Joyce and Pirandello's 'Foolosopher' Kings and Mocking Gargoyles: Buck Mulligan and Enrico IV

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Abstract: This paper investigates the affinities between the folly of Buck Mulligan in Joyce's *Ulysses* and that of Enrico IV in Pirandello's homonymous play. After looking at Michel Foucault's *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, this paper will postulate that Buck Mulligan and Enrico IV seem to precede Foucault's destabilizing vision: they are characters who, through various acts of folly, simulate the exterior signs of madness and play the fools to create confusion amidst existing forms of socialization. I shall also be looking into Robert Bell's *Jocoserious Joyce* (from where the terms 'foolosopher king' and 'mocking gargoyle' are borrowed) and at Elio Gioanola's *Pirandello e la follia* to prove that these modernist clown prototypes become a mirror of painful truths to other characters. Mulligan, for instance, reveals with irony the true nature of Stephen Dedalus, religion and Ireland, whilst Enrico reveals to his visitors their falsity and the dark realm of life's masks. In both cases this is expressed with mood swings of mocking irony and effusions of sentiment. Both characters are also portrayed as having no fixed identities: they indulge in a tragicomic ritual of masks and folly with a delight for the ambiguities of self and language. In their words and actions, Mulligan and Enrico seem to be unshaped by history and free from any responsibility; they seem so fulfilled in playing the fools and thus become 'foolosopher' kings themselves, which act the part of sceptical jokers of the universe.

Keywords: Pirandello, James Joyce, Foucault, folly,

There is a semantic nuance between the Italian term *follia* and the English term 'folly' that has a crucial bearing on the argument I am proposing. In Italian, the semantic value of the term *follia* is defined by the Zanichelli Dictionary either as a '*stato di alienazione mentale*, *pazzia*, *demenza'* –strongly suggesting an irrational and pathological condition – or as an '*atto sconsiderato*, *temerario*, *avventato*'.[1] This pathological connotation of *follia* is confirmed by Giuseppe Pittàno's list of synonyms for the term: '*pazzia*, *alienazione*, *demenza*, *dissennatezza*, *insania*, *mania*, *psicopatia*, *schizofrenia*, *psicosi*, *squilibrio*'.[2] Luigi Pirandello uses the term with its pathological connotation in *Enrico IV* when the Marquis Di Nolli refers to the clinical madness of his uncle as '*la sua follia*.' The term *follia* is also freely replaced by Pirandello with the term *pazzia* in order to obtain the same semantic effect: '*Ed è diventato, con la pazzia, un attore magnifico e terribile*!'[3] *Follia* seems to exclude the behaviour of a subject that is jesting or consciously acting the clown, which in Italian might be expressed more appropriately by the terms *pagliaccio* or *buffone*. On the other hand, the semantic value which the *Oxford English Dictionary* assigns to folly is the tendency of 'being foolish' or of committing a 'foolish act, idea or practice'.[4] This paper investigates the English sense of the term 'folly' which is vital to understand the 'foolosopher' as the rational, sceptical, and cynical *raisonneur* who is purposely acting the fool to reveal a concoction of hidden truths to others. This concept of folly is most appropriately reciprocated in Pirandello's text by the term '*maschera*', 'the mask' of the fool, the absence of which implies clinical madness: '*non era più una maschera, ma la Follia*!'[5] Therefore, it is Enrico's folly – the mask of the medieval emperor – and not his temporary *follia*, which shall be equated with the folly of Buck Mulligan in Joyce's *Ulysses*.

This distinction between the rational folly of a clown and clinical madness unquestionably evokes Michel Foucault's *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*. Foucault made it quite clear that the classification

1 Nicola Zingarelli, *Vocabolario della Lingua Italiana*, ed. Miro Dogliotti and Luigi Rosiello, 12th ed. (Bologna, 1997), 701.

2 Giuseppe Pittàno, *Dizionario Fraseologico delle Parole Equivalenti, Analoghe e Contrarie*, 2nd ed. (Bologna, 1997), 382.

3 Luigi Pirandello, *Enrico IV*, in *Maschere nude*, Vol. 1, ed. A. D'Amico (Milan, 1997), 313.

4 *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, ed. J.B. Sykes, 7th ed. (Oxford, 1984), 380.

