



Fools and Jesters in Literature, Art, and History: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook (Critical Studies in Education and)

Vicki K. Janik

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Jesters and fools have existed as important and consistent figures in nearly all cultures. Sometimes referred to as clowns, they are typological characters who have conventional roles in the arts, often using nonsense to subvert existing order. But fools are also a part of social and religious history, and they frequently play key roles in the rituals that support and shape a society's system of beliefs. This reference book includes alphabetically arranged entries for approximately 60 fools and jesters from a wide range of cultures. Included are entries for performers from American popular culture, such as Woody Allen, Mae West, Charlie Chaplin, and the Marx Brothers; literary characters, such as Shakespeare's Falstaff, Rabelais' Gargantua and Pantagruel, and Singer's Gimpel; and cultural and mythological figures, such as India's Birbal, the American circus clown, the Native American Coyote, Taishu Engeki of Japan, Hephaestus, Loki the Norse fool, schlimiels and schlimazels, and the drag queen.

The entries, written by expert contributors, are critical as well as informative. Each begins with a biographical, artistic, religious, or historical background section, which places the subject within a larger cultural and historical context. A description and analysis follow. This section may include a discussion of the fool's appearance, gender role, ethical and moral roles, social function, and relationship to such themes as nature, time, and mortality. The entry then discusses the critical reception of the subject and concludes with an extensive bibliography of general works.

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