found in Othello, Kent and Enobarbus. Hotspur, however, is deficient as a role model of the Renaissance courtier, since he is too direct, loses his temper easily and is eager to rush into battle. His idealism consists of "rejoicing to display bravery, enduring suffering and loss or even meeting death gladly as a reward for valor". This is typical of a medieval knight demonstrating the code of chivalry, but not of a Renaissance courtier. Hal praises his qualities as a soldier "I am not yet of Percy's mind, the Hotspur of the north; he that kills me some six or seven dozen of Scots at Breakfast, washes his hands, and says to his wife 'Fie upon this quiet life! I want work'. (II, iv, 116); "I do not think a braver gentleman,/ More active-valiant or more valiant-young,/ More daring or more bold, is now alive/ To grace this latter age with noble deeds" (V, i, 89-92).

Shakespeare's Falstaff in *Henry IV, Part One*, is traditionally considered the Renaissance splendid epitome of the braggart soldier. Pincess, however, mentions him as the third example of the various philosophies of courtly behaviour in Shakespeare's play *Henry IV, Part One*, which clearly shows that the two types of braggart soldier and courtier are closely related, since they centre on the same theme. Falstaff is fat, immoral, and given to hedonism. He steals and belongs to the 'rude society' and thoroughly indulges in eating and drinking too much; Hal: "this sanguine coward, this bed-presser, this horse-back-breaker, this huge hill of flesh" (II, iv, 237-239) Critics often compare him to the Vice characters in the morality plays, since the vices of gluttony and greed apparently appeal to him. He is also aligned with the Lord of Misrule from the Christmas festivities. Also, he functions as a commentator and parodist, his outstanding command of language and sense of humour make him charming to the audience, despite his dishonesty. Besides appearing as a rogue, Falstaff is able to behave like a gentleman.

## **7. The Savage Man**

The savage or wild man serves as an image of mankind “without the ordination of civility”. He was a frequent motif in painting, heraldry, pageant, and drama, particularly in English Renaissance pastorals. He covers a wide range of functions: he may play an active, entertaining role, simply be a ridiculous figure, or even a philosophical symbol pointing to serious, complex issues that cannot be easily answered. These issues draw on the contrast of nature and art in the broadest sense: is ‘civilised’ man superior or inferior to ‘natural’ man, or, is the character of an individual predominantly formed by heredity (i.e. ‘nature’) or by education and training (i.e. ‘art’). Also, the savage man may evoke the question of the main differences between man and animals.

The origins of this type lie in classical mythology and in European folklore. Renaissance England knew of Romulus, who was brought up by a wolf, of Hercules, who wore a lion’s skin and carried a club, and was familiar with creatures that were associated with a Golden Age and a state of innocence, like satyrs, fauns, and sileni, “positive examples of kindly and beneficent creatures living happily in accord with nature”. The wild man and the satyr portray a wilder and less cultivated variety of pastoral than does the shepherd. Around 1550, the satyr was a popular figure in Italian pastoral plays; he functioned to criticise the vices of court and city. The image of the wild man was influenced by reports of voyagers to North America about their encounters with the inhabitants there. These accounts were often black and white, either describing the natives as entirely virtuous or purely vicious. Enthusiastic reports went into raptures concerning “the sun-burnt Indians, That know no other wealth but Peace and Pleasure”. The latter tendency stressed the alleged primitivity and barbarousness of the “human beasts” who were “perfidious, inhuman, all Savage”.

