DOKTORI DISSZERTÁCIÓ

Bársony Márton

Shakespeare’s clown
The Decarnivalization of the World in Three of His Dramas

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As concerns carnival. I didn’t have in mind carnival as something cheerful. Not at all! In every carnival image there’s the presence of death. Speaking with your terminology – carnival is tragedy. Its only that here, tragedy is not the final word.

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin

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Introducing the Methodology
In Search of an “Enigmatic Truth Hidden” Nowhere.

If I were to say that the English tradition following the carnivalesque notion and its medium—the clown figure—was able to produce a clean interdisciplinary methodological way to interpret the works of art in the Renaissance, I would most probably be exaggerating the truth. Considering this complex topic, the best option seems to be to write in English, using my English sources, actually, about an English playwright, William Shakespeare, who had a greater understanding of the carnivalesque comprehension of the world than anyone after him and saw clearly—more than anybody before him—the end of the world kept alive by the carnival, from the beginning of history.

Collecting a more or less satisfying amount of information proved to be hard. Not one of the basic books on carnivalesque literature can be found on the shelves of Hungarian bookstores, antiquarians or even libraries. The “folklorist” approach to Shakespeare or any folk-examination of art rarely caught the eye of Hungarian academics. In addition to a few isolated examples not one serious monograph or synthetic volume of essays was yet published in the topic. It is not anyone’s fault to let the topic slide away from our academic discussions, especially with the few, but determined scholars trying to get it to the surface: Natália Pikli, Léna Szilárd, Ákos Szilágyi, just to name a few. Pikli’s work on the carnivalesque Shakespeare published in England, the United States, Germany and Italy is especially important, from her *The Prism of Laughter*\(^2\) to her various studies and articles.\(^3\) Actually, the international case for carnivalesque aesthetics hasn’t been, so to speak, forcing us to reconsider its importance. In the last 80 years many French and English disciplinary works were produced about Medieval and Renaissance folk festivity and its clown and fool characters, but the authors did not consider one another’s works seriously; they rather revolutionarily recreated the carnivalesque logic correlating to their own disciplinary rules, importing their own mistakes and inattentions to their theoretic framework. “Fool-” and “clown-studies” sometimes stray far from their originating carnivalesque notion and become

\(^2\) *The Prism of Laughter. Shakespeare’s “very tragical mirth”*. Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2009. Also Ágnes Matuska has a remarkable writing touching on these matters: *The Vice-Device. Iago and Lear’s Fool as Agents of Representational Crisis*. Szeged: JATEPress, 2011. There are a few very recent dissertations in the wider area, by Krisztina N. Streitman, Anikó Oroszlán and Zita Turi, but those, sadly enough, have not been published.
this way “light” and “entertaining” as their clown-play is imagined: “fun” is not being taken “seriously”.

However poorly supported and structuralized it is, there is an undeniable scholarly tradition. In fact, there are two different “traditions” rarely—as I mentioned—referring to each other. That is, the Anglo-Saxon tradition had its own clown-fool-festival founder, who wrote her book five years ahead of Bakhtin. Enid Welsford’s The Fool: His Social and Literary History is hardly identifiable as a prime disciplinary work, which it was obviously benefiting from. No one ever denied the scholarly value of her work, despite its mosaic structure built from a medley of short biographies based on primary and secondary historical sources, literary analyzes, folk anecdotes, philosophical turns and sociological considerations.

This dissertation mainly focuses on the fool and clown characters in the history of culture. The will to theorize a whole festive philosophy behind these figures only remained secondary to Welsford. Similarly, she never states the radical oneness of the Fool character in history, the basic identity of fools, jesters, madman and stage clowns (the clown or fool par excellence), but—based on anthropological, historical and sociological evidence—argues in the favor of a maintainable tradition based on the instrument of comparison. Comparison, based on the possibility of relation in the common sense, in between two things, which “seem to be” related to each other. Her special emphasis on the relation of the “actual” fools and the fools “in art” makes only one thing clear: the notion of the fool or clown par excellence behind the figures taken into consideration is just as much difficult to defend, as the radical separation of the two.

In 1940 Mikhail Bakhtin’s dissertation about Rabelais was finished, which obviously had a greater impact on the international level of scholarly opinion. It is a legitimate question to ask, whether Rabelais and His World would have been so influential without the slow and indeterminate preparation of the topic by the Welsford tradition⁴, especially considering the long delay in the true debut of Bakhtin’s book in 1965, when it was also translated to

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English. But, in fact, the encounter between the two works in research became delayed for a long time. Most works produced until the end of the 80’s may refer to one another, but, however thorough they seem to be, we hardly find Enid Welsford’s work from 1935 in the same bibliographies, where Mikhail Bakhtin’s work from 1940 (or 1965) is to be found.\(^5\)

While the time difference between the publishing of the two books obviously made their comparison difficult, the very remarkable introduction of the carnivalesque notion by Bakhtin actually accentuated the several times mentioned but vaguely described background of fools and clowns, the \textit{way of being} in the \textit{time} of popular festivity. At the beginning of Bakhtin’s book, he very definitely identifies the \textit{par excellence} fool or clown, as the medium of the carnival.

They were the constant, accredited representatives of the carnival spirit in everyday life out of carnival season […] they represented a certain form of life which was real and ideal at the same time. They stood on the borderline between life and art, in a peculiar midzone as it were […]\(^6\)

After a few, but relevant remarks on these special figures setting them up in the center of the carnivalesque act, Bakhtin seems to lose his interest in the topic, and the pursuit after the somewhat dead-end concept of the folk grotesque begins. This is where Bakhtin appears to be in the need of Welsford’s focus, which he unfortunately lacks. It is no wonder, that his followers of “carnivalesque studies” were easily turned away from the problem of the medium, even if they never stopped combining the idea of carnivalesque with subsequent

\(^5\) This means that clowns are rarely the focus points of books engaged with Early Modern festivity and books on fools and clowns rarely elaborate on the concept of carnivalism. C. L. Barber, for instance, could not read Bakhtin before 1959 when his \textit{Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy} was published, nor could Walter Kaiser before the publication of \textit{Praisers of Folly} in 1963, and also Weimann’s \textit{Shakespeare und die Tradition des Volkstheaters} (1967) and William Willeford’s \textit{The Fool and His Scepter} (1969) do not seem to know anything about the Bakhtinian carnival. Even an important summary of the fool topic in the 80’s like Sandra Billington’s \textit{A Social History of the Fool} (1984) does not mention Bakhtin and the carnival at all. While Bakhtin obviously influenced Michael Bristol’s \textit{Carnival and Theater} (1985) the Welsfordian aspect of folly and clowning do not play significant roles in his study, neither do they in Jan Kott’s \textit{The Bottom Translation}, who, in 1987, also relies on Bakhtin. In Naomi Conn Liebler’s \textit{Shakespeare’s Festive Tragedy} (1995) the word “clown” hardly appears. David Ruiter does not mention Welsford, fools or clowns in his \textit{Shakespeare’s Festive History} (2003).


phenomena, which—in the true Bakhtinian intention—never could have been brought in, because

[the] problem of the grotesque and of its aesthetic nature can be correctly posed and solved only in relation to medieval folk culture and Renaissance literature. The depth, variety, and power of separate grotesque themes can be understood only within the unity of folk and carnival spirit. If examined outside of this unity, they become one-sided, flat and stripped of their rich content.\(^7\)

Bakhtin’s narrowly self-terminating terminology became a serious hindrance in building further theoretical structures and as irrelevant issues of carnival came to the fore, the clown or fool figure was “lost in translation”.\(^8\) The immediate epistemological relatedness of the carnival and the “Lord of Misrule” was never taken seriously, its questions have been never thoroughly answered from the time of Welsford’s *The Fool*.

Regarded from a certain point of view, then, the folkfestivals seem to consist of concentric rings of folly. They are times of universal licentiousness, when all revellers who take part in them are in a vaguely defined way infected with the prevailing ‘foolishness’. This ‘foolishness’ is, however, concentrated in certain performances which are regarded as buffoon-dances or fool-plays; and in these performances themselves, certain characters—often mere supernumeraries—specialize in folly, chief among whom is the grotesquely disguised figure, the Clown or Fool par excellence. Who then is this Fool?\(^9\)

Of course, there were other serious dilemmas making “clown and fool scholars” even more hesitant. As Bakhtin’s theoretical structure was problematic, but thought-provoking and inspiring as well, Welsford’s work proved to be fragile and indeterminate, hard to rely on. The problem of the delicate *The Fool* was the unifying comparative historical view of its known and well criticized precursors. Because behind Welsford and her main source, the generally accepted E. K. Chambers “*Stages*”\(^10\), James George Frazer sat in his “arm chair” with his frequently challenged *The Golden Bough*, and the equally problematic Cambridge ritualist school\(^11\). The universal fool or clown *par excellence* character can typically be based only on the universal anthropological comparativism of Frazer and the “Covent Garden

\(^{7}\) *Idem*, pp. 51-52

\(^{8}\) It is revealing that Bakhtin himself does not even mention the concept of *grotesque realism* in his excerpts, written on Shakespeare, which he wanted to add to his Rabelais-book, anymore.


\(^{10}\) *The Mediaeval Stage* in 1903 in two and *The Elizabethan Stage* in 1923 in four volumes.

\(^{11}\) Jane Ellen Harrison, Francis Macdonald Cornford, Gilbert Murray and Arthur Bernard Cook.
school of mythology”\(^\text{12}\), which was repudiated by the positivist orientation of anthropology\(^\text{13}\).

Frazer, in his search for the explanation behind the strange customs around the forbidden tree of the Diana Temple in Nemi, committed the “most serious flaw in modern science”, when he brought together heterogeneous phenomena, cultural practices of far and distant cultures, and through simplifying generalizations he came up with universal conclusions. Forgetting the positif importance of the examination of specification and the particular, he made a generalizations of every different into the one, the “culture of humanity”. His method contradicted the methodology of positive sciences which are mainly interested in the details and according to which a few omissions could mislead a whole body of research. Yet a deeper rereading of his contemporary and later criticism shows a more distinguished overall judgment. I am not able to give a thorough survey of the secondary literature here, but most of Frazer’s professional readers, while criticizing his concepts on particular customs, appreciated some of his overall achievements\(^\text{14}\), some reached through false paths. Alfred Nutt emphasized “the psychological adequacy of the main hypothesis” which “not only fits the facts” but “arises naturally and unforcedly out of the facts.”\(^\text{15}\) Frazer clearly caused a methodological dilemma, which also shows itself in the positive comments on his work, as *The Golden Bough* “helped to reveal the full significance of mythology, which otherwise might have remained an airy fancy with no social or psychological relevance to modern humanity.”\(^\text{16}\) While it seems Frazer had only a fragile,


\(^{13}\) I speak of his whole work, from the first edition of *The Golden Bough* in 1890 to the *Aftermath: A Supplement to The Golden Bough* in 1936.


\(^{15}\) Mass review in *Folklore*. 12/2. (June 1901), p. 240

minor effect on his own discipline (although he never declared himself an anthropologist scholar\(^\text{17}\)) he had a huge impact on other ones. Is it possible that he just chose the wrong field?