5 Pirandello, 314.

of madness as a pathology has been conjured by society in order to evade certain dimensions of its existence – the disturbing views of the depths of the Self – which should preferably be projected onto 'others.'[6] Scapegoats were therefore ousted by society and pursued right into the domain of unreason and confinement so as to circumscribe the chaos that society refused to confront in itself. Buck Mulligan and Enrico IV seem to precede Foucault's destabilizing vision: they are characters who, through various acts of folly, simulate the exterior signs of madness and play the fools to create confusion amidst existing forms of socialization. As Enrico explains to his councillors, society feels threatened by the mask of folly which undermines the concepts of reality and reason: '*conviene a tutti far credere pazzi certuni, per avere la scusa di tenerli chiusi. Sai perché? Perché non si resiste a sentirli parlare.*'[7] Even Stephen Dedalus shares some of society's discomfort in the face of folly when, at the National Library, he recalls that 'Mulligan has my telegram. Folly. Persist.'[8]

Foucault had highlighted how we must try to return in history to that 'zero point in the course of madness' when it was suddenly separated from reason – much before the confinement of the insane in asylums and in the conceptual isolation of madness from reason as 'unreason.'[9] Enrico might be having a Modernist premonition to Foucault's argument when he states: '*Sono guarito, signori: perché so perfettamente di fare il pazzo, qua, e lo faccio, quieto. Il guaio è per voi che la vivete agitatamente, senza saperla e senza volerla, la vostra follia*.'[10] Foucault's zero point might find an eloquent personification in Enrico or Mulligan since they present a symbiosis between rationality – even though a relativistic one – and folly.

Two remarkable studies which support my analysis are Elio Gioanola's 1983 text, *Pirandello e la follia*[11] and Robert Bell's 1996

6 Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: a History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard, (Cambridge, 1961), 14.
7 Pirandello, 351.
8 James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler, Wolfhard Steppe, and Claus Melchior (London, 1989), 152.
9 Michel Foucault, 'Preface, Folie et Deraison', in *Histoire de la Folie à l'Âge Classique* (Paris, 1961), p. i.
10 Pirandello, 368.
11 Elio Gioanola, *Pirandello: la follia* (Genoa, 1983).

text *Jocoserious Joyce*,[12] from which this paper has borrowed the terms 'foolosopher kings' and 'mocking gargoyles'. Gioanola's text states clearly at the outset that the real madness of Pirandello's characters is that of not actually being able to be mad like the rest of society. This idea confirms that folly in Pirandello implies the significant absence of the medical condition of *follia*. Gioanola sees in Enrico IV the eternal Pirandellian character unable to make any dialectical choice since he is divided between the true and false images of self, so typical of the schizoid condition, but with that slightly stronger urge to cling to the true self whilst upholding totally the mask of folly.

Bell's study, on the other hand, highlights constantly Mulligan's instrumental role as the brilliant clown who is a source of harsh truths and a lover of folly. In fact, Bell's contention is that Mulligan is a far more complicated and important character in *Ulysses* than Joyce or any other critic has ever acknowledged or recognized. Bell proposes a number of different readings of this character who escapes any single interpretation. However, one in particular is quite useful to my argument: 'Buck has no identity, only a series of masks', […] 'He fulfils the classic role of the clown, to threaten our assumption that identity is anything substantial or reliable.'[13] Mulligan is thus a grand mimic who hears and impersonates many voices with the result of an indiscriminate, equivocal, and cacophonous din.

My analysis of these two characters shall attempt to highlight four dimensions of folly: 1) the fool as an actor of parodies, pseudo-rituals, and historical re-enactments; 2) the clown's constant mockery of other characters amidst certain ambiguities of language; 3) the comic folly of Mulligan and the tragic one of Enrico; 4) the folly of these characters demonstrates that in 1922 – when *Ulysses* and *Enrico IV* were published and premiered – Joyce and Pirandello were unshaped by a history they joked about.