The anonymous play *Mucedorus* was particularly attractive and exciting to the Elizabethan audience due to Bremo, the prototype of the savage man. Bremo remained very popular and well-known for a long time; he certainly influenced Shakespeare, whose company revived the old play in 1610. He lives up to all stereotypes of the wild man:

With restless rage I wander through these woods;  
No creature here but feareth Bremo’s force,  
Man, woman, child, beast, and bird,  
And everything that doth approach my sight  
Are forced to fall if Bremo once do frown. (vii)

Despite his brutish and fierce appearance, he is susceptible to beauty and capable of tender feelings; his poetical vein shows when he falls in love with a beautiful princess. On her begging, he spares Mucedorus, the prince that loves her. Mucedorus tells him that his barbaric and uncivilised way of living impedes the coming of a ‘goodly golden age’, which could only be brought about reasonable and peaceful men who have abandoned the woods. Finally, he attacks Bremo without warning and kills ‘the monster’. – Bremo is, in spite of his ferociousness and bluster, a naive, credulous and innocent figure who lacks wickedness.

Shakespeare in *The Tempest* takes up the idea of natural life, the Golden Age, and related themes. Caliban is both a satyr-like figure and the prototype of the savage man of literature and the American native. He bears resemblance to Bremo up to a certain extent, but shows greater depth and complexity. Caliban is the son of a witch and an incubus, which accounts for his savage and grotesque appearance. Malone notes that Caliban’s dress, “which doubtless was originally prescribed by the poet himself and has been continued, I believe, since this time, is a large bear skin of some other animal; and he is usually represented with long shaggy hair.” He is heavy, clumsy, a grotesque figure, that is like, Bremo, at the same time threatening and comic. The ‘civilised’ people in the play call him “man-monster” (II,ii 11), “moon-calf” (II, ii, 107), “the poor monster” (II, ii, 34f.), (II,ii, 20f.), define him alternatively as “half a fish and half a monster” (II, ii, 28), “puppy-headed monster” (II, ii, 154), address him directly as “monster” (e.g. II, ii, 188; III, ii, 117) and “moon-calf” (e.g. II, ii, 20). For Miranda, he is a “villain” (I, ii, 311), “A thing most brutish” (I, ii, 359), and she addresses him as “savage” (I, ii,356). Prospero sees in him the uneducable “born devil, on whose nature / Nurture can never stick” (IV, i, 188f.). However, Caliban as the embodiment of the natural man proves to be capable of instruction; he is converted from cannibalism and states himself that he will be “wise hereafter, / And seek for grace” (V, i, 294f.). He does indeed have a potential for development; unlike Stephano and Trinculo, he is capable of true imagination, which shows in his appreciation of the beauties of the island. According to Pinciss, Caliban blurs the clear-cut distinction between the civilised and the savage world: “The Tempest contains a pair of European nobles who are villains far more conscious of their wickedness and so far more evil than the creature for whom right and wrong seem to be relatively new concepts.”

A 'wild man' or 'monster'; seventeenth-century masque

## **8. The Overreacher**

This type represents “mankind at the height of its potential, achieving superhuman mastery of space, time, power, or knowledge”. He is highly energetic, often even heroic, giving evidence to the Renaissance view that history is more made by men than by Providence. The character of the overreacher is among the most popular in Renaissance drama and can be easily recognised: he epitomises the trait of *virtú*, “a combination of dazzling strength and energy, which is used in the service of self-advancement”. He is an ambitious character who aims high and is willing to overcome every obstacle to satisfy his will and become a ‘super-man’. In this, he resembles the Machiavellian character, but the great difference lies in his candour and directness: The purest specimen of this type operate without trickery, deviousness or criminal scheming. The overreacher seems to possess almost divine qualities; in fact, this type was modelled on Hercules, who was part god and part human and shared a number of characteristics with the overreacher: “absolute fidelity to his own principles of behavior; the ability to perform great feats of courage and strength; the capacity to love; sensitivity to beauty; savage anger; and, finally, the stoicism to endure pain, madness, and death” Evidently, he meets Borrough’s definition of a tragic figure that is larger than life:

The exceptional element in tragic figures—that which makes them so utterly different from characters we meet with in ordinary experience—is a

consistency of direction, a fervor of ideality, a persistence and driving force which is far above the capacities of average men.

