

The Fool (Tarot card)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The Fool or **The Jester** is one of the 78 cards in a Tarot deck; one of the 22 Trump cards that make up the Major Arcana. The Fool is unnumbered; sometime represented as **0** (the first) or **XXII** (the last) Major Arcana in decks. It is used in divination as well as in game playing.

Contents

- 1 Iconography
- 2 History
- 3 In tarot games
- 4 Symbolism
- 5 Interpretations
- 6 See also
- 7 References
- 8 External links

Iconography

The Fool is titled *Le Mat* in the Tarot of Marseilles, and *Il Matto* in most Italian language tarot decks. These archaic words mean "the madman" or "the beggar", and may be related to the word for 'checkmate' in relation to the original use of tarot cards for gaming purposes.^[1]

In the earliest Tarot decks, the Fool is usually depicted as a beggar or a vagabond. In the Visconti-Sforza tarot deck, the Fool wears ragged clothes and stockings without shoes, and carries a stick on his back. He has what appear to be feathers in his hair. His unruly beard and feathers may relate to the tradition of the woodwose or wild man. Another early Italian image that relates to the tradition is the first (and lowest) of the series of the so-called "Tarocchi of Mantegna". This series of prints containing images of social roles, allegorical figures, and classical deities begins with "*Misero*", a depiction of a beggar leaning on a staff.^[2] A similar image is contained in the German *Hofamterspiel*; there the fool (German: *Narr*) is depicted as a barefoot man in robes, apparently with bells on his hood, playing a bagpipe.^[3]



The Fool from the Rider-Waite Tarot deck

The Tarot of Marseilles and related decks similarly depict a bearded person wearing what may be a jester's hat; he always carries a bundle of his belongings on a stick slung over his back. He appears to be getting chased away by an animal, either a dog or a cat. The animal has torn his pants.^[4]

In the Rider-Waite Tarot deck and other esoteric decks made for cartomancy, the Fool is shown as a young man, standing on the brink of a precipice. In the Rider-Waite deck, he is also portrayed as having with him a small dog. The Fool holds a rose in one hand and in the other a small bundle of possessions.

In French suited tarot decks that do not use the traditional emblematic images of Italian suited decks for the suit of trumps, the Fool is typically made up as a jester or bard, reminiscent of the joker in a deck of playing cards.

History

The Hermitage tells us that in the decks before Waite-Smith, the Fool is almost always unnumbered.^[5] There are a few exceptions: some old decks (including the 15th-century Sola Busca and the Rider Waite) label the card with a "0", and the Belgian Tarot designs label the Fool as "XXII". The Fool is almost always completely apart from the sequence of trumps in the historic decks. Still, there is historic precedent for regarding it as the lowest trump and as the highest trump.

Traditionally, the Major Arcana in Tarot cards are numbered with Roman numerals. The Fool is numbered with the zero, one of the Arabic numerals.

In tarot games

In the various tarot card games such as French Tarot, Tarocchini and Tarock, the Fool has a unique role. In these games, the Fool is sometimes called "the Excuse". The tarot games are typically trick taking games; playing the Fool card excuses the player from either following suit or playing a trump card on that trick. Winning a trick containing the Fool card often yields a scoring bonus.

In occult tarot, the Fool is usually considered part of the "major arcana". This is not true in the tarot game itself; the Fool's role in the game is independent of both the suit cards and the trump cards, and the card does not belong to either category. As such, most tarot decks originally made for game playing do not assign



In the Visconti-Sforza tarot deck, the Fool is depicted as a ragged vagabond.

a number to the Fool indicating its rank in the suit of trumps; it has none. It usually has a star in French Tarot. Waite gives the Fool the number 0, but in his book discusses the Fool between Judgment, no. 20, and The World, no. 21.

However, in some more modern tarot card games, specifically Austrian Tarock games, the Fool is instead played as the 22 of Trump, making it the highest trump in such games.

Symbolism

The Fool is the spirit in search of experience. He represents the mystical cleverness bereft of reason within us, the childlike ability to tune into the inner workings of the world. The sun shining behind him represents the divine nature of the Fool's wisdom and exuberance, holy madness or 'crazy wisdom'. On his back are all the possessions he might need. In his hand there is a flower, showing his appreciation of beauty. He is frequently accompanied by a dog, sometimes seen as his animal desires, sometimes as the call of the "real world", nipping at his heels and distracting him. He is seemingly unconcerned that he is standing on a precipice, apparently about to step off. One of the keys to the card is the paradigm of the precipice, Zero and the sometimes represented oblivious Fool's near-step into the oblivion (The Void) of the jaws of a crocodile, for example, are all mutually informing polysemy within evocations of the iconography of The Fool. The staff is the offset and complement to the void and this in many traditions represents wisdom and renunciation, e.g. 'danda' (Sanskrit) of a Sanyassin, 'danda' (Sanskrit) is also a punctuation mark with the function analogous to a 'full-stop' which is appropriately termed a period in American English. The Fool is both the beginning and the end, neither and otherwise, betwixt and between, liminal.