The first trait deserving attention concerns the roles of the fool and the actor merging into each other. Joyce and Pirandello's fools allude to a meta-theatrical dimension with performances of parodies, rituals, and a pageantry of historical and symbolical re-enactments. In *Ulysses*, parody becomes a form of humorous acting and travesty, eloquently

12 Robert Bell, *Jocoserious Joyce: The Fate of Folly in Ulysses* (Gainesville, 1996).
13 Ibid., 18–19.

personified in Mulligan's liturgical activity. Consider, for instance, when he is playing the priest in the Martello Tower in *Telemachus* chanting '*Introibo ad altare Dei*';[14] or when he is performing a pseudo-consecration, 'For this, O dearly beloved, is the genuine Christine';[15] or when he is undressing before swimming and states 'Mulligan is stripped of his garments';[16] or else when he chants in 'a quiet happy foolish voice' the ballad of the joking Jesus.[17] The dramatic dimension of Mulligan's folly is textually confirmed by Joyce in this character's entrance in the National Library, in *Scylla and Charybdis*: '*Entr'acte*. A ribald face, sullen as a dean's, Buck Mulligan came forward […]'.[18] This entry might be heralding in Stephen's eyes the second act of the fool which will persist for most of the chapter, the first act having been the black mass ritual in the opening chapter of *Ulysses*. Mulligan even jokes on his fake dramatic authorship when he claims to have 'conceived a play for the mummers' entitled '*Everyman his own wife or A Honeymoon in the Hand*'.[19] He even indulges in instances of what might be considered as theatrical asides: 'Buck Mulligan, his pious eyes upturned, prayed: Blessed Margaret Mary Anycock!'[20] In Stephen's stream of consciousness, Mulligan is also imagined on top of a tower wearing the costume of a '*particoloured jester's dress of puce and yellow and clown's cap with curling bell.*'[21]

This fusion of acting and folly is also evident in Enrico who, after twelve years of madness, chooses to continue acting a medieval fiction which his rival Tito Belcredi recognizes as a form of conscious madness. During his acting the foolosopher, there is a faithful upholding of all the medieval rituals of courtly communal life; he adopts fully this mask with an eye for dramatic detail since it is the only kind of equilibrium available to him. For example, apart from his royal garments, heavy make-up, and dyed hair, he grotesquely wears sack-cloth as a symbol of contrition to the pope who had excommunicated the historical Enrico IV. At one point, however, he shakes it violently and is stopped from

14 Joyce, 3.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., 14.
17 Ibid., 16.
18 Ibid., 162.
19 Ibid., 178.
20 Ibid., 166.
21 Ibid., 473.

removing it by his councillors, whilst he voices the actual hatred of the historical emperor for the pope: '*Ah per Dio!* (*Si tira indietro e, levandosi il sajo, grida loro*:) *Domani, a Bressanone, ventisette vescovi tedeschi e lombardi firmeranno con me la destituzione di Papa Gregorio VII: non Pontefice, ma monaco falso!*'[22] A short while after his outburst of rage, he cleverly asks the psychiatrist, dressed up as a bishop, and Matilde dressed as a countess, for their pardon, just as the historical Enrico IV had asked for pardon at the feet of the pope. He tells his visitors that the weight of his anathema is too heavy a burden: '*Sento, vi giuro, sento tutto il peso dell'anatema!*'[23] When his councillors and visitors finally realize that Enrico has acted out a role, he explains that his performance was a voluntary caricature of that other involuntary masquerade of life, self-concepts, and social relationships: '*Questo, (si scuote l'abito addosso) questo […] è per me la caricatura, evidente e volontaria, di quell'altra mascherata, continua, d'ogni minuto, di cui siamo i pagliacci involontarii […] quando senza saperlo ci mascheriamo di ciò che ci par d'essere.*'[24] Enrico is convinced that acting out his folly is to see things with a mind that disintegrates conventional structures.

The second step of my analysis delves into the clownish and mocking enterprise of the two characters, a task which keeps them constantly busy. Apart from his liturgical parodies, Mulligan reveals with mocking irony the true nature of Stephen Dedalus. He never calls him by his Christian name but mostly 'Kinch' together with a myriad of other names: 'fearful Jesuit',[25] 'The jejune Jesuit',[26] 'Kinch, the knife-blade',[27] 'Kinch, the loveliest mummer of them all!',[28] 'poor dogsbody',[29] 'The unclean bard',[30] and many others. Buck also mocks Stephen on his 'agenbite of inwit' as regards the last wish of his mother at her deathbed; when Stephen tells Buck he cannot wear grey trousers, Mulligan retorts sharply: 'Etiquette is etiquette. He kills his