Examples of the overreacher are Marlowe's Faustus and Shakespeare's "great hero-magician" Prospero.



A scene from Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*; a woodcut of 1636

Faustus's classical roots become evident when he is compared with Icarus. His downfall is described as the result of the Aristotelian concept of hubris: "a pride which causes the hero to overreach, disregarding a divine warning or going against a fundamental moral law". The archetype of Faust springs from a late medieval legend about a man who pledged his soul to the devil. Marlowe's Faustus is a scholar-magician driven by intellectual ambitions; he aims at infinite divine knowledge and ultimate power, therefore he strives to overcome human limits. He hopes to achieve this by studying 'heavenly necromantic books':

O, what a world of profit and delight,  
Of power, of honour, of omnipotence,  
Is promis'd to the studious artisan!  
All things that move between the quiet poles  
Shall be at my command: emperors and kings  
Are but obey'd in their several provinces,  
Nor can they raise they raise the wind or rend the clouds;  
But his dominion that exceeds in this  
Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man:  
A sound magician is a demi-god;  
(Faustus, I, i , 51-61)

He renounces Christian faith and willingly becomes blind to everything that is inconsistent with his own view of the world: he sticks to his denial of Christian ideas of damnation even when Mephistopheles tells him of his own fall which has deprived him of everlasting bliss and appeals to him to “leave these frivolous demands”/ Which strike a terror to my fainting soul” (I, iii, 81f.). In the end, all his promising abilities turn out to be useless, since he achieves nothing. “Striving to be more than a man, he ends ironically desiring to be less” :

This soul should fly from me and I be changed  
Unto some brutish beast. All beasts are happy.  
For, when they die  
Their souls are soon dissolved in elements,  
But mine must live still to be plagued in hell. (Faustus xii, 403)

A Shakespearean overreacher is Prospero in *The Tempest*. Prospero, the usurped duke of Milan, is a powerful magician who has enslaved Ariel, the spirit of the air. At the beginning of the play, he is a cold-hearted necromancer who has entirely dedicated himself to becoming adept in magic power and, in consequence of neglecting his duties, he has lost his position to a usurper. Yet his studies have not been in vain, as he disposes of extraordinary power: he is master of spirits through which he can command the sun, the sea, and thunder and lightning. His magic power finally helps him to regain his dukedom.

Prospero forms a striking contrast to Faustus: Prospero had to suffer a lot to achieve his knowledge, as he was excluded from society, but at the close of the play he is reformed for the better and uses his supernatural abilities wisely; he is “an overreacher for the noblest cause” who himself brings about a happy ending. On condition that he abjures his magical power, he can resume his former political power and his place in society. In a ceremonial act, he buries his staff and drowns his book, which demonstrates that he is healed from his self-indulgence and renounces being an overreacher. He has now gained a new sort of knowledge, a “nobler reason”; by accepting his human limitations, he can find happiness, realising that “even a successful overreacher, a wonder-working mage, cannot be content to leave behind his own humanity and the society of his fellows”. Prospero shows us that man cannot enjoy the overreacher’s dream of glory even if he could achieve it.

## **9. The Machiavel and The Tool Villain**

In Elizabethan drama, the villains were frequently among the most important characters, as they embody innate malignancy in the tradition of the Vice figure of the morality play. The conqueror and ferocious tyrant, whose reputation and triumph depended on his cruelties that were usually condoned and left unjudged by moral standards, anteceded the villain, who became popular around 1600. He often had a henchman to carry out his orders, the tool villain, whom he often deceived in the end. The role of the tool villain depended on the plot rather than on his character. However, there are examples of tool villains that developed into distinctive characters.

The Machiavellian type of villain is treacherous, devious and fearless; being driven by ambition, he cunningly tries to take advantage of others. Therein lies his dramatic purpose: with his plotting, he complicates the action and helps to create the tragic situation. As the incorporations of natural malignancy, he is a useful device in drama: the virtuous heroes are often so faultless that innate villainy can be the only motivation to do harm to them.