If the question of “the particular” and “the general” has so deeply destabilized the Welsford tradition, in another sense it also weakened Bakhtin’s legacy, which might be the result of his direct social context. Because Bakhtin mixed literary criticism, philosophy of language, and aesthetics, his “less strict methodological embeddedness” he was never questioned the same way as Welsford. Still, his—less well studied—theoretical background also poses methodological dilemmas. The concept of the carnival hugely bases itself on Freud’s analytical psychology, as the antinomy of the carnivalesque and the \textit{official culture} on the Nietzschean\(^\text{18}\) antinomy of the Dionysian cult and the Apollonian order. Vjačeslav Ivanov, Bakhtin’s friend could be the key figure of the transfer of thoughts\(^\text{19}\). He also searched with conviction for the \textit{one} against the \textit{difference} of the many. He wrote about the prototype of the carnival in the Dionysos cult,

\[\ldots \text{when speaking about an ancient whole-population ritual living so long since in the memory of people, which presents itself in the multitude of data from different ages emphasizing its ancientness with its character itself [... our only mission can be the recognition of the distinct epochs of the several hundred years old ritual, which rather, than bringing changes to the ritual itself brought changes in the relation of the social environment to the ritual, and conversely, in the relation of the ritual to the environment.}^{20}\]

Building on the ideal antinomy of the classical philologist/philosopher, stressing the ritual—later: the carnivalesque act—as the \textit{cathartic} eruption of the \textit{concealed}, in the


\[\text{\footnotesize 18} \text{On Nietzsche and his aggressively “unifying” tendencies: “From all quarters of the Ancient World—to say nothing of the modern—from Rome as far as Babylon, we can prove the existence of Dionysian festivals, the type of which bears, at best, the same relation to the Greek festivals as the bearded satyr, who borrowed his name and attributes from the goat, does to Dionysus himself. In nearly every instance the centre of these festivals lay in extra vagant sexual licentiousness, the waves of which overwhelmed all family life and its venerable traditions; the very wildest beasts of nature were let loose here, including that detestable mixture of lust and cruelty which has always seemed to me the genuine “witches’ draught.”” From \textit{The Birth of Tragedy or Hellenism and Pessimism}. (translated by WM. A. Hausmann) London: George Allen, 1923. pp. 29-30.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 19} \text{The dominant studies about Bakhtin’s sources and his work together on Nietzsche’s and Freud’s heritage with Vjačeslav Ivanov are mostly in Russian and decisively Rusist scholars wrote them. Hungarian scholars are fortunate to have a clever book summarizing the topic written by Léna Szilárd: \textit{A karneválelmélet. Vjaceszlav Ivanovtól Mihail Bahtynig}. [The theory of carnival. From Vjačeslav Ivanov to Mikhail Bakhtin] Budapest: Tankönyvirálog, 1989}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 20} \text{Quoted in Hungarian by Léna Szilárd in: \textit{A karneválelmélet. Vjaceszlav Ivanovtól Mihail Bahtynig}. Budapest: Tankönyvirálog, 1989. p. 26, translated to English by myself.}\]
collective unconscious seemed, to the disjunctive “scientific” eye, a suspicious way of approaching the topic. The discipline—even so many years after Gadamer’s Wahrheit und Methode—very firmly specifies the authorized methods of research in the Welsford-case and nearly never cared about the methodical eclecticism of the Bakhtinian tradition. As the history of fools and clowns par excellence never really became available in the fear of unscientific idealism the carnival was brought in and analyzed in every unsorted phenomenon in the world—even if simultaneously taken as a defective Marxist concept being the instrument of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. While Bakhtin, in his monumental theoretic achievement of the carnival—as it has succinctly been pointed out—was somewhat influenced by the Soviet reality of the extreme social system of the communist dictatorship and its class language\textsuperscript{21}, this side of the Rabelais-book has become, it seems to me, somewhat exaggerated.

The only hope left to address our “archetypical phenomenon” is to maintain an awareness of disciplinary and methodical problems, while working. I would like to set the frames, which are acceptable for most methodological considerations. Without that, this study becomes like the literary traditions mentioned: a person going on vacation to a faraway country with only one article of clothing, the other boarding the plane with all his clothes, but having no idea about the destination\textsuperscript{22}. If there is a topic easy to approach that way, the topic of the clown, the medium of carnival should be it\textsuperscript{23}. This has to be followed by the next decision of my study: if I am not forced to choose between the one and the many different, I choose not to choose at all. I don’t think either of them shows the way to the Thing-in-itself investigated. I think, actually, both of them lead away from it. I think none of


\textsuperscript{23} “[P]erformances of both early modern plays and ritual practices can never be completely historicized”, says Naomi Conn Liebler in Shakespeare’s Festive Tragedy. London – New York: Routledge, 2002. p. 3
the epistemological obstacles stands before the transgressing clown, but—through its transgressing abilities—the clown, as thing, always proves to be identical with itself.

“Clown-studies” thus often leave their categorical structure vague and divert responsibility, referring to the elusiveness of their subject. Their “subjective” readings compare a range of distinct types in their own right, while constantly stating the lack of continuity between any of those. While the studies vigorously divide phenomena by ages, the circus clown is still brought together with the festival fool. As difference is emphasized between different cultures, the medieval French court fool is still compared to the Wawan Sarki in northern Nigeria24. As ontological qualities emphatically “never should be confused”, “innocent” fools appear still together with Robert Armin, the player of clown roles on the Shakespearean stage25. And orthodox holy fools, demonic Vices, ritual clowns of the pueblo Koshare dancers26, fool societies (or Abbeys of Misrule) are pulled into the meaning-historical arguments, whereas the exceedance of the rule of “interrelatedness” is never truly declared.

However, don’t these meanings contradict each other? Does one not exclude the other? Certainly. The clumsy clown isn’t similar to the agile clown in any way. The August is not Harlequin. The Clown-victim (as a desolate illusion of Christ) has nothing in common with the Harlequin (a pretty spare Devil) behaving contrary to every rule.27

And then again, from the other side,

While reading the history of fools we always get the impression that we are following the biography of one particular person, from his birth to his death. Their identities disappear perfectly behind the masque of their common occupation.28

The clown as Thing-in-itself seems like a gravel rolling in a shallow rill: its continuously moving image held above the surface never becomes identical with its images from before or after. The phenomena is intangible in its identity in time or space, never shows the total sameness, the total oneness of itself. As Freud’s iceberg-like subject, it has the richness of

meaning under the water. But whatever it shows us, after all it is the same gravel, the same clown or fool par excellence. Is there a possible relationship between meanings which could account for the living subject behind the discourses about it? Is there anything behind the heteronomically structured mirage in our eyes? The history of interrelating discourses and their well-structured meanings constructs a concept of something as genealogy.

One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that’s to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution for the subject within a historical framework. And this is what I would call genealogy, that is, a form of history that can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, and so on, without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendent in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history. 29

Foucault—as many others in the last century—after giving up the—in his thinking—pointless search for truth the earlier, metaphysical philosophies were busy with, places the emphasis on the historical glance cast on truth. But in his early work—not without interest to my present topic—he leaves traces of the truth existing behind the however controlled glances.

The consciousness of madness, in European culture at least, has never formed an obvious and monolithic fact, undergoing metamorphosis as a homogeneous ensemble. For the Western consciousness, madness has always welled up simultaneously at multiple points, forming a constellation that slowly shifts from one form to another, its face perhaps hiding an enigmatic truth. 30

Whatever we think about these prominent questions in the history of philosophy, folly and the prosopopoeia of folly seem quite extraordinary. The clownish element of the world, only assessed in its basic definition, simply exists, despite all the differences. Clowns are literally everywhere, clowning is ubiquitous. Not only in every culture, age or religion. Where three people come together, soon one will be ridiculed and laughed at. Quoting Bergson, the “comic will come into being, it appears, whenever a group of men concentrate their attention on one of their number” 31. The clown predates written history and even the

forgotten past of formal communication, as laughter is to be understood everywhere in the world by anyone experiencing it. Laughter’s “healing myth” treated as a therapeutic commons sense is closely linked to the periodically renewed social harmony by the ritual intensification of collective experience, which Emile Durkheim’s sociology was the first to mention. This reconciliatory function also helps to interpret the carnival as such, as referred to by Bakhtin’s followers. The momentary assault on the dominant seriousness of the world arises from human existence without any determination, without interest in the recent overcoming of the Platonic metaphysics.

However, it is easy to miss the phenomena being probed after. The history of truth is truly corrupted by discourses of power(s), meanings lost behind the whitening metaphors (Jacques Derrida) and the inability of complete understanding. Without getting into the details of the long and heavy aesthetic debate of its side issues, the only possible area to follow the figure of the clown seems to be the world of art and its periphery, where the only potentiality of autonomy could lie hidden. Its periphery, where Bakhtin himself locates carnival, at the “border line between art and life”; where, next to the relations to the world loaded by discourses there exists another complex structure of relations in the work of art itself, which cannot be dissected into its constituents; where also these first and second relations organically coalesce. Also, this is the very territory where ritual clowning actually shows itself, as the “Lord of Misrule” on the stage of the carnival and the early modern theater. First of all, we don’t have to rely solely on the deep search after forgotten


35 That is, the autonomy of the artwork, as Kant argues in his Critique of Judgement. I do not want to enter the debate about the depths and the degrees of art’s possible autonomy. I use the term, autonomy, to emphasize my esthetician conviction, according to which a work of art (especially one that survived for centuries) can never be easily explained by direct historical (social, economic, political or administrative) bodies of knowledge, mainly used by historians. Art always stands in the way of its own decryptability and always questions one-sided solutions. That makes it memorable and superior to any other “heteronomous beings” of the world.

36 Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World. p. 7

37 I am speaking about the relations of truth and material in Walter Benjamin’s sense, in his text on Goethe’s Elective Affinities.
Elizabethan and Jacobean signs of the carnivalesque (in the worst case, the grotesque), because the medium of the carnival is there, in the center of attention, called by his name: clown and fool. And it is especially so in the grand theatre of Shakespeare. The mimetic theater of Shakespeare—quoting Weimann—constantly undermines and subverts “principles of homogeneity, ‘closure’, and authority in representation” being illuminated by post-structural theories. Multiplicity of social and cultural functions that is, the carnival dimension is sustained inside those plays being performed on stage (not primarily determined by their textual qualities) makes his work central to the problem of carnivalesque clowning. If there is anybody who denies Shakespeare’s involvement in the carnival based on Bakhtin’s neglect of the subject in the Rabelais-book, Bakhtin himself proves him wrong. In the newly translated notes he binds together his concepts of the Toward a Philosophy of Act, the chronotope and the carnival into the topographic gestures on Shakespeare’s stage.

In Shakespeare’s images (similes, metaphors, etc.) both poles are always given—both hell and heaven, angels and daemons, both earth and sky, life and death, top and bottom (they are ambivalent thematically, but not in their tone); they are topographic; they are cosmic, all the elements of the world, the entire universe, are implicated in their play. Shakespeare’s image always feels hell under its feet and heaven above its head (i.e. it feels the actual topography of the stage), it is deeply topographic and liminal.

The topographic gesture locates the speaker and also locates the actor. What about the clown then, always falling down in his plays, and getting back up again, transgressing the border—as the gravediggers in Hamlet or the porter in Macbeth—of “hell” and “earth”, breaking down the “fourth wall”, while speaking and acting always faithfully to the principle of the bodily lower stratum, literary becoming an “ass” in the A Midsummer’s Night’s Dream.

or figuratively for example in *Twelfth Night* or *What You Will* (if there is any sense of “figurativity” on the stage of the topographic gestures).

FESTE: Marry, sir, they praise me and make an ass of me. now my foes tell me plainly I am an ass, so that by my foes, sir, I profit in the knowledge of myself, and by my friends, I am abused; so that, conclusions to be as kisses, if your four negatives make your two affirmatives, why then, the worse for my friends and the better for my foes.  

The clown or fool par excellence, as the medium of carnival is inimitably “himself” on the Shakespearean stage and this should result in a new, holistic carnivalesque interpretation of his work, freed from the strict disciplinary frames inherently contradicting what they try to lay hold of.

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41 *Twelfth Night* (5.1.13-18)
1. “Popular Culture”

As Bristol keenly observes, although “Carnival specifically refers only to festivities that immediately precede Lent, the typical Carnival experience of excess and social derangement was not limited to a single annual blowout”42. There is a lot to read on regular festivity in Early Modern England, it is a broad and scarcely categorizable area truly appropriate to be called “a second life outside officialdom” by Bakhtin43. Still, the scholarly tradition “was forced” to choose another phrase rather than the indefinite expression used by the Russian thinker. While Barber selected the harmless festive for his book title, he emphasized the increasingly popular word, “popular”, a term already considerably problematic. Following Weimann’s monograph, translated and also somewhat altered into Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater, the term “popular tradition”—also interpretable without “theater”—became defining. After the several-decade-long “trench warfare” about the meaning of “popular”, it is hard to argue in favor of the term. Also in the “narrow” sense used by literary studies dealing with Shakespeare (more preciously: the social surroundings of Shakespeare in Early Modern England) the term “popular” is part of an intensive debate. Actually, I do not have the intention to use the term which has been proved so troublesome outside this chapter, but still, some clarifications have to be made. Without trying to put an end to the ongoing war over the terms “popular” or “popularity”, I will simply point out some problematic issues in literary criticism, often caused by a conceptual fight fought for its own sake, while introducing the socio-historical reality of the carnivalesque.

