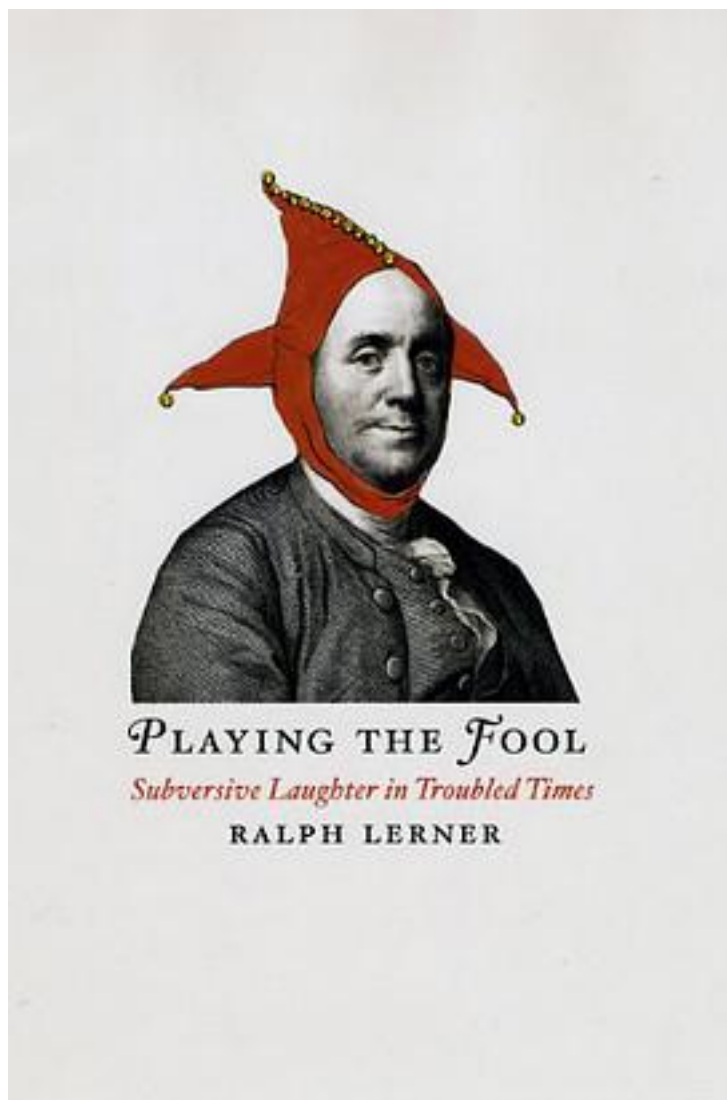


Playing the Fool



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The role of the fool is to provoke the powerful to question their convictions, preferably while avoiding a beating. Fools accomplish this not by hectoring their audience, but by broaching sensitive topics indirectly, often disguising their message in a joke or a tale. Writers and thinkers throughout history have adopted the fool's approach, and here Ralph Lerner turns to six of them—Thomas More, Francis Bacon, Robert Burton, Pierre Bayle, Benjamin Franklin, and Edward Gibbon—to elucidate the strategies these men employed to persuade the heedless, the zealous, and the overly confident to pause and reconsider.

As *Playing the Fool* makes plain, all these men lived through periods marked by fanaticism, particularly with regard to religion and its relation to the state. In such a troubled context, advocating on behalf of skepticism and against tyranny could easily lead to censure, or even, as in More's case, execution. And so, Lerner reveals, these serious thinkers relied on humor to move their readers toward a more reasoned understanding of the world and our place in it. At once erudite and entertaining, *Playing the Fool* is an eloquently thought-provoking look at the lives and writings of these masterly authors.

作者介绍:

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