One of the earliest villains is Lorenzo in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. He is driven by his desire for advancement that he wants to achieve by arranging a marriage between his sister Belimperia and Balthazar, the Prince of Portugal. The only obstacle to his plans is Horatio, Belimperia's suitor. Assisted by Balthazar, he plots to murder Horatio. Being a genuine Machiavel, he will stick at nothing to attain his own ends, and he uses a tool villain: Pedringano, Belimperia's servant, whom he bribes into telling where the lovers meet, and who, along with Balthazar's servant Serberine, also takes part in the murder of Horatio. Shortly after, he orders Pedringano to shoot the allegedly treacherous Serberine, and makes sure that a watch witnesses the assassination. In doing so, Lorenzo rids himself of his two accomplices: "Thus must we practise to prevent mishap, / And thus one ill another must expulse [...]" (Act III, ii, 106f.) According to Pinciss, using one 'ill' to eliminate another is a typical stratagem of Machiavels, and a particularly practical side effect for them is the self-elimination of tool villains. Pedringano as one of the earliest tool villains is not an individual character; he is rather a 'cog in the machine' and determined by his function as Lorenzo's agent.

One of Shakespeare's most sophisticated villains is Iago, a relatively young professional soldier who ambitiously seeks advancement in his job. His deep insight into other people and their motivation makes him an excellent manipulator. Through suggesting his own interpretation of events, he blurs and prevents individual judgement in his victims and thus leads them to prepare their own downfall. He truly is a skilful and opportunist intriguing villain. The malignity that shows in his actions derives from his fundamental love of power, "and there is no more certain proof of one's power than the ability to hurt". Yet he is certainly not, as Coleridge regards him, a mere "motiveless malignity for which there need be no explanation", as Shakespeare does attribute him motives for destroying Othello, however plausible they may be: the post as lieutenant that he hoped for has gone to Cassio, and he envies him for the "daily beauty in his life, / That makes me ugly" (V, i, 19f.). He plots revenge against both Othello and Cassio.

Nonetheless, it cannot be doubted that Iago is indeed evil and displays dazzling villainy; virtue is "a fig" (I, iii, 319) to him: his plot is to manipulate Cassio into discrediting himself. He makes the lovesick Roderigo his tool villain and spurs him to slay Cassio. As his plot risks to fail, as Cassio is not dead, he murders Roderigo to avoid being suspected. He dupes Othello into believing that Desdemona was unfaithful to him and manoeuvres him into killing her. In the end, he murders Emilia, his own wife.

Another famous Shakespearean villain is Richard III, a Machiavellian schemer who overreaches himself. His tool villain, Buckingham, is a more complex character than Pedringano. To a smaller extent, Lucio (*Measure for Measure*), "that extension of the medieval Vice", could also be mentioned here as a typical though lesser villain.

## **11. The Ruler in Disguise**

The sovereign in disguise is a widely current motive from world folklore and a widespread literary device that provides great comic potential in comedy. His disguise, which belongs "to

the category of conventional theatrical tactics", allows the ruler to interact with people from all social layers, to "Visit both prince and people" (*Measure for Measure*, Act I, iii, 45), which would be impossible for him in his position of head of state. The disguised ruler functions as "the marionette man of the play" who lacks individual traits for the sake of the play's intrigue.

Duke Vincentio in *Measure for Measure* who disguises himself as a friar is a good example of this type. In effect, two popular comic conventions of the time are merged here: the sovereign in disguise and the intriguing friar. In comedy, disguise is frequently found as a comic device, but these comical effects are not exploited in *Measure for Measure*. Of course, there are some funny passages and remarks associated with the Duke's disguise; e.g. Lucio's obvious enjoyment in slandering the Duke in the Friar's presence, or the Duke-as-friar's ironic comment "I protest, I love the Duke as I love myself" (Act V, i, 339).