The Meaning of “Popular”

The first problem of the concept of “popular” is that it has rarely been really reflected on in the past when it was used in various texts. Our puzzlement partly comes from the identification of what we may mean by “popular” (culture, music, fiction, etc.) in the course of time and how, with the identification in hand, how we may trace it in history, and how to find a reliable textual corpus to do so. For literary scholars, the lack of texts is disappointing,

traditions without a textual body are invisible and cloudy: more like spirits than substantial beings. The non-textual element of literature—its existence being itself the biggest dilemma—became a taboo in the era ruled by post-structuralism and New Historicism. Although Shakespeare-scholars did not all reject the possibility of a “popular tradition” in Shakespeare’s time, they chose not to reckon with it because they did not feel safe in their paradigms when trying to delineate the precise scope of these terms. It seemed wiser to remain “unconcerned” than being misled and getting involved in “the scholars’ heresy”.

Thus, the common opinion about “popular” traditions, i.e. that they rarely have contemporary literary sources and that they are part of an oral and mimetic heritage, still persists. “Popular culture” and “the carnival themselves are often known as impromptu and ephemeral, consciously left in these forms. Whereas the major works describing the traditions truly are from the 18th and 19th centuries, this opinion is still an eyesore, a disproportionate exaggeration. Sometimes there are useful texts which survived from certain periods that appear to belong to the ‘popular tradition’, these texts created by individuals from the subordinate classes. These individuals were fluent in the verbal idiom and the intellectual traditions of their “popular culture”. Their position cannot be understood according to the “trinity” structure of the aesthetic process, involving artwork, artist and recipient. Since it is possible to argue that a specific text is not art, while claiming that its performance is, it may be claimed, it seems, that the carnival transforms the author of the text into participant as well. This special functioning of the carnival is able to undermine recent literary theories about literature with ease. The individual, writing about the festive act himself becomes a constituent, a part of the artwork; she may be a recipient enjoying the artwork she created as well. Because, quoting the convincing definition of the book Shakespeare and Elizabethan Popular Culture, “popular culture”—contrary to the “popular” after the Early Modern period— is not something “for the people”, but “of the people.” Dramatic enactments of Bible stories, festive rituals associated with holidays, clowning, old romances told around a winter fire and other products of the oral tradition

45 Idem, p. 45
(proverbs, ballads, songs) are included, too. The social fabric which Shakespeare grew up with, was still full of these old traditions. With the axiomatic view that he was the “sole author” of the emerging commercial-popular (the new “popular”) productions in the theatre, we still should not “underestimate the extent to which Shakespeare’s writing itself was created from materials that might genuinely be described as being of the people”47. And indeed, there is plenty of documentary evidence about this “popular culture” with a serious impact on Early Modern English drama. This impact is probably much more important than our medium-edged (thus blindly text-based) criticism was willing to admit, since—as David Scott Kastan noted—Shakespeare most likely even exhibited a “lack of interest in publishing his plays” as the entire institution of literary authorship emerged only later in the history of theatre.48

Most of this “popular impact” was already processed in the monumental work of Robert Weimann, who was able to organize all the “scattered and specialized studies of the isolated aspects of the problem” unifying them into a single rubric. While commending Weimann, the conjurer of “popular culture”, his critics often argue his basic assumption, that is, the linear structure of his work tracking theatrical art from the “undeveloped”, feudal “popular” or folk culture to its perfection in the “capitalist” Elizabethan and Jacobean drama of Shakespeare.49 This view strongly linked itself to Shakespeare criticism and is always searching for the “industrial revolution” in his age. And this is just a minor issue to the strengthening of another anachronistic view always associating this “popular” with the poor class of Early Modern society in opposition to the other, ruling class (sometimes directly the bourgeoisie).50

The meaning of Early Modern “popular” always falls to pieces when one of its derivatives, populous is considered. Our language after Marx and mostly Hegel—detectable

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47 Ibid.
50 As Laroque sharply states in Shakespeare’s Festive World. Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage. Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 5, “The idea that festivals, poor and rich alike, draw upon the same mythical and imaginary stock is an attractive van, for it could blow apart the watertight compartments set up by ideologies and call into question the idea that the class struggle is universal. Nor does the suggestion of a mutual interaction and influence between the various manifestations of festivity of the period necessarily imply an old fashioned, paternalistic view of the situation. Festivity is profoundly ambivalent and, for that very reason, tends to repel dialectical interpretations.”
in Bakhtin’s language, too—tends to be ruled by two-sided structures, particularly so in studies on “popularity” and this tendency immanently places some limits for theoretical creativity. Thus “popular culture” becomes a counterculture, the festive freedom-will of the plebeian majority. This overt or covert assumption works even in innovative attempts, like Bristol’s, when the search for “popular” becomes a counterpart of the poststructuralist concepts of power and authority.

The literary subjects [...] produced their work not only by ‘looking up’ towards a sinister but powerfully seductive image of ‘power’, but also by ‘looking down’ towards the vitality, the continuity, the relative stability and abundance of popular culture.51

Knowing that every deeper analysis clearly shows “festive audience” as a socially much more sophisticated structure, many tried to free themselves of these dialectical presuppositions (as Bakhtin himself, through dialogism). Robert Redfield’s universal Peasant Society and Culture52 invented the concept of “little tradition” of festivals and villages standing next to the “great culture” in schools and churches, which Peter Burke also took up in his study entitled Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe53. Unfortunately, because of the multitude of colorful events and customs in schools and churches connected to the carnivalesque festivals, this opposition is hard to maintain. Studies of Early Modern England thereafter—especially shaped by literary sources—recognized a less slippery ground and set up the notion of “popular” against the ascetic, dry puritan authority much more part of a historical reality. “Popular” became the “Catholico-pagan” tradition54 of the folk, the “culture of laughter” against the ruling Puritan seriousness55. Still, the phenomena maintained its sociopolitical definition, pointing to a suppressed group of people, even in the opposing view proposed by others, were it became treated as yet another “instrument” of political and cultural domination (as for example in the hands of the Stuart’s)56, turning back

53 Peter Burke, Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe. London: Temple Smith, 1978
to the power-based thinking of Foucault’s post-structuralism. Following Foucault (as already seen in the History of Madness) we are forced to claim that textual history only reflects the history of view of the ruling authority (the one dominating the discourse). This seems to be justifiable at first, because it explains that there are only few traces of the carnivalesque in a textual form. Nevertheless, in this reasoning, it doesn’t matter how much effort is made to gather information on the plebeian-carnivalesque world, because—at least according to Foucault—the only sources of information already speak the language of the dominant culture. Research is doomed to be stuck in the power discourse of the studied age. This reasoning is wrong because, when combined with the social view of “early popularity”, necessarily takes us to a dead end.

Many tried to draw attention to these problems. Weimann himself was aware of the dangers in visioning a clear “plebeian ideology” behind the Misrule tradition, which was based on much more heterogeneous social foundations. The crowd at the “popular festivity” rather than homogeneously confronting something beyond itself was building on interior, mock-confrontations of all kind, like the opposition between sexes, different age-groups, the town and the countryside (which the mock-opposition between social classes was a part of, too)\(^57\). The social heterogeneity of the carnivalesque crowd is essential enough to provide a stable foundation for Bakhtin’s heteroglossia, a linguistic reflection of carnival, where “speech types overlap, interpenetrate, exchange terms and expressions, and in general shadow each other so intimately that no monopoly of knowledge is ever achieved without contamination by what it purports to exclude.”\(^58\)

Many authors of Early Modern textual sources themselves have been “culturally ‘amphibious’—reared in a community of ‘country people’ and ‘old woemen’ [sic!] before [their] education in the texts and values of a literate society.”\(^59\) Following Bakhtin, we may see, that for the participants of the carnival, the inner picture of the world matters much more, as the subversion of everything ideological, rather than standing up for any hypothetical ideology of festivity. Otherwise, losing its inner complexity, the polyphony of

\(^57\) See for example François Laroque, Shakespeare’s Festive World. Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage. Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 32
languages and *dialogism*—inherently working in the “grotesque novel”—could not function at all. The participant taking part in the carnival simultaneously as artist, as the work of art and as a member of the audience can come from any social group, bringing all his social dilemmas into the mock reality and adding it to the joint act of Misrule. For the normative effort intending to separate different festive acts connected to different social groups, it is almost impossible to understand this tradition, which, it seems, was never really concerned with “separating itself” from other trends referred to above. There were, undoubtedly, different customs in different areas of the *carnivalesque act*, from a celebrating village family through university communities and festive masses to the Revels by the court. But these took place on the same dates of the calendar year, and altogether made the *carnivalesque act* “a whole”. It was their inner discourse which constituted *carnival*, when the court celebrated in parallel with the events in the villages 60, on the twelve days of Christmas, on May Day or the Festival of 17 November, with the same tastes for masques and disguises 61. Henry VIII and also Elisabeth I were willing to feast with the commoners, stepping out onto the street in the clothes of Robin Hood 62, and giving a marvelous example of the old carnivalesque unity, which certainly took until James I, who was the first to close doors on the streets and preferred his “private merriment” 63.

**Festivities**

The textual sources of Early Modern “popular festivity”, or *carnival*, like Thomas Nache’s *Lenten Stuffs* and *lacke-a-Lente* are already satisfyingly introduced by scholars like Michael  

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60 François Laroque, *Shakespeare’s Festive World*. Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 72
62 François Laroque, *Shakespeare’s Festive World*. Ibid.
63 I am not speaking about Bakhtin’s so called “official culture”, which obviously had its completely different origins and functions already in the medieval world and before. The “official culture” as historical reality, is not a natural antithesis of *carnival*, because it is a simply representation of ideology, and there is no possible earthly confrontation between *an ideology* and *anti-ideology*, only between different ideologies. *Conservativism against liberalism*, as Jew-Christian world order against world order of the Muslim fundamentalists or the Sovietunion against the USA can be a war of ideologies. Those have nothing to do with the order against disorder (or “not-order”) opposition which also means *world built up of ideologies* against *world smashed free of ideologies*. 
D. Bristol. The second chapter of the *Carnival and Theater* discovers three definitive aspects of the festive reality:

1. The mocking of the privileges establishing social hierarchy, also through parodic travesties.
2. Carnivalesque conflicts, productive mock battles to fertilize life, like the battle of *Carnival versus Lent*.
3. Claim for material abundance and independence for the whole community (through the bringing back of the *Golden Age* and simultaneously evolving into *utopia*)⁶⁴.

The problem of the origin of carnivalesque festivity leads us back to the methodological division of thought. It is one of the most serious challenges of recent work done on the carnivalesque not to entangle itself in the impermeable roots of this pointless, but constantly over-emphasized discussion (partly originating from the process this study tries to reveal in its conclusion). On the one side, based on the similarity of certain elements in the carnivalesque tradition, there is a unifying will among folklorists and anthropologists, tracing the tradition back to pre-Christian fertility rituals. The aforementioned aspects can be complemented by the powerful role of *resurrection* connected to mock battles. After the mock battles of characters in the Mummer’s play there is always one figure slain in the fight, who must be revived, frequently by the “quack doctor” figure, with some kind of magic potion, or a mysterious cure. These recurrent elements and their recurring sequence are often identified as originating—through the roman Saturnalia—from the same ancient ritual form, universal for all the tribal human societies, largely relying on Frazerean anthropology⁶⁵. Chambers, as a representative of this tradition, speaks about “folk-drama’s” central incident symbolizing “the *renouveau*, the annual death of the year or the fertilization spirit and its annual resurrection in spring”⁶⁶. Disher takes the Saturnalian origins of folk, university and Inns of Court festivities for granted, together with the even Saturnalian revels at Whitehall⁶⁷.

