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## **‘A Motley to the View’: The Clothing of Court Fools in Tudor England**

ZOE SCRETI

Synonymous with garish parti-colours, the fool in popular imagination is an individual distinguished by their bold fashion choices. However, the prevalent image of the fool in red and yellow parti-colours does not hold true for the Tudor period. Whilst beginning the period in the traditional motley—a coarse, woollen fabric of multi-coloured, interweaving threads—fool fashions soon evolved to mimic courtly styles. This evolution, influenced by religion, the Renaissance and the sheer notoriety of fools illustrates most explicitly the changing role and significance of court fools in the Tudor period.

Fools embodied several contrasting characteristics and so occupied a unique position at the Tudor court. Simultaneously free and constrained, divine and devilish, truthful and illusory beings, fools never truly fit into any of the social positions dictated by the deeply hierarchical court system. The difficulty of definition has all too frequently relegated court fools to the footnotes of history. They are rarely studied explicitly and where fools are incorporated into broader histories of the Tudor period, they are often mentioned only in passing.<sup>1</sup> This reluctance to include the fool in broader histories is surprising, since not only did the Tudor period witness the zenith of court foolery, but there exists, as shall be seen, a wealth of sources relating to the fools who made the Tudor court their home.

John Doran, the first modern historian to study and attempt to define court fools, suggested that Elizabethan fools were categorised as either a jester, ‘a clever individual retained or invited to make good jests without being always obliged to wear motley’, or a fool, ‘who had his wages, his privilege of speech, his whipping occasionally, his cumbersome jokes,

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<sup>1</sup> L. Porter, *Mary Tudor: The First Queen* (London, 2010) p.1518; L. de Lisle, *Tudor: The Family Story* (London, 2013) pp. 101, 327.

his freedom of the pantry, and his bed with the spaniels'.<sup>2</sup> In essence the jester was akin to the modern clown; a professional comedian employed explicitly for entertainment purposes. The fool, meanwhile, was a member of the royal household, granted privileges of free speech and movement within the royal court whilst simultaneously being denigrated to the subservient status of a dog.

Doran's binary has proven to be a popular tool amongst historians, though a problematic one, especially when considering that fools were individuals with individual personalities. Though the same may be said about defining any social group, it is particularly problematic here as court fools, as illusory and fluid beings, often transcended the binary categorisations proposed by Doran, combining elements of the jester and the fool in varying measures. Thus, to fully understand the court fool, it is important to perceive of them as individuals operating in individual ways rather than people defined and restricted by a binary system. Enid Welsford challenged Doran's categories by suggesting that fools could be defined in three ways: the parasite, the fool proper, and the court fool.<sup>3</sup> The parasite, she postulated, was a man who had a 'peculiar faculty for taking life easily, which would baffle more serious-minded and responsible individuals'.<sup>4</sup> This initial categorisation is a definition saturated with inter-war ideas concerning those seen not to be contributing to the war effort, the social context of Welsford's monograph having a clear influence. The fool proper, she continued, was a 'man whose real or assumed infirmities...marked him out as predestined for comedy' and the court fool was a man with 'knaveish tricks, mental deficiencies or physical deformities which deprive him both of rights and responsibilities'. This shift moves the defining focus from a fool's personality traits to their responsibilities and liberties.<sup>5</sup>

Despite its inadequacies, the tendency to use binaries to categorise fools has prevailed most recently in Suzannah Lipscomb's article, 'All the King's Fools'. Lipscomb defines the fool

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<sup>2</sup> J. Doran, *Court Fools* (London, 1896) p. 162. Despite Doran's claims that the fool found "his bed with the spaniels," no evidence has been seen while researching the present study to suggest this was true.

<sup>3</sup> E. Welsford, *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (London, 1935) p. xii.