Being released from his ducal constrictions, the Duke can intrude even into the lower world of Vienna and communicate with its people. As a go-between, he is given a full view on his city now, being enabled to see his dukedom from an entirely new angle – and, as the inconspicuous kindly father, he can also enquire about his own reputation among the people. On the whole, being dressed up as a friar serves him to gain further insight in the state of Vienna, since he can complete his view that he formed out of touch with his people.

His disguise thus allows him a certain omnipresence: as the "Duke of dark corners" (Act IV, iii, 156)), he can secretly listen to the other characters' conversations without being recognised. He is in fact "a dark figure, directing, watching, moralising on the actions of the other persons." The origins of the role lie in world folklore: "Historically he belongs to a familiar dramatic type; that of the omnipotent disguised character who directs the intrigue, often hearing strange things of himself by the way". It is not easy to ascertain whether the Duke is a rounded, individually shaped character, or whether his personality remains a brief outline and is therefore of secondary interest. If he were rather a type reminiscent of the stock characters of medieval morality plays, the functionality of his figure would be stressed the more.

## **10. English Personnel**

## 10.1 The Gentry

Representatives of the English gentry are the two friend Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night*.

Aguecheek's telling name suggests that a thin or pinched face as if he had a chill, or an ague. Both are in fact highly comical characters who embody the stock joke of the two comedians of contrasting physical appearance: Sir Andrew is very thin, whereas Sir Toby a "plumpudding of a man". Toby flatters his friend by describing him as an educated, cultured, talented and gallant gentleman and admires him for his ability to speak "three or four languages word for word". Maria, however, takes the opposite view; for her he is a "foolish knight" (I, iii, 16), a "fool and a prodigal", a "great quarreller" and a "coward" given to drunkenness. – Indeed, his knowledge of foreign languages apparently is not too profound: When Toby inquires why he plans to ride home (*Pourquoi*, my dear knight? I, iii, 89), he does not understand the French word: "What is *pourquoi*? Do, or not do?" (90) and reveals that he has spent little time in 'the arts' but pursued much less refined activities such as "fencing, dancing, and bear-baiting" (92). He resembles Pantalone and the *amans senex* figure in his useless and clumsy efforts to pay court to Olivia who is not in the least interested in him. Toby encourages him to spend even more time and money to carry on his suit and to challenge his supposed rival Cesario (Viola), which is particularly funny as the boisterous Sir Andrew is a coward and the resulting duel is comically timid. In the end, when Andrew Aguecheek is out of money, Toby turns out to be an unfaithful friend who only cherished Sir Andrew's money. He now speaks his mind and denounces him for being "an ass-head and a coxcomb and a knave, a thin fac'd knave, a gull!" (V, i, 206f.)

Sir Andrew is a combination of various types: he is a parody of a courtly lover, a cowardly knight in the tradition of the miles gloriosus/bragging soldier, and a buffoonish fool, ridiculed by Feste, the actual fool in the play.

Sir Toby Belch is a hanger-on who lives off his niece Olivia and appreciates his drinking pal Sir Andrew mainly for his generosity and for his equal inclination towards festivities involving food, drink, and song. Thus his surname Belch indicates his dissipated way of

living; he is “a drunkard and glutton” whose main object in life is to indulge his craving for “cakes and ale”, and he has no moral scruples at all to pursue this end by taking advantage of Sir Andrew. – Although it looks most unlikely, he is an appealing figure due to “his drunken jokes and festive, topsy-turvy approach to life”.

## 10.2 The Constable

Shakespeare also uses the traditional roles of the comic constable in Dogberry (*Much Ado About Nothing*), Elbow (*Measure for Measure*), and Dull (*Love’s Labour’s Lost*). “All constables were foolish by tradition, as all shoemakers were witty.”

Dogberry’s part was originally customised for William Kempe, a famous comic actor in Shakespeare’s times.