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⁶⁴ The last part is in my opinion highly problematic. The ideas of the *Golden Age* and *utopia* should be banished from carnivalesque theory. I will take on the question in the next chapter.

⁶⁵ Meanwhile, this always recurring pattern of time behind the festive forms of the *homo religiosus* became actually an anthropological and philosophical matter of course for more accepted scholars, like Anton Gurevich (in his *A középkori ember világképe*. [The worldview of the medieval man] (translated by Előd Nóra) Budapest: Kossuth, 1974) and Mircea Eliade (in his *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Or, Cosmos and History*).


ceremonial church festivals, and indeed all the “anti-Christian” miming differs in no way from the earlier burlesques of pagan ceremonies. In Barber, the “Saturnalian pattern is depicted as a well-understood social custom that reflects quite consistently the shared ideological horizon of Elizabethan and Jacobean England.” They mobilize a large quantity of evidence and make a plausible argument on their own, but never question their methodological basis.

The other tradition, criticizing the unifying tendencies in the former, is usually called the advanced, the “modern” one. In fact, it really became widespread later, as a response, radically disagreeing with the former views, as an antithesis without performing a synthesis. For a much deeper understanding of one specific custom the “indefensible” comparative method was given up. “Textual evidence” tended to replace “hypothesis”. Their wonderful case studies base themselves on other sources, questioning contemporary conditions, political surroundings, economy and society, but they get lost in details, they bypass the uncanny similarities. To oppose the previous tradition sometimes for its own sake, they ignore the central topics of their predecessors. The problem of the “origin” does not seem to be enticing for them any longer because of the absence of hypothesis-free, clear, material evidence, as it can be read, for example, in Ronald Hutton’s The Rise and Fall of Merry England, which was published in 1994. This way, this “modern” tradition slowly eliminated itself. Without scrutinizing origins, the carnivalesque tradition became a loose structure of “popular”, with events occasionally added to, or removed from, the phenomena on display, depending on the argument.

In any case, the “popular” customs that evolved in England seem to be separable from the “popular culture” emerging on the Continent in a few terms. The French, German, Italian and other continental traditions are somewhat closer related. For example, there were less fool societies or fraternities on the British islands. (Yet they still had a few.) This tradition was more or less replaced by the Boy Bishop tradition mainly in communities of school children and the cloisters of the cathedrals. The Boy Bishop (episcopus puerorum, sometimes episcopus Nicholatensis) was elected between 6 and 28 December as an anti-sacral mock-ruler performing mock rituals and mimicking the sacred ecclesial ceremonies of the Church.

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It was closely related to the Feast of Fools (festum stultorum) in the cathedrals of England, were its 300 years of history can still be more or less traced. There is written evidence about the tradition already in 1222, when the cathedral of Salisbury owned “one gold ring for the Feast of the Boys” and 1225, when John de Belemains offered the St. Paul cathedral “a white mitre fringed with gold for the boy bishop”. Although the Church tried to suppress this tradition as early as in 1398, and the election of the Boy Bishop was banned in 1541 by the Protestant government of Henry VIII, this ritual was revived by Catholic Mary Tudor. As Keith and Laroque observe, this had a close relation with the tradition of “barring out the schoolmaster” and it is well described in Thomas Dekker’s The Shoemaker’s Holiday.70

While the Boy Bishop tradition and its pagan mockery was frequently criticized by the authority, there were also truly dangerous festivals disturbing social peace. The Shrove Tuesday celebrations, directly preceding the Lent period, tended to fall overboard. The carnivalesque revelries heightened the mood until fights and vandalism arose, many brothels and theaters were smashed. Andrew Gurr wrote about the Shrove Tuesday of 1617 in his The Shakespearean Stage. The unleashed passion became so unrestricted and the damage so great, that the king had to hang many of the revelers afterwards. Beside the theaters and the brothels, London’s Inns of Court were popular venues for carnival festivities as well, and also had their own festive mock-kings, like the Christmas Lord (or Prince of Purpoole) in the Gray’s Inn, the Prince d’Amour in the Middle Temple, or the King of the Cockneys in Lincoln’s Inn. The mock-kingdoms were attended (played for/perform by) many London citizens of many social classes. It was especially popular among the university students of London Law School, Oxford and Cambridge, who also organized these Lord of Misrule festivities, and burlesqued the authorities of the “official” world. Shakespeare himself may also have been there and probably also featured in some plays.

While these “Saturnalian” events successfully attracted the folk of the cities, the festive folk traditions of the countryside ran parallel with those. The Mummers’ play is the first documented folk play of this kind, its first transcription as the Reversby Sword Play dates

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from 1779. Ronald Hutton names the Mummers’ play the most archaic and persistent form of English folk drama. Of course, that the only textual piece of evidence comes from the late 18th century, seriously complicates the search for the origins of these customs. Still, it is probable that there were many mummers around in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England, if use the term in a little “broader” sense. Many who wanted to deal with these customs of earlier times turned to the comparative methodology again. The Mediaeval Stage in 1903, and Laroque’s Shakespeare et la fête almost 85 years later also found its familiar elements, the symbolic sacrifices, the mock-combats and the revivals of the dead closely related to other festive activities, most of all with the tradition of Sword dance. According to Chambers, the Mummers’ play looks like a Sword dance with a more elaborated dramatic plot structure, frequently with St. George as protagonist, and with a madman ritually killed and revived thereafter, closing the story with a joyful dance performance. Chambers also writes about the Plough play, as a type of the Mummers’ play, acted out during the Christmas holidays. That Christmas custom involved a lot of characters, moving from house to house, among whom there frequently was a Madman as well, who usually was called Tom.

Following Chambers, we can claim that the folk tradition of Sword dance was not unique at all. Based on the mock swordfights and the revival element, the parodied or symbolic sacrifice of the madman reminds him of the Morris dance, another well spread custom in the 16th and 17th centuries, with the performers wearing “bells which jingle at every step.” Miles, another believer of an ancient origin behind the customs, simply states, that the Morris dances were the southern versions of the Sword dances chiefly played in the north. Chambers concluded that blackened faces were common in both and both had the same grotesque figures. According to Miles’s sources, while Morris dancers sometimes used

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72 Ibid.
swords, in some “Continental accounts” bells are mentioned to be used in Sword dances. The Morris dances were also repeatedly performed in company with the *May-game* (as Philip Stubbes reports in the *Anatomie of Abuses*), including thus the famous figures of the Fool and Maid Marion, a man in the clothes of a woman. The first documented “mourice daunce” was actually performed on winter festivity, 2 January 1494, not so long before May Day became more popular and the first “maypole” was erected in Westminster abbey at the command of Henry VII on 22 May, 1506.

While many critics emphasize the differences between the aforementioned traditions and the Robin Hood plays, others easily relate them. Reginald Tiddy claimed that these traditions are not to be compared but the idea of sharp separation was even rejected by “rigorous historians” like Ronald Hutton in his *Stations of the Sun*. Laroque, as a supporter of Charles Read Baskerville, thinks about the custom as the “summer version” of the Mummers’ play, also including Maid Marion (thereafter Maid Marian) and the sacrificed Madman, who was revived at the end of the play. As Baskerville argues, the Wooing play is also defined in close relation to the Mummers’ play, with the only thematic specialization to “love”, plotting the Madman’s wooing for the “Fair One”. It is difficult and perhaps even unnecessary to choose between these opinions, because the differences in the customs, and even in one custom’s local specifications are just as striking as the structural and elemental similarities.

This short account of different carnivalesque traditions may seem cursory and most of the sources undoubtedly seem to be outdated by recent historical achievements. Ronald Hutton, in his *The Rise and Fall of Merry England*, and particularly in his *Stations of the Sun* thoroughly describes the debate between the comparatists, originating every festive custom from prehistorical rituality, and the more rigorous historians, who, through painstaking work, discovered the divergent forces. Hutton mentions how Barbara Lowe in the beginning

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and A. G. Barrand in 1980, for instance, drew attention to the fact that the Morris dance, instead of being a traditional rural custom, moved from to the neighboring towns and only after that to the countryside, from London, and even more, how it actually became popular first in the Royal Palace. Also, they found evidence that festive clothing and the costumes changed from time to time, and even discovered that the same dances could have been performed at different carnival-events of the festive calendar. There is not much to gain from these debates, because it is not the historical evidence, but the psychological necessity which matters. Festive traditions existed and expressed the collective will for transgressing the contemporary borders of reality. Besides the problem of how customs were connected directly or indirectly, what the chronological order of festive trends was, how the events were chronicled or not, the existence of the carnival when these customs intermingled could never be ruled out, because the dates of holidays—even if locally various—remained. Every carnival date seems to contain events, small or massive, holiday customs, seasonal rituals and other forms of communal activities performed together, in towns and in villages, in palaces and on the lands of farmers, feeding Bakhtin’s carnivalesque spirit.

As some borders truly have to be drawn, following Bakhtin, I separate the recurrent—carnivalesque—festive revels organized by the court (by the Lord of Misrule for a time) for main carnival dates, and the particular, “official” pageantries mostly serving the ruling ideology. While there were, obviously, mixed events, partly “official” and carnivalesque, the balance was not maintainable. Either the "official" seriousness became overdriven into ridiculous, or the carnivalesque remained formal and insincere. The ritual world, corrupted by the parallel presence of the carnivalesque and the “official” haunted historical and literal scholarship for centuries. The basic mistake, equally for the unifying and the separating will was their committed search for the usual. Not every event goes the way it should go, and this is particularly true about the Renaissance carnivalesque. In the topic of “popular culture” in Early Modern England, there is no possible solution to the definition of usual. The usual itself can only be stated about the “official” world, with the recurring strategies of ideology. But the carnivalesque being “pure negativity” is not graspable by sentences, like

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81 I have to emphasize, that I am not speaking about any kind of class struggle. The “official”—the one opposed to carnival—means a lot more, then the life given (or dictated) as “normality” by the power of the actual political authority. It is the world as being experienced, the epistemological “normality” with all the ideologies and powers working in the actual historical consciousness. When opposed to carnival, official is not an ideology, but the world perceived as ideological.
“the carnival usually works like …” Especially not in the age when carnival, and it’s very particular, aesthetic perception of the world was slowly cast away, parallel with its obvious impact on the English Renaissance theatre.

How Theater is “Popular”

Burke himself mentions how Carnival was the favorite time for the performance of plays, and how these plays are hard to understand properly without some knowledge on Carnival rituals. Although opinion on the impact of “popular festive culture” again proved to be a watershed between scholars of the two kinds, the contemporary historian considers the “popular origin” of the theater of his time self-evident, stating that

These or the like exercises have been continued till out time, namely in stage plays, [...] a play by the parish Clerks of London at the Skinners well besides Smithfield: which continued three days together, the king Queen and Nobles of the realm being present. And of another, [...] which lasted eight days, and was of matter from the creation of the world, whereat was present most part of the Nobility, and Gentry of England. Of late time in place of those Stage plays, hath been used Comedies, Tragedies, Interludes, and Histories, both true and feigned: For the acting whereof certain public places have been erected.

Still, even scholars of the “Early Modern popular” seem to be overly cautious, stating that “primitive folk drama may yield relatively little in the way of profound symbolic meanings, and its influence on the later professional theater was minimal.” In any case, the audience of the early theatre is seen unanimously as a huge and socially heterogenic community of people, which is very similar to the audience (or participants) of the festive events. As the carnivalesque events—constituting the carnivalesque act—, the plays also had their intention to draw from all social classes, welcome the pageantry the same way as

university students or even the monarch of England, without any drastic modifications in the process of the performance. While the theatrical industry develops and institutionalizes, the system of supply and demand develops commercialization and the performative art of the theatre becomes partly the textual art of drama—topics discussed exhaustively enough in recent works—the festive, carnivalesque, and the ritual nature of the theater begins to fade away. But in Shakespeare’s time the relationship between actors and audience is still more than their being under the same roof. And the heritage of the carnival in the theatre was of a visible kind. This was at least true, because, as Jan Kott observed, carnival polyphony, “the meeting of various experiences, of various ‘ways of speaking,’ may appear not in the dialogue of characters but in the ‘dialogue’ of various ‘theaters,’ of various theatrical forms in one play.” Perhaps that is the reason behind the increasing attacks on the theatre, which also challenged performances in the 17th century, based on the historical crusade against the carnivalesque world. The aggressive ideology of seriousness arose parallel or even earlier to the commercialization of the theaters, and started a war against the carnival on several different fronts already in the 16th century.