22 Pirandello, 326.
23 Ibid., 326–7.
24 Ibid., 368.
25 Joyce, 3.
26 Ibid., 4.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 5.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 13.

mother but he can't wear grey trousers.'[31] Even Stephen's search for paternity through his theory on Shakespeare is criticized: 'He proves by algebra that Hamlet's grandson is Shakespeare's grandfather and that he himself is the ghost of his own father.'[32] Leopold Bloom also undergoes Mulligan's mockery. In two different instances in *Scylla and Charybdis* Mulligan competes against his influence on Stephen. He questions his name, 'Ikey Moses?';[33] he identifies him as 'The sheeny' ('the Jew'),[34] and 'The wandering jew';[35] he tries to imply that he is lustful and 'Greeker than the Greeks', having once spied him glancing at Aphrodite's 'mesial groove'.[36] Across *Ulysses*, Mulligan obviously mocks the English, 'Bursting with money and indigestion';[37] he comments on the Gaelic language, 'Grand is no name for it';[38] he jeers on a 'new art colour for our Irish poets: snotgreen';[39] he parodies the works of Robbie Burns, W.B. Yeats (the 'Yeats touch'[40]) and Lady Gregory ('the old hake',[41] whereby 'one thinks of Homer'.[42])

Enrico is similarly skilled in the art of mockery and, as soon as he recognizes his visitors, he swears vengeance, expressing the intention of targeting them with ridicule. In fact, he mocks his former lover Matilde on her dyed hair and the falsity of her mask: '*Siete mascherata anche voi, Madonna.*'[43] Belcredi, wearing the costume of a Benedictine monk, is labelled by Enrico as being the historical enemy of the emperor, Pietro Damiani. By mocking the historical figure of Pietro Damiani, Enrico alludes subtly to the deceit, falsehood, and responsibility of Belcredi over the riding incident which had caused Enrico's temporary madness: '*A voi, Pietro Damiani, invece, il ricordo di ciò che siete stato, di ciò che avete fatto, appare ora riconoscimento di realtà passate, che vi restano*

31 Ibid., 5.
32 Ibid., 15.
33 Ibid., 165.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., 179.
36 Ibid., 165.
37 Ibid., 4.
38 Ibid., 13.
39 Ibid., 4.
40 Ibid., 178.
41 Ibid., 177.
42 Ibid., 178.
43 Pirandello, 325–6.

dentro – è vero?'[44] Quite in line with Foucault's ideology behind the *Histoire de la folie*, Enrico even mocks the psychiatrist, wearing the costume of a bishop, as being an extremely naïve character:[45]

DOTTORE:	*Ah, come, io? Vi sembro astuto?*
ENR. IV:	*No, Monsignore! Che dite! Non sembrate affatto!*

Enrico's dazed servants also have to suffer the humiliation of his mockery. He compels them to kneel down in front of him, the self-proclaimed mad emperor, but then with a sudden mood swing he criticizes their naïve and servile attitude: '*Vi ordino di inginocchiarvi tutti davanti a me – così! E toccate tre volte la terra con la fronte! Giù! Tutti, davanti ai pazzi, si deve stare così! [...] Su, via, pecore, alzatevi!*'[46]

All these tragicomic rituals of mockery are carried out with a delight for the ambiguities of language. Mulligan constantly expresses himself in a multiplicity of voices and indulges in word play which is frequently daring and satiric, such as the use of 'Christine' as the feminization of Christ, or his inversion of the famous phrase from the book of Proverbs: 'He who stealeth from the poor lendeth to the Lord.'[47] He even indulges in self-irony: 'My name is absurd too: Malachi Mulligan, two dactyls. But it has a Hellenic ring, hasn't it?'[48] He puns with the word 'dogsbody' and adopts various forms of Dublin slang (such as 'scutter',[49] 'bowsy'[50]), and verses in Church Latin or Greek such as '*Epi oinopa ponton*'[51] ('over the wine-dark sea') which Homer used repeatedly in the *Odyssey.* Mulligan also indulges in word-play in his singing, sometimes 'out of tune with a Cockney accent'.[52] Pirandello does not possess all this linguistic and semantic versatility, punning, or word play in the language of *Enrico IV*. However, just like the Father's reflections in the play *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* ('*Ma se è tutto*

44 Ibid., 326.
45 Ibid., 345.
46 Ibid., 350.
47 Joyce, 19.
48 Ibid., 4.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., 5.
51 Ibid., 4.
52 Ibid., 9.