Woodcut of 1600: William Kempe dancing

Dogberry’s name gives a clue to his lack of cleverness, as it denotes a kind of hedgerow bush or shrubbery. He is an endearing person, despite his self-importance and his pride in his position form a funny contrast to his actual performance in his job and his use of language: he is garrulous and prone to malapropisms, which is highly comical. In his attempts to impress by using long and educated words, he often manages to say the exact opposite of what he intends: “You shall also make no noise in the streets: for, for the watch to babble and to talk is most tolerable, and not to be endured” (III, iii, 34-36); “Our watch, sir, have indeed comprehended two auspicious persons” (III, v, 43f.). His comic ineptitude also shows in the instructions he gives his men on how to react in specific situations: If someone does not obey

the order to stand up, he should be let go, “and thank God you are rid of a knave” (III, iii, 29f.). Also, thieves might be suspected, but are not to be stopped, for “the less you meddle or make with them, why, the more is for your honesty” (III, iii, 51f.). he puts words in the wrong place: “we are the poor duke’s officers” (III, v, 22) Dogberry is “the antitype of the clever slave”, a *servus ineptus* who instructs his watch not to interfere but to steer clear of trouble, i.e. of drunks and thieves.

Elbow, “a simple constable” another example of this type, makes the same blunder, introducing himself as “the poor Duke’s constable” (II, i, 47f.) Like Dogberry, he is very good at expressing things wrongly and misusing words: He says ‘detest’ and means ‘protest’: “My wife, sir, whom I detest before heaven” (II, i, 68), and confuses the gentlemen with the varlet he addresses in the courtroom: “Prove it before these varlets here, thou honourable man, prove it” (II, i, 85f.).

## **12. Conclusion**

John Vyvyan has pointed out that allegory is not much valued in our century, and that we often fail to see the allegory that Shakespeare uses in his work.

To Shakespeare, allegory is not puppetry, but a deeper level of life, and he uses it frequently, [...] [it] is one of the most significant elements of his art; and if it eludes us, we are losing his deepest thoughts. But it is easy for us to miss, partly because we are out of sympathy with it, and partly because Shakespeare uses it with great subtlety.

While the 18<sup>th</sup> century admired Shakespearean characters for being typical, Victorian critics up to Bradley in our century treated characters like individuals detachable from a play. The attempt to (re)discover the conventions that Shakespeare used for his characters has set in relatively late again, i.e. around the 1950s.

Shakespeare still uses stage figures carrying various themes, many of his figures are modelled on a traditional type, and some of them even on a variety of traditional roles. Especially in his comedies, the audience could easily assign the characters to various species. In effect, Henri Bergson argues that “Every comic character is a type. Conversely, every resemblance to a type

has something comic in it". Shakespeare was probably the first playwright to create highly complex 'mélanges': Falstaff, for one, is composed of at least four conventional types: the bragging soldier, the parasite, the Vice, and the court jester. "He is both familiar and unfamiliar; above all, unpredictable."

If 'types' are defined as the reflections of different aspects of human nature, the archetypical characters described in this paper may be said to present divergent answers to the same basic questions: the savage man is an image of the naive human being untouched by the sophisticated ideals of culture and education. Similarly, the fool is another example of physical man that stands for "instinctive human nature as contrasted with culture". Moreover, comic characters such as the traditional clowns and fools, the *zanni* from the *Commedia dell'arte* and the specifically English comic constable share a number of characteristics. The English stage fool has undeniably been influenced by the *zanni* figures, e.g. the servant-clown as intriguing and mocking schemer.

Characters in drama often serve a specific dramatic function that justifies their existence, e.g. clowns and fools or comparable figures such as the Porter in *Macbeth* provide comic relief. Yet reducing a character to a prototype is a great danger, as this would undermine his individuality. In Shakespeare at least, if less so in his contemporary playwrights, the personality of each figure has importance, notwithstanding its other functions.

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