**Early Attacks**

Naomi Conn Liebler’s study takes up the topic were Barber left it, and tries to draw attention to the ritual and festive elements, perhaps even ritual and festive deep structure in tragedy. She dwells a lot on how pagan, or, more “politely”, “folklore” ritual processes could unconsciously function in drama regardless of the conscious beliefs of the common audience. So if “plays can be viewed as ritual enactments in their own right and therefore extensions of Pre-reformation rituals by means other than the Church,” this probably was able to disturb the more attentive observers coming from the intellectuals of the Protestant

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church. The question of how the Catholic tradition and the customs of the carnivalesque folk “culture” were mingled is secondary for the researchers who based their “popular” definition on the antinomy of the old, common, “Catholico-pagan” confronting the Protestant, puritan seriousness of the royal authority. Seriousness waged war on festive culture, from local repressions of the Church to the nationwide proclamations of the monarchs even earlier than the well-known ones in 1537, in 1543, and 1549. In 1539, the pageant of Saint John’s Day, with its famous Midsummer Watch instituted by Henry III in 1253, was suppressed by Henry VIII. In 1547 the Corpus Christi was suppressed, which from the time of 1264 meekly accepted quasi-pagan dramatic performances and processions in e. g. York and Chester. Henry’s cultural crusade on 22 July 1541 declared, that

...from henceforth all suche superstitions be loste and clyerlye extinguisshed throughoute all this his realmes and dominions, forasmoch as the same doo resemble rather the unlawfull superstition of gentilitie [paganism], than the pure and sincere religion of Christe.

Either because of the lack of resources, or the earnest determination, especially by Elizabeth’s less interest and less rigor, the bans and prohibitions were still not enforced on the people, so the carnivalesque spirit still had its annual appearance on the streets and marketplaces of England for a long time. Still, many changes are observable and the debate over carnivalesque events was an ongoing topic in Elizabethan and Jacobean public life. The Protestant England kept 27 feast days with the addition of the Sundays, which was 75%
less than the feast days in the Catholic period before\textsuperscript{95}. This was a drastic way to change the order of everyday life which, not surprisingly, affected the whole population and became a constant point of debate. Shakespeare likely had an opinion on this matter?

We have to count with the involvement of theatrical art in the puritan prosecution of idleness, drunkenness and idolatry. Because not only festive customs were banned, but whole festive genres, entertainer types (clowns, Vices) were persecuted by puritan ethics, also in the theaters. As Leah S. Marcus states, “Phillip Stubbes and also other controversialists condemned the London Stage with the same language that they used for mummers’ plays and May games”\textsuperscript{96}. Also there was the not insignificant contemporary opinion on the theater being a more “harmful realization of carnival”, as “amateur performances that actually coincide with holidays” seemed more tolerable than the events at public playhouses that offer “to provide a holiday experience without a formal liturgical sanction” which is clearly “a resort of idleness”\textsuperscript{97}. And of course, while Stubbes, Sidney and Prynne aggressively attacked the Lord of Misrule customs and the carnivalesque elements of the theatre, the “Catholico-pagan” and puritan antinomy again proves to be an exaggerated generalization, because not all contemporaries who held such an opinion were actually puritans\textsuperscript{98}. As the social, horizontal approach to the “popular”, emphasizing “poverty fighting against wealth” is clearly enforced, the other, vertical approach of Catholicism against Protestantism is also far-fetched. There are still many things to understand, like the incomprehensible friendship between Phillip Sidney and Richard Tarlton. The latter chose the former as godfather for his son, while Sidney (with his aesthetics) was a committed Protestant enemy of his carnivalesque profession. Still, Sidney’s argument already reveals a new, aesthetic condemnation of the “low” humour of carnivalesque, further developed by Nicolas Boileau, Lord Shaftesbury, Voltaire, Gottsched and Winckelmann\textsuperscript{99}.

\textsuperscript{96} Idem, p. 50
\textsuperscript{99} This tradition is the change in aesthetics I frequently refer to.
[Our] comedians think there is no delight without laughter, which is very wrong; for though laughter may come with delight, yet cometh it not of delight, as though delight should be the cause of laughter; but well may one thing breed both together. Nay, rather in themselves they have, as it were, a kind of contrariety. For delight we scarcely do, but in things that have a conveniency to ourselves, or to the general nature; laughter almost ever cometh of things most disproportioned to ourselves and nature. Delight hath a joy in it, either permanent or present; laughter hath only a scornful tickling. For example, we are ravished with delight to see a fair woman, and yet are far from being moved to laughter. We laugh at deformed creatures, wherein certainly we cannot delight. We delight in good chances, we laugh at mischances. We delight to hear the happiness of our friends and country, at which he were worthy to be laughed at that would laugh.100

Sidney’s thoughts from Hamlet’s mouth, when speaking about the dangers of the clowns playing, actually mislead generations of scholars into thinking that Shakespeare himself was an enemy of this undetermined “popular culture”.

Shakespeare and the “Popular Culture”

The argument about Shakespeare’s involvedness in, or absentia from, “popular culture” could not be more anachronistic, as the word “culture” itself only got into England in the 18th century from Germany. Still, the debate has its own literary history, with several instances of internal and social influence. The introductory essay of *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Popular Culture* by Neil Rhodes and Stuart Gillespie suggests to demonstrate how “the grounding of so much of Shakespeare’s work in the popular cultural forms of his own age has been an important factor in his continued popularity down to the twenty-first century”. Actually, we should consider some issues with the “continued popularity of Shakespeare” and also with the “continued popularity of ‘popular’” itself. Considering the literary history of Shakespeare’s popularity, a few lessons can be learned.

1. The assessment of Shakespeare’s work is determined occasionally by the festive content of his plays and also the opposite: the festive content of his plays can only be imagined in relation to Shakespeare’s actual assessment. Quality judgment usually precedes and affects research.

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2. Shakespeare’s plays are treated as “popular” on three different levels, rarely combined in one study. The plays deep structure can be fundamentally festive and ritual, they can have festive elements, mainly linguistic, as decorative bells on the textual body, and can be opinion-type reviews, comments by the playwright on the “popular-debate” of his own time.

While the present study, like all the others, particularly tries to find a better understanding of the carnivalesque Shakespeare (in all the remaining chapters), it also tries to determine in advance how it is not going to proceed. So I have to shortly deal with my antecedents searching for “popularity” in Shakespeare’s work.

Gillespie and Rhodes mention, how “Shakespeare was for a century and a half after his death reputed to be barbarous, vulgar, Gothic” and that “his work as a whole was spoiled by lowness and spectacular failures of taste”\(^\text{102}\). The upcoming seriousness of the world relentlessly challenged him, first through puritan ethics, after that in the aesthetics of the “refined taste” and many other dangers yet not mentioned, seeking to banish carnivalesque from the world of art\(^\text{103}\). As Keith Thomas observes, “the new cult of decorum thus meant that it was only the vulgar who could go on laughing without restraint”. Soon, in 1649 “a contemporary observed that those ‘most apt to laughter’ were ‘children, women and the common people’”\(^\text{104}\). I think about this age—in terms of the lessons above—as one that rejects the carnivalesque (old “popular”) world with its taste of the “lower stratum of the body” and therefore degrades Shakespeare. Samuel Pepys’ well known opinion was one of the many, when he saw the pure carnivalesque *Midsummer’s Night’s Dream* in 1662.

[We] saw “Midsummer’s Night’s Dream,” which I had never seen before, nor shall ever again, for it is the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life. I saw, I confess, some good dancing and some handsome women, which was all my pleasure.\(^\text{105}\)

The subsequent generations didn’t have the distance to separate Shakespeare’s work and its festive elements, they have seen them as a functioning “whole”. Shakespeare’s work

\(^{102}\) *Idem*, p. 2

\(^{103}\) While having many issues with the misplaced notion, Bakhtin’s work was probably also aimed at this in the disappearance of grotesque realism.

\(^{104}\) Keith Thomas, “The place of laughter in Tudor and Stuart England.” *TLS* (January 1977), p. 80

\(^{105}\) *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*. (edited by Braybrooke, Richard Griffin, Baron) London – New York: Frederick Warne and Co., 1879. Monday 29 September 1662 (Michaelmas day). These opinions degraded the play to a dancing-singing show for 200 years, until Kott’s enlightening *The bottom translation*.
is essentially festive, he actually deals with the problem of carnivalesque, perhaps even takes
the side of the carnival, through the scenic and linguistic use of its phenomena, and loses in
this battle of history against the army of seriousness. For a considerable time, the judgment
on Shakespeare’s corresponds to the judgment on carnival.

Gillespie and Rhodes continue with the second half of the 18th century, when “popular
culture itself was revalued in terms of the genius of the folk”\textsuperscript{106}. The interest in the “folk
traditions” arose and Shakespeare, together with Homer got to be viewed as authentically
bardic, assisted by the theories of the \textit{sublime}. In this age the “deep functioning of
carnivalesque” is emphasized against the “commenting on the dispute of carnival and
\textit{seriousness}”. Folk art occurs as the origin of the theater based on the local immediacy
against the linear descent of the \textit{one Greek culture}, as every nation

\begin{quote}
will create its drama out of its history, out of the spirit of the age, manners, opinions,
language, national prejudices, traditions, and pastimes, even out of carnival plays and
puppet plays (just as the noble Greeks did from the chorus). And what it creates will
be drama if it achieves its dramatic purpose among this people. As the reader will
see, we have arrived among the \textit{toto divisis ab orbe Britannis} and their great
Shakespeare.\textsuperscript{107}
\end{quote}

Still, however much Herder and his followers raised their awareness of those who were
ready to “explain, defend, condemn, excuse, worship, slander, translate, and traduce”
Shakespeare, “all of whom he cannot hear”, the long period of violent intervention—for
example by Nahum Tate—was already irreversible. As Gillespie and Rhodes state,
Shakespeare again was “propelled into the elite”, that is, Shakespeare was translated and
rendered suitable for the role of “elite literature”. His importance soon became essential, so
his works had to be reread and reinterpreted through every occurring new literary paradigm.
The plays had to be proven as valuable in every tradition of literary theory, and particularly
“high literature”, even if opposed to the redefined “popular” in the meaning of “low”. And
Shakespeare’s “highness” became also misjudged for being “high” in a social sense\textsuperscript{108}.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[106] Ibid.
\item[108] Patterson argues, that the “elite Shakespeare”, who only writes about kings and lords and defines his topics
against the “lowborns” became a commonplace for the conservatives from Coleridge to Tillyard, democrats as
Hazlitt or Whitman and even Marxists, like Terry Eagleton. \textit{Shakespeare and the Popular Voice}. Oxford: Basil
\end{footnotes}
Coleridge argues that Shakespeare is “never angry with [the passions and follies of a mob], but hugely content with holding up its absurdities to its face; and sometimes you may trace a tone of almost affectionate superiority”109. Of course, the transition of Shakespeare into a “philosophical aristocrat” was easy enough, after the work done by the Pepys-Tate era, by removing festive scenes and characters from the plays. The new, transitional period became burdened with inconsistency. And while the legend of his undeniable genius arose, his interpretation was narrowed to the recurrent certification rehearsals of different literary trends.