<sup>4</sup> Welsford, *The Fool*, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Welsford, *The Fool*, pp. xii-xiii, 55.

in sixteenth-century terms as either “natural” or “artificial”, the former denoting a mentally disabled individual and the latter an individual who played the part of the fool.<sup>6</sup> Although Welsford had suggested that some fools were disabled, Lipscomb’s work reveals that most court fools were “natural”.<sup>7</sup> This highlighted a crucial flaw in the works of Doran and Welsford: in failing to consider the language used by contemporaries to define fools, they had misconceived what it meant to a sixteenth-century individual to be a fool. This, in turn, meant that both had missed Tudor attempts to define disabilities through words such as “natural”. Though Lipscomb does not consider the full range of language used to describe fools in the sixteenth-century, her classifications do derive from contemporary language, giving them greater accuracy than those of either Doran or Welsford.<sup>8</sup>

In light of Lipscomb’s research, the following article has chosen to refer to fools in sixteenth-century terms, offering greater opportunity to understand the subtle differences between each fool than has been afforded previously. Despite their limitations, Lipscomb’s definitions have been built upon here as they correspond most accurately with contemporary language. As most Tudor court fools were “natural”, traditional binaries have necessarily been used here. However, unlike with Doran who creates categorisations with no consideration for individual characteristics, they have been used cautiously with the recognition that fools were not pre-defined individuals who never deviated from a pre-defined set of characteristics. Whilst most court fools were “natural” in the sense that they had a mental disability, they were nevertheless individuals with other defining characteristics such as wit or perceptiveness.

Understanding how fools dressed is crucial in order to explore the fluidity of their position at court and to dispel the myth that fools were poorly treated individuals, who were not respected or revered. Whilst John Doran and Sandra Billington have postulated that the fool’s official uniform consisted of parti-colours or motley, incorrectly equating the two, this article demonstrates that fools were clothed in luxurious materials such as silks and furs which

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<sup>6</sup> S. Lipscomb, ‘All the King’s Fools’, *History Today*, 61 (August, 2011) pp. 12-16.

<sup>7</sup> Lipscomb, ‘All the King’s Fools’, pp. 12-16.

<sup>8</sup> Lipscomb did not consider terms such as sot, fol, cloake-bag and pickle-herring.

were often boldly coloured.<sup>9</sup> This suggests they were more highly revered than has traditionally been thought, as silks and furs came at a far greater cost than motley and communicated a higher status.<sup>10</sup> Despite the quality of their clothing, fools were still discernible from other members of the court. Rather than contrasting with their fellow courtiers by wearing inferior fabrics, the following article reveals that the fool instead stood out for wearing contrasting colours and unfashionable styles. There was, therefore, a tension between quality and fashionableness which ensured the fool was ultimately the subject of derision and ridicule despite also being valued. The analysis has been grounded in wardrobe and household accounts, which reveal that court fools were dressed much less distinctly than their stage counterparts who needed to be instantly recognisable to fulfil their roles. Therefore, this article sheds light on an element of court foolery that has previously been obscured by stereotypes and misconceptions.

Natural fools began the Tudor period in motley, a rough cloth of mixed threads commonly used for items such as saddlebags. It was a resistant material that could withstand arduous journeys and hide any staining among the mixed-thread material.<sup>11</sup> Whilst motley was clearly a practical material to use for fools' clothing, it may also be suggested that motley was used to denote the mental state of the fool. Just as the fabric consisted of various threads of different colours, so the fool's mind was an array of different thoughts woven into one being. This is reflected upon in *The Masque of Patriotism*, an eighteenth-century play about court fools, in which it is stated: 'by my motley-chequered Coat, all of party-colour'd Hue, I, ye courtly Tribe, denote, what strange mottled Things are you,' suggesting the mixture of threads which made the 'motley-chequered Coat' directly correlate to the wearer's mind.<sup>12</sup> Far from being

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<sup>9</sup> Doran, *Court Fools*, pp.159, 162, 181, 214; S. Billington, *A Social History of the Fool* (Brighton, 1984), pp. 30-36.