The number 0 is a perfect signicator for the Fool, as it can become anything when he reaches his destination as in the sense of 'joker's wild'. Zero plus anything equals the same thing. Zero times anything equals zero.^[6] Zero is nothing, a lack of hard substance, and as such it may reflect a *non-issue* or lack of cohesiveness for the subject at hand.

Interpretations

In many esoteric systems of interpretation, the Fool is usually interpreted as the protagonist of a story, and the Major Arcana is the path the Fool takes through the great mysteries of life and the main human archetypes. This path is known traditionally in Tarot as the Fool's Journey, and is frequently used to introduce the meaning of Major Arcana cards to beginners.^[7]

In his *Manual of Cartomancy*, Grand Orient has a curious suggestion of the office of Mystic Fool, as a part of his process in higher divination. The conventional explanations say that The Fool signifies the flesh, the sensitive life, depicting folly at the most insensate stage. When The Fool appears in a spread,



L'Excuse from the French Tarot card game

he is a signal to strip down to the irreducible core, and interrogate whether the Querant's self-vision is obscured. It may also be a warning that significant change is coming. Another interpretation of the card is that of taking action where the circumstances are unknown, confronting one's fears, taking risks, and so on.

See also

- Heyoka
- Crazy wisdom
- Joker (playing card)
- Wild Card (card games)

References

1. ^ Talia Felix, "The Cartomancer's Key"
2. ^ Images from the *Tarocchi de Mantegna* (<http://www.wopc.co.uk/italy/mantegna.html>) , accessed April 9, 2008.
3. ^ *Hofämterspiel* images (<http://www.wopc.co.uk/austria/hofamterspiel.html>) , accessed April 9, 2008.
4. ^ Bill Butler, *Dictionary of the Tarot*. (Schocken, 1975; ISBN 0-8052-0559-4)
5. ^ History of the Fool (<http://www.tarothermit.com/fool.htm>)
6. ^ "Tarot 0 - Fool" (<http://www.yhwh.com/Tarot/Tarot0.htm>) . Yhwh.com. <http://www.yhwh.com/Tarot/Tarot0.htm>. Retrieved 2012-03-31.
7. ^ See, e.g. Rachel Pollack, *Seventy-Eight Degrees of Wisdom* (Thorsons, 1980; ISBN 0-7225-3572-4); Gareth Knight, *The Magical World of the Tarot* (Aquarian, 1991; ISBN 0-85030-940-9).

- A. E. Waite's 1910 *Pictorial Key to the Tarot*
- Hajo Banzhaf, *Tarot and the Journey of the Hero* (2000)
- G. Ronald Murphy, S.J., *The Owl, The Raven, and The Dove: Religious Meaning of the Grimm's Magic Fairy Tales* (2000)
- Mohandas Gandhi: *Essential Writings* (John Dear, ed. 2002)
- Juliette Wood, *Folklore 109* (1998):15-24, *The Celtic Tarot and the Secret Tradition: A Study in Modern Legend Making* (1998)
- Vici Dwyer-Thomas: *The Fool and her Facebook* (2012)
- Robert Mazlo: *A la recherche du Tarot perdu. Les tablettes d'Hermès*, ISBN 2-910401-86-3, Ramuel Ed. (1998)

External links

- "Fool" cards from many decks and articles to "Fool" iconography (<http://trionfi.com/tarot/cards/00-fool/>)
- The History of the Fool Card (<http://www.tarothermit.com/fool.htm>) from The Hermitage
- The Fool article at para.wikia.com, the Paranormal and Metaphysical Wikia



A standard medieval allegory of Foolishness, painted by Giotto. This depiction resembles the Fool in the earliest surviving painted decks.

- A collection of Tarot Card Meanings for The Fool Tarot Card (<http://tarotcardmeanings.tarotsignals.com/the-fool>)

This article incorporates text from the public domain 1910 book Pictorial Key to the Tarot by Arthur Edward Waite. Please feel free to update the text.

Retrieved from "[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Fool_\(Tarot_card\)&oldid=526838386](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Fool_(Tarot_card)&oldid=526838386)"

Categories: Tarot cards

Navigation menu

- This page was last modified on 7 December 2012 at 09:14.
- Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; additional terms may apply. See Terms of Use for details.
Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.