“Folk drama” in Early Modern England became an area of the new, “scholarly” interest after G. L. Gomme’s The Village Community in 1890 and the Christmas Mummers in 1897, won its respective legitimacy with E. K. Chambers’s The Mediaeval Stage and The English Folk Play in 1903 and 1933. After that, the context of Shakespeare and “popular culture” became a plausible topic—however stuck in the so-called folklorist (Chambers) disciplinary tradition. The other literary traditions persistently denied its justness, as Disher observed in 1925110, even if the direct references were already clearly visible in the work of Shakespeare.

I see the trick on’t: here was a consent—
Knowing aforehand of our merriment—
To dash it like a Christmas comedy...111

The figures of carnival come and go on the Shakespearean stage. Falstaff is directly called a “Vice”112, the “May Day” tradition—that is to say, Maying—obviously plays a fundamental role in As You Like It and A Midsummer’s Night Dream113. After some attempts not really taken seriously114 reputed Shakespeare scholars started to turn toward the topic. Northrop Frye, in 1957, wrote:

This is the drama of folk ritual, of the St George play and the mummers’ play, of the feast of the ass and the Boy Bishop, and of all the dramatic activity that punctuated

111 Love’s Labour’s Lost (5.2.460-462)
112 1 Henry IV (2.4.441-442): “…that reverend vice, that grey iniquity, that father ruffian…”
the Christian calendar with the rituals of an immemorial paganism. We may call this the drama of the green world, and its theme is once again the triumph of life over the waste land, the death and revival of the year impersonated by figures still human, and once divine as well.\textsuperscript{115}

C. L. Barber and \textit{Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy} was the first where the festive substructure behind the group of concepts, acts and formulas was accepted as a well-founded scholarly opinion, but he also was criticized because of his “lack of historical precision”, since he argued in favor of Falstaff’s festive clownery throughout in comparison with continental examples Shakespeare probably was not familiar with. But behind the refusal of Shakespeare being “popular”, the refusal of Shakespeare being “low” was concealed, because “popular” was enslaved by a highly social approach, dominated by utterances rooted in Marxism.

Soon, the positivist argument about Shakespeare’s “popularity” and “non-popularity” became occupied with collecting festive patterns in the Shakespearean texts and/or denying them as evidence. The question of \textit{how} Shakespeare is “popular” or “not popular” never was truly asked, because New Historicism never became interested in such internal matters of the plays. In Herder’s time the “festive” Shakespeare was not improbable anymore, but the Shakespeare “questioning the festivity of the world” was lost, as not applicable to demonstrate his geniality (as this \textit{festive} became equal to \textit{genial}). New Historicism started to reverse the problem. While collecting the elements relating to the Early Modern Festive world, it never again questioned the deep structural “festiveness” of a play as a work of art, also because of its inner incompatibility with the notion of the \textit{autonomy of artwork}.\textsuperscript{116} This attitude is nicely shown, for example, by Gary Taylor’s \textit{Reinventing Shakespeare}, in which, during the history of ascension of Shakespearean dramatic art, the notion of “art” becomes entirely collateral. Only after the historical rediscovery of the “festivity debate” of the Early Modern it became possible to see Shakespeare as the third kind, as a critic of his day commenting on the ongoing war between \textit{carnival} and the \textit{seriousness of the world}.

\textsuperscript{116} Again, I am speaking about the work of (dramatic) art as a phenomenon, \textit{a whole}, not separable into pieces of historical reality, having its autonomy or at least a structure it is impossible to disassemble into recognizable parts. New Historicism typically tries to explain artwork (like anything else) through the contemporary historical reality (like the biography of the author, the changes of book trading, the social position of the characters reflected in the real Early Modern). These are necessary questions, but not the most important ones.
Shakespeare’s “commenting upon popular festivity” obviously was a step forward in comparison of seeing him simply mirroring “the common festival practices of his own culture” 117. However, this still ruled out the earlier option, the inherent ritual value of theatrical art. While shortly giving an account of “popularity” in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Marcus states, that

[d]ivine benevolence, supernatural ritual and human popular festivity are aligned in their effects. The ‘disorder’ of popular pastimes is required for the ‘order’ of natural fecundity. The play’s construction of a universe under the control of ritual practices [...] helped to inaugurate and argument about the beneficent effects of popular festivity that would be articulated by Stuart monarchs over the next several decades.118

Every observation is directed outside of the theatre, to the history behind the stage. Ritual forms and “popular festivity” are only questions of the social policy of the realm, as Shakespearean art itself is only a transparent window to the Elizabethan and Jacobean universe of politics. The research after “political struggles” behind the silencing of carnivalesque, also in the body of the drama, did not recognize the fact that the carnival never was historical material or a positive fact to be “calculated” with. Carnivalesque is ontologically spiritual and functions on an aesthetical basis. It is impossible to unravel it into actions of political ideologies, because it is a condition of the world, which doesn’t ask for participation, but simply pulls in everybody through festive laughter as we will see.

Weimann’s Shakespeare und die Tradition des Volkstheaters spends its first chapter on the origin of theater, how magical rite and mimic theater are or can be related. Actually, the whole, enormous discussion about the Greek ritual origins of drama, in particular in the “culture of Dionysos” beautifully runs parallel with the Bakhtinian “tradition” of carnivalesque in the medieval age, also theoretically based on the “culture of Dionysos” discussed by Friedrich Nietzsche119. The Greek origins of the antinomy in the theoretical literature of the carnival mirror the “more accurate”, anthropologic tradition of the theatre, whereas the relationship to several hundred years old, ritual customs (as the repeatedly

117 Idem, p. 45
118 Idem, p. 61.
highlighted Saturnalia) still appear useful next to the customary world of the contemporary Early Modern England. Because these “popular customs” are also originating from the ritual traditions of the pagan world (as the repeatedly highlighted Saturnalia). Therefore the contemporary impact of carnivalesque customs on the theatre and its origins in the (Greek) ritual forms, are actually correlating. Still, Shakespeare’s plays are considered either “popular” in their deep, ritual ground as all plays are, or mirror some “popular events and utterances” while commenting on his time from the outside. Where else can “popularity” been found?

I am almost embarrassed to ask, why we never questioned the medium of “popular festivity” before. The one, who does not have to depend on instantaneous transformations, who always is always in the center of carnival, who carries it within his body also in time of order, and also radiates it on the stage of Shakespeare’s plays.

In spite of numerous transformations, he has never achieved the psychological complexity or ability to develop associated with more modern dramatic characters. Thus he remains, more than other figure in drama, closest to his early ritual heritage.

How can we ask about the carnivalesque substance of Shakespeare without the main attention given to the clown or fool of the play?

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2. The Medium of Carnival

Naomi Conn Liebler in 1995, 36 years after Barber’s *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy*, recognized the festive elements which also permeate Shakespeare’s tragedies. After Bakhtin’s Rabelais-book became generally known between scholars, *Shakespeare’s Festive Tragedy* made sense.

In world literature there are certain works in which the two aspects, seriousness and laughter, coexist and reflect each other, and are indeed whole aspects, not separate serious and comic images as in the usual modern drama [...] The most important works in this category are, of course, Shakespeare’s tragedies.124

Festive, ritual forms and elements can equally be investigated in tragedies and comedies, this became clear. Most studies in the topic which searched for carnivalesque customs still missed a few basic elements carnival—at least according to Bakhtin—cannot function without. The word “laughter” is not mentioned even once in Liebler’s text, neither are there any thoughts on carnivalesque fooling or clowning, although it is precisely the “carnivalesque clownery” that actually holds the Welsford tradition and the Bakhtinian idea of Renaissance festivity together. “Certain characters—often mere supernumeraries—specialize in folly, chief among whom is the grotesquely disguised figure, the Clown or Fool par excellence”125, who is the “constant, accredited representative of the carnival spirit”126. They are amphibians, “equally at home in the world of reality and the world of imagination”127, staying “on the borderline between life and art, in a peculiar midzone as it were”128. The interdependence of the carnival and the clown is forgotten.129 When we look at Brueghel’s *The Fight between Carnival and Lent*, the center of the painting is covered from us with the dense veil of scholarly indifference, hiding the figure who rules the space through the circle of light illuminated by his torch. Without him the festive customs are

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129 The story of the clown is told further separately. Southworth can still repeat Welsford’s words in 1998 on how “his origins may be, through hidden in unrecorded antiquity, may be as old as kingship itself”. John Southworth, *Fools and Jesters at the English Court*. London: Sutton Publishing, 1998. p. 2
meaningless, dry imitations of pointless actions, and mere signs without any signified. Without the clown, the festive or “popular” cannot be interpreted as carnivalesque.

“Thou com’st in such a questionable shape”\(^{130}\)

The clown or fool par excellence’s\(^{131}\) phenomenology for us is as confusing as the phenomenology of carnival. Actually, the defining problems of the latter may help to define the problems of the former. In the literature of the 20th century, the carnival is explained in many ways: as festive memory of ancient sacrificial rituals; as a valve, which serves as some kind of affirmation for the “people”, or, as their only secure position to criticize the oppressive authority; as a group of historical realities i.e. events difficult to connect for the same reason. It is at the same time interpreted as a game with magical customs, denying that this would have an important social function as claimed, for example, by Natalie Zemon Davis. She argues that festive life can also “perpetuate certain values of the community,

\(^{130}\) Hamlet (1.4.43)

\(^{131}\) “The clown” from now on.
even guarantee its survival.” 132 Eventually however, historical inquiries could not decide the question, because many evidence can be presented to prove any approach and even to contradict themselves. And however deep the historical enquiry into the festive phenomena may go, somehow basic questions are left untouched.

There were many other occasions for mockery by the Abbeys of Misrule, but readers are surely wondering, as I did when I had this preliminary data in front of me [...] what kind of organizations these really were, what they were really up to, where they came from and where they were going, and what linked together their seemingly disparate recreations. 133

I wish to argue that none of the above listed definitions are wrong. All of their assumptions are simultaneously represented by the carnivalesque reality of the world. In other words, when we are looking for the “meaning” of the carnival for the people who took part in it, we, in a sense, ask an unnecessary question, as Burke claims, because “Carnival was a holiday, a game, an end in itself, needing no explanation or justification” 134. The carnival does not function as some historical truth (particular events—historical realities—with reasons that can be made uniform), because it does not have any causes and purposes as historical action thrown into linear temporality. It is functioning in an aesthetic way, in the Hegelian sense; it is dominantly autonomous. It is not to be considered from the point of result, because as soon as it becomes determined, it loses its freedom and becomes incompatible with itself. Similarly to its medium, it is “uninterpretable, because its vital point is freedom” 135.

As Burke also states, to discuss festivals is necessarily to discuss ritual 136. The clown as the medium of carnival is responsible for the process of the carnivalesque ritual. The clown, throughout his clown-play, takes on the act of dying and with his coming back to life he symbolizes the recurrent victory over death. The “crowning” and “uncrowning” evoke the circular time-notion of human understanding, the always recurring seasons and the yearly readmission of fertility. The liminal space of carnival orients the calendar, and with it, it

133 Idem. p. 46
measures out time and space, and thus affirms life itself. Nobody else but the clown is able to show what happens in this magnificent show. When his misbehavior suffers harsh punishment, the clown is put to death. But no death is comparable to the death of the clown. His death is a “regenerating and laughing death”\(^\text{137}\), it is a “pregnant death, a death that gives birth”\(^\text{138}\). And it gives birth to life. He will rise unharmed and unscathed, so ritual laughter can rise. The clown interrupting the linear end of life and curving it into a circle releases steam, as his essence, the carnival releases, as a valve for the soul of his “participants” saturated with fear, as in the circus, which also connects and separates dangerous, neckbreacking attractions with mimicking and parodying them in clownish ways. As even Richard Levin—far from giving sufficient attention to the clown—mentions in *The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama*, he steps on the stage to lighten all sentiments when the plot becomes too heavy and too serious. But what should we call him in Early Modern reality? What differences puzzle and commonalities unite his figure already before the flourishing time of Shakespeare’s?