<sup>10</sup> N. Mikaila & J. Malcolm-Davies, *The Tudor Tailor: Reconstructing Sixteenth-Century Dress* (London, 2006) p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> H. F. Lippincott, 'King Lear and the Fools of Robert Armin', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 26 (July 1975), p. 249; K. Muir, 'Shakespeare's Motley, by L. Hotson', *The Review of English Studies*, 4, 16 (October 1953), p. 378; L. Hotson, *Shakespeare's Motley* (London, 1952), p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> C. Leslie, *The Masque of Patriotism and Truth: Or, The Court Fool* (London, 1743) p. 4.

simply practical, therefore, motley appears to have been a fabric which would have made the fool easily distinguishable.

The notion of motley symbolising folly is evident in two further ways. First, another word for motley that was frequently used by the Tudors was “patch”, a reference to the fabric’s mixture of coloured threads.<sup>13</sup> Cardinal Wolsey’s fool, later gifted to Henry VIII, was also called Patch.<sup>14</sup> It is fair to assume that this was an adoptive name rather than the original one given to him at birth, corroborating the suggestion that motley denoted a mental state. Patch both wore and found his namesake in the fabric which classified him as an incoherent, inconsistent fool.

Second, the fool had no fixed position and could not be easily defined. Whilst enjoying some benefits afforded to courtiers, such as being in close proximity to their monarch, the fool was nevertheless a servant and an inferior. They seemed to transcend social boundaries, almost existing in their own hierarchical sphere. Motley may therefore represent more than just an uncertain mind; it may also reflect the uncertainty of a fool’s social status. Combining shades of nobility and poverty, motley encompassed the fool’s transcendent social position.

Whilst motley consisted of a mixture of coloured threads, it was not uncommon for the fabric to have a predominant base colour. Leslie Hotson has suggested that green motley was most popular. Whilst Hotson suggested this was because ‘all green things are gay’, it may also be argued that green motley was popular amongst court fools because it would have coordinated with the Tudor liveries, which were green and white.<sup>15</sup> By wearing “Tudor green” motley, the fool may have been able to display both their subservience to the monarch and their association with the court. Whilst the fool’s position was not lowly enough to require them to wear livery like other servants, at the beginning of the Tudor period their position was not noble enough to allow them to follow court fashions.

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<sup>13</sup> L. Hotson, *Shakespeare’s Motley* (Oxford, 1952) pp. 6, 48.

<sup>14</sup> B. Otto, *Fools Are Everywhere: The Court Jester Around the World*, (Chicago, 2001) p. 299.

<sup>15</sup> Hotson, *Shakespeare’s Motley*, p. 40.

Green also carried religious connotations. Representing Epiphany, green symbolised nature and rebirth, two particularly apt characteristics embodied by a fool.<sup>16</sup> Fools continually invented and reinvented themselves but their candid comments could also inspire change in others. There were also elements of the natural in the fool; they were uncorrupted by worldliness and spoke like children, affording them a special place in relation to the church as holy innocents. In First Corinthians, it is stated 'all men were fools before God and the foolishness of God was wiser than men's wisdom'.<sup>17</sup> This passage seemingly equates folly with divinity, implying that fools occupied a place far above even the wisest of men because their foolishness was not impeded by worldly wisdom. Theirs was, therefore, a particular wisdom because it was naturally divine as opposed to a worldly acquirement. Lipscomb has argued that this essential "goodness" and simplicity accounts for the fool's favoured position and authority, concluding that this was the reason many fools sported shaven heads.<sup>18</sup>

The shaven head is, however, a controversial topic. Whilst fools may certainly have had their heads shaven to indicate their divine status, as Lipscomb suggests, 'echoing the tonsures of the religious', it may also be argued that this was done out of mockery.<sup>19</sup> Borradaile suggests that in one instance, the shaven hair was used to construct a triple or papal tiara.<sup>20</sup> Such mockery may be used to support the argument that fools were devilish in that they cared not for the sanctity of the Church or the authority of God and his representatives. However, it may also show a licence to jest about even the most sacred topics. Natural fools could speak openly about topics otherwise deemed unsuitable or dangerous, sometimes even heretical, because their outlandish comments could be attributed to their intellectual disabilities.<sup>21</sup> To broach a topic such as the Church and to openly mock figures such as monks would have taken extraordinary bravery. However, it may be possible that their mocking of the shaven

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<sup>16</sup> 'Elizabethan Era Colours and Meanings', <<http://www.elizabethanenglandlife.com/elizabethan-era-colors-and-meanings.html>>, accessed 12.12.2016.