qui il male! Nelle parole'[53]), Enrico reflects on the weight of words in the life of a character, particularly, the weight of the word '*pazzo*'. He tells his councillors that words are relative to the different subjects that absorb and reproduce them as value judgements about others: '*Parole! parole che ciascuno intende e ripete a suo modo. [...] E guaj a chi un bel giorno si trovi bollato da una di queste parole che tutti ripetono! Per esempio: "pazzo!" – Per esempio, che so? – "imbecille!"*'[54] The weight of the spoken word – the word in action on stage – stifles any form of life since it bears the brutal judgements decreed by others: '*Schiacciare uno col peso d'una parola? Ma è niente! Che è? Una mosca! – Tutta la vita è schiacciata così dal peso delle parole!*'[55] Enrico warns his councillors that all forms of direct speech shall bring displacement since any possible dialogues have surely been uttered previously by many vanished generations: '*Mettetevi a parlare! Ripeterete tutte le parole che si sono sempre dette! Credete di vivere? Rimasticate la vita dei morti!*'[56]

The point of arrival of this discussion is that both these characters derive great pleasure from all their mockery and joking. However, it is essential to note that whilst Mulligan's folly is comic, Enrico's is tragic. Mulligan never takes history too seriously like Stephen does – he jokes about Ireland, England, religion, sex, literature – but as Dominic Manganiello points out, he 'toadies to the Englishman Haines and the Church he blasphemes against', thus never fitting coherently into any particular ideology or political position.[57] Joyce chose to include a German proverb in Stephen's stream of consciousness in *Scylla and Charybdis*: '*Was du verlaschst wirst du noch dienen*'[58] ('You will serve that which you laugh at'). This seems to specify the significant role of comic relativism that Stephen perceives in Mulligan. Without any ideological intent, the jest and comic folly of Mulligan therefore becomes an end in itself. Maybe, as Bell argues, by diving naked into the ocean, Mulligan may be accepting life as it is and immersing himself into a meaningless flux in so far as he believes in anything, a stance which

53 Luigi Pirandello, *Sei Personaggi in Cerca d'Autore,* in *Maschere nude*, Vol. 1, ed. A. D'Amico (Milan, 1997), 65.
54 Pirandello, *Enrico IV,* 349.
55 Ibid., 350.
56 Ibid.
57 Dominic Manganiello, *Joyce's Politics* (London, 1980), 135.
58 Joyce, 162.

the main object of his mockery, Stephen himself, adamantly resists. Enrico's folly is quite different in nature, since Pirandello's concept of *umorismo* is based on tragedy. Whilst conceding that the historical pageant which he enacts offers him '*il piacere della storia*',[59] stability and predictability, maybe even cynical laughter at times, Enrico's life becomes inadvertently captured in forms which are irreversible and unchangeable, quite unlike Mulligan's constantly changing pranks. As Romano Luperini has similarly noticed, Enrico's madness becomes a series of defences erected by his world of masks which excludes him from the vital flux of contemporary history, ideology, and society as well as from all social customs, feelings, and hypocrisies of his times.[60] However, the defences which Luperini highlighted condemn Enrico to live in a space without time. The outcome of this folly, which plays a medieval fiction during contemporary times, can only have tragic consequences in the play: Belcredi's fatal wounding and Enrico's indefinite internment. On the other hand, Mulligan cannot be a tragic character, not only because it is contrary to his nature, but also because he lives in a space interspersed with the signs of contemporary time: at the beginning of *Ulysses* we find him joking in the Martello tower in County Dublin in 1904.

The fourth and final result of this analysis is that, through these characters, Joyce and Pirandello seem to be unshaped by history and free from any ideological responsibility. The Irishness and *Sicilianità* of these writers had stemmed out from an insular, Catholic, and politically compromised environment; by 1922 Joyce and Pirandello were well aware of the delusion and violence of Irish and Sicilian history. With such delusions, these authors felt spurred to seek refuge in the world of art through their eloquent characters and thus become 'foolosopher' kings, Irish and Sicilian clowns, seeking out the only possible catharsis available to them as sceptical jokers of history.

59 Pirandello, *Enrico IV*, 355.

60 Romano Luperini, *Pirandello* (Bari, 2005), 123.