**“Social-functional” fool categories**

The Lord of Misrule was the main “mock-ruler” of English carnivals in the Early Modern age. He presided over the festivals and judged or gave orders to everybody taking part in the carnivalesque reality. Similar mock-kings can be found anywhere in Europe (and perhaps even farther not even specifically in the age). His basic distinguishing\(^\text{139}\) feature is that in any festive event, only one such mock-king exists at the same time at the same festive event. The Lord of Misrule could be a direct descendant of the abbot from the Feast of Fools festivals, because sometimes he was also called the “Abbot of Misrule”\(^\text{140}\). Still, we can distinguish different types of the Lord. While the Lords in the summer, the King of May, or Robin, in the May games were ruling the daytime, the winter lords ruled the cold nights\(^\text{141}\). I


\(^{138}\) Idem, p. 25

\(^{139}\) A feature distinguishing him actually from the other clown-figures.


already mentioned the two kinds of Lords, one at the Court and one at Gray’s Inn, the other riding (with) his fellow hobbyhorse\textsuperscript{142} at the festivals in the countryside. John Stow and Stubbes describe him.

Thus:

[...]

He perfectly demonstrates the problem of categories because no matter how many differences in customs there are locally, the dates and the name refer to a stable and unified tradition. Although it is possible—as mentioned before—that only one Lord rules at a local festive event, the many parallel events on the same date—in the same \textit{carnivalesque act}—have their own Lords as well\textsuperscript{144}. Not to mentions all the Lords from very different dates and particular customs; there were actually many mock-kingdoms going on every year.

At first sight, there is the easily distinguishable figure of the Court Fool who is also called Jester from the time of the Tudors\textsuperscript{145}. As the main Court Fools were busy with cheering up the monarchs, the nobility (church leaders, sometimes towns and even guilds) had their own Court Fools as well. Talking about the king’s fools, despite their privileged, permanent presence in the courts, close to the monarch of England, they didn’t build—at least as far as we know—actual political careers for a long time. As Southworth mentions, in the 15th century they occupied otherwise empty spaces in the scenes of court life, or are shown flitting from one group of courtiers to another as “barely corporeal presences”\textsuperscript{146}. As the known historical figures, of course, differed from each other, individually, texts frequently confuse them and the same anecdotes are tied to different people.

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\textsuperscript{142} The hobbyhorse—while having also other valid meanings—was a morris character, a figure of a horse fastened about the waist of one of the performers, who executed various antics in imitation of the movements of a skittish and spirited horse. See Natália Pikli’s “The Prince and the Hobby-Horse: Shakespeare and the Ambivalence of Early Modern Popular Culture.” \textit{Journal of Early Modern Studies}, 2. 2013. pp. 119-140.

\textsuperscript{143} \textit{A Survey of London}. Oxford: Clarendon Press, reprinted from the text of 1603, 1908. p. 89

\textsuperscript{144} As also mentioned before: the concurrently ongoing local festive events together constitute the \textit{carnivalesque act}.


\textsuperscript{146} \textit{Ibid.}
The third basic clown-figure of the age was supposed to be unique because there were more of them at the same time and at the same place or festive event. The Vices in the plays were mostly typical tricksters, sometimes even antagonists with powers to set the play in motion, but they never committed serious crimes themselves and were most of the time appealing characters. They could also juggle with the various layers of illusion and reality: they could speak to the actors just as much as to the spectators, and they were entitled to comment on the action on stage. They were professionals, not elected ones as the Lords were. They were little devils playing in moralities and festive events surrounding the other, monomial fool formations. Even if they are devils and antagonists, they are not necessary evil, as they may have nothing to do with the moral doctrines of the play.

David Wiles, while preparing the difference between the “rustic clown” and the “fool of Armin” emphasizes the difference between the Lord of Misrule and the Vice figure. In his opinion the two became distinct figures in the Tudor festivals of the village May games in Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire and Lincolnshire. Some differences are obvious but these are still not decidedly reflected by the customs. While the Lord was an amateur and the Vice/Fool a specialist, they are always “related”, and appear together on the stages of the carnivalesque plays. Others also wrote about the strange convergence of Fool and Vice in the 1560’s and emphasized the Vice’s “going out of fashion” as intriguer, demonstrated in 1584 by Wilson’s The Three Ladies of London. Still, they add, that not only does he become identical with the “Fool” as Jester, but also with the “fool” as fool, as an “innocent madman”. Actually, Court Fools around the world were elected because of their “natural” folly in most cases.

147 The primary question here is not what “crime” means, as a legal issue, but what “serious” means from the perspective of the audience (which, of course, could also be influenced by law). If a “crime” provokes laughter, then it is a “crime of a clown”. If the “crime” excludes laughter “tragically”, it—in its impact, and usually also legally—becomes “serious”. There should be no doubt about those two, at least, in a carnivalesque manner. A funny Vice is simply a clown. The other Vice’s, who do not obey the rules of the carnival are themselves—in the most straightforward way—decarnivalizing the world of the drama.

148 See Ágnes Matuska’s detailed discussion on the Vice figures: The Vice-Device. Iago and Lear’s Fool as Agents of Representational Crisis. Szeged: IATEPress, 2011


150 William Wager in his The longer thou livest, the more fool thou art.

151 In Chapman’s Alphonsus in 1590 and also in Stubbes’ Anatomie of Abuses in 1583.

152 It was much more important than any physical disability. See, for example, Maurice Lever, Korona és csörgősípka. Az udvari bolondok története. (translated by Kamocsay Ildikó) Budapest: Európa, 1989. pp. 77-79.
Other resources also confuse our evanescent “certainties” because the historical accounts of the carnivalesque in the Early Modern period are not presented—by their authors—with enough precision and they are inconsiderate of future historians. As the Jester through the Vice figure became related to the fool, he is also related—through his activity—to the Lord of Misrule.

Immoderate and disordinate joy became incorporate in the body of a jeaster; this fellow in person is comely, in apparell courtly, but in behaviour a very ape, and no man; his studie is to come bitter jeasts, or to shew antique motions, or to sing baudie sonnets and ballads: give him a little wine in his head, he is continually flearing and making of mouthes: he laughs intemperately at every little occasion, and dances about the house, leapes over tables, over-skips men’s heads, trips up his companion’s heels, burns sack with a candle, and hath all the feats of a lord of misrule in the countrie: feed him in his humour, you shall have his heart; in mere kindness he will hug you in his armes, kisse you on the cheeke, and rapping out an horrible oth, crie [...] 153

The carnivalesque activity of the Jester seems the same as the carnivalesque activity of the Vice and also the Lord of Misrule, or any “fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy”, like Yorick, who carried young Hamlet on his back a thousand times, and kissed him we know not how oft, with all his jibes, his gambols, his songs and flashes of merriment, “that were wont to set the table on a roar” 154. On stage the Vices, as probably all the clowns of Shakespeare (from the porter of Macbeth to the gravediggers of Hamlet) are responsible for the filling in the pauses with improvised jests and lighten the mood 155, as also given at times in stage directions 156. Chambers concludes that the character of Vice is derived from that of the domestic fool or jester 157, while in the later drama he is an antiquated figure considered directly identical with the jester. Happé connects the Vice with the folk-play fool, the presenter, the court-clown, the cheeky servant, the impertinent messenger, the mystery-

154 Hamlet (5.1.174-181)
155 And they have of course many other important functions in Shakespeare’s works, which may affect the dramaturgy and even the genre of the plays. Even this “mood-lightening” attitude needs further explaining in these dramas, as we will see. But the basics are still visible in the Vice-play.
156 In Wapull’s The Tide tarrieth for No Man, in 1576.
157 Also Leslie Hotson agrees with him, who actually also tries hard to separate categories, in Shakespeare’s Motley. New York: Oxford University Press, 1952. p. 58
play Devil\textsuperscript{158}. We see the Lords of Misrule (later giving way to the Masters of Revels in the court) as organizers of festive events celebrated also in the inns of London and the stages of the theaters, all stuffed with Vices and fools and Fools, rarely “separated” as our “modern” normative borders of the profession wish to present them. George Ferrers as Lord of Misrule and William Sommer as court fool played together in the games of carnival. In their mock-kingdom the mock-ruler (Ferrers) also had a court fool, John Smith, who was wearing a “vice’s coote” and fought together in the mock-combat with Sommer\textsuperscript{159}. Still, David Wiles, when he mentions a Vice acting as a “minion” of the Christmas Lord in 1556, embarrassingly in a fool’s “petticot”, tries to interpret that as a sign of distinction\textsuperscript{160}.

In the court, and on all the possible stages of performers, professional players came right after the amateurs; elected fools were playing the ritual clown-play shoulder to shoulder with the ones who were doing this for most of their lives\textsuperscript{161}. Their role in the “common plays” was frequently the one of the “presenter”, as also Chambers concludes, after considering 29 different folk plays. In most of the cases, the “madman” was the alter-ego, who was also given a specific name in many other cases “so as to adapt the performance to the relevant season of the year”, and that is how, for example, “Old Father Christmas”, St. Patrick, Saint George, “King Cole”, or “Captain Slasher” were presented in the clothes of the ritual clown\textsuperscript{162}. Or, to be more precise, this was the ritual clown with his many clothes of individuality. Furthermore, this goes also, for all the other figures studied by scholars in the topic of Early Modern fools. No matter which type of activity, profession, genuine rank or ephemeral festive title we address, it can either become identical with the clown or fool par excellence and mirror all the rest through identical functioning, or distance himself from them at other times.\textsuperscript{163} Social features, occupational characteristics do not seem to matter at carnival time.

\textsuperscript{158} Ágnes Matuska, \textit{The Vice-Device. Iago and Lear’s Fool as Agents of Representational Crisis}. Szeged: JATEPress, 2011. pp. 44-45
\textsuperscript{159} Enid Welsford in \textit{The Fool: His Social and Literary History}. Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1966. p. 214
\textsuperscript{163} My work has no intention to map the over-complicated systematization of fools, buffoons, dwarfs, minstrels, jugglers, joculators, etc. Many studies in the topic focus exclusively on these questions (and arrive to conclusions full with doubt), like Sandra Billington, \textit{A Social History of the Fool}. Brighton – New York: The Harvester Press – St. Martin’s Press, 1984 or John Southworth, \textit{Fools and Jesters at the English Court}. London: Sutton Publishing, 1998.
The relation of the Vice and the Fool (two professionals, but the latter without companions, often also an “innocent” or otherwise a “natural” fool, yet both coming from highly diverse societal surroundings) is accurately described by David Wiles who in the other half of his book tries to argue in favor of a distinction of the same kind.

[...] no useful distinction can be made between the costume of the 'Vice' and the costume of the 'fool'. In Armada year, English Catholics in Rome dressed a Protestant traveler in 'a fool's coat [...] half blue, half yellow, and a cockscomb with three bells'. And in the court of Queen Mary we find a gown of yellow and blue fabric being chopped up to make 'two Vices' coats for a play'. The Revels documents of Edward VI use the terms 'Vice', 'fool' and 'dizard' interchangeably for a man who wears a suit of many colours and carried as his props a ladle with a bauble pendant and a dagger. A Tudor Vice/fool, therefore, would play a scripted part in an interlude as long as the script required, but he would wear his fool's coat and play the fool's part as long as the occasion required.164

“Naturals” and/or “Artificials”

The question of “playing” or “being” is the most confusing issue, heavily complicated by present to day normative historian volition. Our sources, the texts—from our point of view—are imprecise, they are simply not “interested” in making statements that would meet our standards of categorical precision. Early Modern texts about fools do not “introduce themselves” as either historical texts, or fictional literature. Their anecdotes are of the mixed kind: reality and fiction, older traditions and new trends mingle in them inseparably. Based on our thinking today, it is impossible to understand their lack of interest, when they should separate the “artificial”, “acting” roles from the “natural” fools or “innocents” with “real mental disability”. They demonstrably knew about the difference already in the 12th century165, but did not care about it. They used these terms simultaneously, applying them to the same individuals; they told the same stories about them, hardly ever questioning these unequivocal contradictions, not even in the 18th century166. They once mention “playes” and then claim “was” after just a few sentences. We cannot determine the mental

state of many “fools” even though having a lot of sources written on them\textsuperscript{167}. Forced regulations never worked, historians with opposite opinions can simultaneously be justified\textsuperscript{168}.