<sup>17</sup> Corinthians 1. i.25.

<sup>18</sup> Lipscomb, 'All the King's Fools', p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> Lipscomb, 'All the King's Fools', p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> H. Borradaile, 'Clowns and Fools of Shakespeare's Time', *Poet Lore*, 8 (January 1896) p. 212.

<sup>21</sup> D. Jones, *Censorship: A World Encyclopaedia* (Oxon, 2001) p. 1428.

heads of monks demonstrates protestant humour, likening the fool to the monastic orders with the express aim of making Catholicism seem laughable.

However, there is also some indication that the shaving of a fool's head was done for medical reasons. This is evident in the case of Jane the Fool, a woman of unknown origins who began her court career as fool to Anne Boleyn before becoming Mary I's cherished fool and companion. Under Mary's supervision, Jane had her head shaved four times in the space of two years.<sup>22</sup> One medical treatise, compiled in the seventeenth century prescribes the following cure for foolishness (the emphasis is my own):

Take of the Plaster of Floris unguent so called, two ounces, of Tachamahac of Carranae, of the Balsom of Tolu, each three drams; of the powder of Amber, Myrrh, each two drams; of Cloves, Nutmeg, Mace, each one dram; being all liquefied or melted together, let them be made into a mass, of which make a Plaster, spread it on leather, and *the head being shaved*, put it to it (emphasis added).<sup>23</sup>

It cannot be stated for certain that this method was used in the previous century, as this treatise post-dates the Tudor period, but it nevertheless indicates that attempts were made to cure foolishness by means of applying a plaster to a shaven head. Far from mocking the church or sanctifying the role of the fool, it is possible that Mary was trying to heal her fool's mental disability. Thus, hairstyles could be used as extensions of clothing, reflecting the inherent innocence of natural folly, could create religious parodies, or, potentially, be the result of medical attempts at curing folly. However, it may further be argued that, in light of contemporary medical treatises, that the shave heads of fools had a less symbolic but a more practical purpose, demonstrating attempts the cure the individual's folly.

If green motley came with associations of the natural, the gleeful, and subservience to the monarch, then yellow, the second most popular colour of motley, also had its own significance. Yellow was also a colour associated with renewal—particularly prominent at Easter—again suggesting the fool played the role of rejuvenator. However, this colour also

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<sup>22</sup> F. Madden, *Privy Purse Expenses of the Princess Mary* (London, 1831) pp.150, 161-162, 164

<sup>23</sup> P. Cranefield, 'A Seventeenth-Century View of Mental Deficiency and Schizophrenia: Thomas Willis on "Stupidity or Foolishness"', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 35 (1961), p. 305.

denoted treachery, indicating a more sinister side of folly. Whilst fools were loyal to their masters, their remarks could stray into the realm of treason.<sup>24</sup> The use of yellow may therefore represent the contradictory, multi-layered elements of court foolery.

Motley in the late medieval period had been a celebrated fabric; yet, by the beginning of the Tudor period it was already waning as a fashionable or popular choice, a decline which witnessed its near-disappearance by the end of Elizabeth's reign.<sup>25</sup> There is some evidence to suggest that the move away from motley had already begun under Henry VIII. An entry in the *Accounts of the Great Wardrobe* from 1535 for clothing for Will Somer—Henry VIII's beloved fool, who would find a home at the Tudor court under successive Tudor monarchs until his death in 1560—makes no reference to motley. This entry reveals that the first "livery" purchased for Somer was:

a dublette or wursteede lined with canvas and cotton  
a coote and a cappe of grene clothe fringed with red crule and lined with fyse  
a dublette of fustian, lined with cotton and canvas.<sup>26</sup>

