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ABSTRACT-

Of all Shakespeare's plays, *King Lear* has perhaps generated the largest amount of emotional and critical debate. From Tate's infamous "happy ending" redaction to the differing opinions over authorial and conflated texts, *Lear* is nothing if not controversial. The disappearance of the Fool in 3.4 is no exception, with scholars arguing that the disappearance was caused by practical reasons—an actor doubling as Fool/Cordelia—or perhaps that the Fool vanishes because Lear, upon encountering Edgar in the hovel, becomes his own fool with his own wisdom, making the Fool superfluous. Regardless of the theory, the critical emphasis is frequently, almost myopically, placed on the impact the disappearance has on the title character.

My paper, a revised chapter from my MA thesis on fools as pedagogues, seeks to put the emphasis on why the Fool might have decided to vanish from the play, rather than simply the impact such a desertion has on Lear's psyche. Using Bakhtinian speech genre theory and Renaissance pedagogical writings, my paper seeks to build on Theodore Leinwand's notion of the conservative fool. I will argue that Lear's Fool embodies reason, counterbalancing Lear's excess of emotion, and that his departure is tied to the incremental upsetting of that balance.

By situating the Fool's license in a pedagogical context, I will argue that the "sudden" departure of Lear's Fool is a deliberate act resulting from a clear and progressive erosion of Lear's ability to authorize the very license that allowed the Fool to be Lear's voice of reason.