This entry is particularly revealing as it shows little indication of the sumptuousness of materials that fools experienced later in the period. Whilst not dressed in motley, the fool was clothed in cheaper materials such as canvas and fustian. Fustian was not dissimilar to motley; it consisted of 'plant cotton thread in one direction and a variety of other materials in the other direction,' resulting in a similarly mixed appearance as motley.<sup>27</sup> Tellingly, fustian was commonly used to line doublets, yet the fool's is made of fustian with a cotton lining. There are two reasons for this. First, like motley, fustian was practical. Its mixture of colours and materials covered spills and stains. Second, it may also indicate the fool's mental state as wearing something usually maintained on the inside of a garment on the outside may reflect

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<sup>24</sup> T. Leinwand, 'Conservative Fools in James's Court and Shakespeare's Plays', *Shakespeare Studies*, 19 (1987), pp. 219-238.

<sup>25</sup> Hotson, *Shakespeare's Motley* p. 36.

<sup>26</sup> F. Douce, *Illustrations of Shakespeare and of Ancient Manners: with Dissertations on the Clowns and Fools of Shakespeare* (London, 1898), p. 513.

<sup>27</sup> 'Warp and Weft- Historically Correct Fabrics', <[http://stuart-hmaltd.com/historical\\_fabrics.php](http://stuart-hmaltd.com/historical_fabrics.php)>, accessed 24.11.2016.

the fool's honesty, inability to censor thoughts or confused mental state. This entry does however show some signs of improved materials as the coote and cappe are both fur-lined indicating that the fool's position was in continual flux; whilst being common enough to warrant fustian, they were noble enough to be allowed furs, in their position at the court if not their bloodlines.

The use of fabrics, however, changed significantly under Mary I, especially with regard to her favourite female fool, Jane. Stopes notes that comparatively, 'there is no distinction between the dress of Jane and that of the great ladies of Court', as Mary afforded her luxurious materials.<sup>28</sup> Silk stockings, supposedly a new luxury reserved for Queen Elizabeth I, were 'liberally given to the Court Fool' under Mary, suggesting that she was keen to see her fools clothed in finery, even if such finery could not often be seen.<sup>29</sup> Whereas before fools were clothed to represent their position and to meet practical demands, now fools adopted a new role as 'pets of the court'.<sup>30</sup>

Jane's wardrobe was an illustrious array of splendour. In a single order on 27<sup>th</sup> April, 1540, Jane gained:

a Douche gowne...of striped purple satten  
a kirtle...of striped silk lined with cotton  
a Douche gowne...of crimson satten striped with golde  
a kyrtle...of blew silk  
a Dowche gowne...of crimson striped satten  
a kirtle of like crimson striped satten  
a cloak...of yellow cloth garded with grene clothe layde on with yellow  
whippe lase  
a douche gowne...of blew damaske chequered  
a kirtle...of white satten fringed with copper silver  
a kirtle...of red vared sylke  
a petticoat...of red cloth.<sup>31</sup>

The use of silk or satin would have denoted someone of the nobility. The fact that three of Jane's gowns are satin and four of her kirtles are silk, with the exception of one satin kirtle,

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<sup>28</sup> C. Stopes, 'Jane, the Queen's Fool', *The Athenaeum*, 4059 (August, 1905), p. 209.

<sup>29</sup> Stopes, 'Jane, the Queen's Fool', p. 210.

<sup>30</sup> E. Richardson, 'Two Court Fools by Frans Floris', *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts of the City of Detroit*, 18 (May 1939), p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Stopes, 'Jane, the Queen's Fool', p. 210.

indicates that she was clothed to the same standards as the Marian nobility. There also seems to be an almost total rejection of the colours traditionally associated with folly, green and yellow. Only the cloak contained these colours, perhaps indicating that whilst in the court the fool would have been well known, outside of the court there remained a need for a garment that would instantly distinguish the fool from other individuals.

Alternatively, the rich and exuberant colours on display in Jane's wardrobe may have distinguished her in a crowd. Whilst mixing colours within one outfit was not uncommon, colours were usually contained to certain subtle combinations.<sup>32</sup> However, if Jane combined the yellow and green cloak with her blue gown, white kirtle and red petticoat, she would have been an extraordinary spectacle. Thus, whilst the materials used for Jane denote a rise in status when considering the move in quality from motley to satin and silk, the use of colours would have ensured that Jane was still a figure to mock and deride in her outlandish and eye-catching colour combinations, reinforcing her undefined position as motley had done under Henry VIII.

Further example of how clothing could be used to reaffirm her status as a fool can be found in the style of Jane's gowns. The entry stresses that her gowns were of the Dutch style, contrasting the French gown given to Lady Clifford at the close of the same entry. Dutch gowns were far less fashionable than French gowns in this period and wearing such a style would have been humiliating for a Tudor noblewoman. Thus, whilst the materials used to clothe Jane were indicative of nobility, the clashing colours and unfashionable shaping of the gowns would have ensured she was an object of derision, reaffirming her status as a fool.

Mary also clothed Will Somer in luxury. In the autumn following her accession, she bought him 'a gowne of blue satten, the ground yellow stripped with a slight gold, a jerkin furred, with sleeves of same, furred with conie'.<sup>33</sup> Will seems to have been clothed comparatively soberly as his colours were not particularly clashing, suggesting a degree of

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<sup>32</sup> Mikhaila & Malcolm-Davies, *The Tudor Tailor*, p.43

<sup>33</sup> Stopes, 'Jane, the Queen's fool', p. 210.

respect from Mary towards Will as by this stage he would have been aged and notorious. However, the placing of Somer in a gown makes his style of clothing unfashionable. Borradaile notes that long petticoats were adopted by fools 'for the purposes of cleanliness' and were often fringed with yellow to denote the wearer's status as a fool.<sup>34</sup> The long petticoat also had associations in this period with children, madmen and scholars, again alluding to the unique and contradictory status of the fool as both a teacher and a speaker of nonsense.<sup>35</sup> The associations of folly and childish innocence were prominent as the fool's seeming inability to censor their speech has clear parallels with childish mannerisms. To the court fool, therefore, the gown symbolised 'the license, indulgence, or privilege allowed to the innocent and irresponsible'.<sup>36</sup>

The contradictions of materials and styles seen under Mary seems to have continued under Elizabeth who, for her coronation, ordered Jane:

oon gowne of...golde tinsell  
oon gowne of Crimsin Satten Rayed wihe thredde of golde  
oon kyrtell of blewe  
a kyrtell of blacke golde tinsell.<sup>37</sup>

Again, this is an extensive order for one individual, showing a willingness to spend large amounts on fools. The use of colour here, however, marks a significant shift in attitudes. Whereas Mary used clashed colours, Elizabeth seems to have muted the palette slightly with each of the items; except for one blue kirtle, the clothing was ordered in combinations of crimson, black and gold, which Elizabeth wore herself. This demure approach to fools' clothing may seem unusual. However, this perhaps carried the most poignant message. Whereas other monarchs had been keen to distinguish their fools from the nobility and by extension themselves, Elizabeth seems to have welcomed a direct comparison, perhaps suggesting that

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<sup>34</sup> Borradaile, 'Clowns and Fools', p. 212.

<sup>35</sup> D. Gifford, 'Iconographical Notes toward a Definition of the Medieval Fool' in P. V. A. Williams (Ed.), *The Fool and the Trickster: Studies in Honour of Enid Welsford* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 18.

<sup>36</sup> Hotson, *Motley*, p. 54.

<sup>37</sup> *Sign manual warrant to Sir Edward Walgrave, Master of the Great Wardrobe*, SP 46/8, The National Archives, Kew (NA), f.5

she was unafraid of self-evaluation and willing to see the folly in her own actions. However, the similarity of colours between the fool's clothing and Elizabeth's clothing may also demonstrate the intimacy of the relationship between fool and monarch.

Will Somer was similarly clothed in a more sober yet noble manner in the same entry, being ordered 'oon gowne and oon Coate...furred with ermine'.<sup>38</sup> This again suggests a move towards viewing the fool as an individual to respect who was not so diminutive in status as to warrant being clothed in a deliberately garish manner. Yet, there may also be a further reason for the comparably fashionable approach to fool's clothing under Elizabeth. Based on the amount of references to Somer in contemporary plays and to Jane in the account books it may be assumed that both fools gained a significant degree of popularity in the Tudor period. By the time of Elizabeth's coronation, they were likely to have been respected and well-known individuals who neither needed nor deserved humiliating outfits. It may therefore be argued that their changing clothes reveal the outcome of their dedication to their role. For the likes of Will Somer who had worked tirelessly throughout the Tudor period, gaining much respect, it seems only fitting that they would be rewarded with clothes that demonstrated the reverence that they had accumulated over the course of their employment.

Despite Jane and Will Somer's undoubted progression as popular and respected fools, the change in their dress during the Tudor period may instead have been a result of the broader socio-cultural changes of the Renaissance. According to Walter Kaiser, the Renaissance's contribution 'was precisely that of making [the fool] just like everyone else'.<sup>39</sup> The Renaissance, and more specifically Renaissance Humanism, popularised and legitimised the pursuit of worldly pleasures and encouraged individualism and individual expression. The fool, as a source of worldly pleasure and a dissenting voice who was not limited by the social restrictions placed on other courtiers, may therefore have grown in prominence at the court, being heralded as a symbol of Renaissance Humanism. As a consequence of this newfound

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<sup>38</sup> NA SP 46/8, f.5

<sup>39</sup> W. Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly: Erasmus, Rabelais and Shakespeare* (London, 1964), p. 14.

status, the clothing of court fools came to be used more subtly, yet in such a way that ensured they remained the subjects of derision. A fool's 'lack of sophistication is a necessary condition of their relationship' to their audience.<sup>40</sup> Audiences would be amused by the frank speech and outlandish actions of a fool whose clothing reflected their inner turmoil, but they would not be so welcoming and forgiving of an individual who dressed in the same way as themselves. A clear distinction between fool and courtier therefore had to be drawn for the fool to maintain their unique role and position. Thus, fools came to dress in a way that was 'grotesquely out of fashion and yet not without glamour and elegance' to appear more human than their earlier counterparts resigned to motley, yet not as noble as their audiences.<sup>41</sup> Whereas once they were seen as sub-humans, clothed in practical garbs which reflected their lowly status, in the latter half of the Tudor period, their reinstatement to a more human status came to be seen in their altered clothing which grew more luxurious and worthy of the court, though not luxurious enough to challenge their fellow courtiers.

This article has challenged the notion that natural court fools only wore motley by showing that the clothing of fools underwent extensive changes throughout the Tudor period, resulting in their being dressed similar to their fellow courtiers. Beginning in motley and similar fabrics which represented disjointed mental states and indefinable social positions, the fool came to be clothed in first more noble materials (whilst maintaining unfashionable styles) and then in noble colours, materials and styles. The luxurious fabrics used in the clothing of fools (such as silks, furs, and damasks) indicate that great expense was afforded them. This change in clothing may indicate a greater affection for fools who gradually became akin to pets at the court, subservient but beloved. However, the garments which gradually replaced motley were boldly coloured, clashing with each other when worn as an outfit. This combined with the unfashionable cuts would have ensured that the fool was singled out, and almost certainly,

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<sup>40</sup> M. West, 'Skelton and the Renaissance Theme of Folly', *Philological Quarterly*, 50 (January 1971), p. 33.

<sup>41</sup> W. Zucker, 'The Image of the Clown', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 12 (March 1954), p. 311.

mocked for their garish and unfashionable outfits. Therefore, whilst court fools grew to be more beloved over the course of the Tudor period, they were kept in a subservient position and were clearly distinguishable from their fellow courtiers despite being clothed in relative luxury.

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