Southworth also mentions that it is especially hard to differentiate between “naturals” and “artificials” in England. Michael, the fool of Isabella, the queen of Edward II, was capable of handling money and he did buy things, while what he spent was called “aims” and not “wages”\textsuperscript{169}. The well-known William Sommer is mentioned as a “wise innocent”, and while constantly considered to be a man with mental disability, in Armin’s \textit{Fool upon Fool} he easily outwitted cunning Cardinal Wolesey. It is the same in France, with the legendary Triboulet. As Marot or Dés Periers wrote, he was “more happy than wise” as all true naturals should have been. Still, anecdotes about him “having tablets, on which he kept a kind of comic diary” spread with ease, and nobody cared about the improbability of the story\textsuperscript{170}. The English royal families—as all the others in Europe—were fond of choosing “naturals” for court fools, and obviously didn’t have our commitment to true fool individualities. All of Edward II’s fools—whether “natural” or “artificial”—were named Robert, moreover even Edward III had only “Roberts” in his court. After “the age of Roberts” the fashion of “Williams” came, so all jesters were named “fool William”. Also in the theaters, separating “naturals” from “artificials” proved to be impossible, as very recently Bart van Es argued, “because the role of the fool was not time-limited: it was not a performance that an actor turned on and off”\textsuperscript{171}. His examples are drawn from Robert Armin’s works. In the \textit{Two Maids of More-Clacke} the fool character, John of the Hospital is opposed by the artificial comic, Tutch the clown. Tutch disguises himself as John and is then revealed as a “counterfeit”. Van Es, joining Charles Stanley Felver, Armin’s biographer, believes that this moment “subtly pushes the boundaries of foolish”\textsuperscript{172}. Also, he suggests that the uncertain distinction between “playing” and “being” becomes a pressing issue in \textit{Quips upon Questions}, where

\begin{thebibliography}{100}
\bibitem{167} One of the most recent complains by Southworth in \textit{Fools and Jesters at the English Court}. London: Sutton Publishing, 1998. p. 61
\bibitem{168} Many examples are being found also in Welsford’s \textit{The Fool} and recently Southworth’s work as well. See for example \textit{Fools and Jesters at the English Court}. London: Sutton Publishing, 1998. p. 89-90
\bibitem{169} \textit{The Household Book of Queen Isabella of England}. (edited by F.D.Blackley, G.Hermansen) Edmondton: University of Alberta Press, 1971, p. 103. These primary sources are also not sufficient.
\bibitem{170} Enid Welsford in \textit{The Fool: His Social and Literary History}. Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1966. p. 148
\bibitem{172} \textit{Idem}, p. 172
\end{thebibliography}
“verses such as ‘Who’s the Fool Now?’, ‘He Plays the Fool’ and ‘Where’s Tarlton?’ challenge the distinction between jester and audience”\(^\text{173}\). But this distinction is only pressing for us today. Van Es rightly observes that in *Fool upon Fool*, in which we find self-conscious performers, most of the characters can be labelled as “naturals” as well. But the transitions and travesties of “natural” and “artificial” folly are found everywhere in the age.\(^\text{174}\)

**Rustic clown and/or Professional Fool**

David Wiles’s well known thesis in his *Shakespeare’s Clown* was quickly accepted. His argument about the paradigmatic difference between the clown characters of William Kemp and Robert Armin in Shakespeare’s plays smoothly fits into the interpretative intent of today. The individual, biographical differences between the two people—as historical “realities”—are projected back onto the roles they play, as the typological change of the clown roles, and, through all these, the changes occurring in Shakespeare’s dramatic art. Kemp being a “rustic”, socially low-levelled, harsh “man of the folk” is left for the intellectual Armin, himself an artist and dramatist, a professional with his new, more polite playing, more suitable to help Shakespeare getting on the new stages of nobility and wealth. It is easy to see how this thesis based on historical truths (the two men as biographical realities) corresponds to the story of the “plebeian popular” becoming the “professional popular”, we may also witness to the notion of the “war between social classes”. Wiles beautifully describes the differences between the two personalities—naturally also affecting their roles,—but he actually is more the victim of anachronisms than anybody before him. The anachronisms have to do with the ongoing clash of social classes, and, simultaneously, the idea of “feudalism replaced by capitalism”, in the blink of the historical eye. While pointing out the genuine differences between the personalities Wiles—as a good historian—stresses social differences, but he also clearly overemphasizes those. This is especially so, while he considers them strangely independent (or moveable) in the Early Modern social hierarchy as well.\(^\text{175}\) The first counter-argument is given by Bakhtin, the aesthete. For a historian

\(^{173}\) *Idem*, p. 173

\(^{174}\) I will also comment on this topic in the following chapter on *King Lear*.

\(^{175}\) There is a whole block about the social and functional transgressions forgotten later in David Wiles’s, *Shakespeare’s clown. Actor and text in the Elizabethan playhouse*. Cambridge University Press, 2005. pp. 20-22. Among Wiles’s critics, Weimann and Douglas Bruster stated: “In Shakespeare’s theatre the transition from clowning to fooling is not as clear-cut as the departure of clownish Will Kemp and the subsequent playing and
completely describing a person according to his historical surroundings may be important, but art, according to Bakhtin, itself shows the flaws of that objective:

An individual cannot be completely incarnated into the flesh of existing sociohistorical categories. There is no mere form that would be able to incarnate once and forever all of his human possibilities and needs, no form in which he could exhaust himself down to the last word, like the tragic or epic hero; no form that he could fill to the very brim, and yet at the same time not splash over the brim. Richard Tarlton, the famous ancestor of Kemp and Armin, worked on the stage and also was—according to Wiles, Welsford and others—a clown of the English court, “the most famous Jester to Queen Elizabeth”177. He simultaneously was a theatrical performer and a founding member of the Queen’s Man in 1583. He was an official master of fencing, a tavern owner, an author, and also a farmer watching pigs; a swineherd. Tarlton was a minstrel, a theatre clown178 and a “surrogate Lord of Misrule”179 at the same time. The social transgressions of Tarlton were plenty, and they were successfully repeated by many other fools and clowns, Kemp and Armin not being exceptions. When claiming “that no absolute distinction can be made between Tarlton the man and the roles which he played in different environments”180, Wiles, unintentionally, not simply showed the difference between Kemp’s and Armin’s roles, based on the difference of their personalities, but quite the opposite: the characteristics of the individuals—seen as biographical and social realities, historical truths—changed as quickly as the roles they had to play. I am not speaking of their singing of Robert Armin have led some critics to assume. Between them, the overlap is especially obvious where it was Armin who (in the absence of Kemp) was most likely to do the part of clowns in revivals of older plays.” Robert Weimann-Douglas Bruster, *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance: Stage and Page in the Elizabethan Theatre*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. p. 99. James Shapiro (while being also on the same opinion as Wiles) states that, even concerning some differences in term of talents, Kemp and Armin easily shared the role of Dogberry and Peter, which does not support Wiles’s thesis: James Shapiro, 1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare. New York: Perfect Bound, 2005. p. 222, and Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Third Edition, 2004. p. 183. Actually, even the circumstances and the time of Kemp’s departure is being argued with. See also: James Nielson, “William Kemp at the Globe”. in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 44/4., (Winter, 1993) pp. 466-468.

178 There is an actual probability that Shakespeare, as a young actor only 23 years old, met Tarlton in 1587 at Stratford where the Queen’s Players were that time: Samuel Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare, a Compact Documentary Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. pp. 116-117
180 *Idem*, p. 16
“private” personalities of course, but their “social dimension”, their relation to the different classes of society, to their profession and the role they played in the local discourses of power in their age. These are social conditions the clown does not possess for a long time, and he quickly moves on to the next. Tarlton visited every horizontal and every vertical stratum of Early Modern English society, not only in the roles he played, but also as for as biographical reality was concerned. Wiles argues that he never played the role of a Vice, especially because he never became a “professional”, like the Vice figure should. Can we really think about Tarlton as a so-called “amateur”? A clown, in a way, always plays; according to Ágnes Matuska, he metaphorically never comes off the stage, as he “behaves the same way” no matter where he is and who he is talking to—whether offstage or on, as it was also mentioned about William Kemp. And was Armin, Wiles’s huge innovator, not following Tarlton, his ancestor?

I haue seene the stars at midnight in your societies, and might have commenst, like an asse as I was; but I lackt liberty in that, yet I was admitted in Oxford to be of Christs Church, while they of Al-soules gaue ayme: such as knew me remember my measures. I promised them to proove mad and I thinke I am so, else I would not meddle with folly so deeply, but similis similem, &c. If I doe offend, as I make no question, my pardon is signed, I doubt not — marry there is an execution yet behinde, and I long till I passe my plundge, that is censure. They say he goes in colours, as one strangely affected, and I goe in motly, making my own cloakebag ready. If hee proue porter, and beare with me, I shall rest behoulding; if not, I am his martir, and suffer extreamly.

Armin himself plays in the church, as a festive clown (which was a more emphasized function of Kemp), and even more, he identifies himself with the “naturals”. While playing a “natural” and taking up his cloackebag-motley, he becomes a “natural” himself, the great “player” of his time, else he “would not meddle with folly so deeply”. Opposing somewhat Wiles and the “commercialization of populare culture”, Gillespie and Rhodes mention that

181 Also, for example, Ágnes Matuska states that the fool’s—mainly entertaining—functions in society did not exclusively need a theatrical stage to be activated. Ágnes Matuska, The Vice-Device. Iago and Lear’s Fool as Agents of Representational Crisis. Szeged: JATEPress, 2011. p. 104
184 From the introduction of A Nest of Ninnies (1608).
185 About the cloackebag-motley always worn by naturals, see Leslie Hotson’s Shakespeare’s Motley. New York: Oxford University Press, 1952.
the “late” clown’s “commercial status is marginal, since it comes in amateur as well as professional form”, unlike bear-baiting, which was a purely commercial enterprise. The clown easily dodges the normative historical will of classification, valorization, hierarchization and normativity, especially in questions of social dimension and professionalism, by jumping back and forth on the borders often subsequently set down and projected back onto Early Modern reality. The clown is hardly interpretable as “historical truth”, while still, he is recognizable as the medium of carnival. As theatrical clown he is “the representative of popular culture on the renaissance Elizabethan and Jacobean stage”.

The Clown or Fool par excellence

The clown or fool par excellence is obviously not a term for a historian, who tries to find meaning in negative terms. As we have seen, it is really hard to define what clown does not mean. While considering several factors: profession, social and mental status, we miss the ontological nature of carnivalesque folly. There is a huge difference between playing and being a clown, according to our sources. The former simply did not matter in that state of the world. Bakhtin also notes:

Clowns and fools, which often figure in Rabelais’ novel, are characteristic of the medieval culture of humor. They were the constant, accredited representatives of the carnival spirit in everyday life out of carnival season. Like Triboulet at the time of Francis I, they were not actors playing their parts on a stage, as did the comic actors of a later period, impersonating Harlequin, Hanswurst, etc., but remained fools and clowns always and wherever they made their appearance. As such they represented a certain form of life, which was real and ideal at the same time. They stood on the borderline between life and art, in a peculiar midzone as it were, they were neither eccentrics nor dolts, neither were they comic actors.

I do not intend to add another “half true” meaning history with its admitted and exiled elements “based on historical sources”, because classification is not able to define the meaning of the clown. The meaning of the clown or fool is more complex, as also considered

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187 On the question of the clowns transgressions between social stratum, see my chapter on Twelfth Night or What You Will.
in William Empson’s monumental *Structure of Complex Words*. Instead of “narrowing meaning to historical truth” we have to collect the “functions” that constitute the phenomenon, even if the functions appear to lead us to other ontological qualities (like the carnivalesque).

Empson claims that the linguistic functioning of some words, outgrow normative intention and the “compacted doctrines” in words are not suitable for positivist evaluations. Fortunately, the word “fool” was one of the examples of Empson’s “complex words”. In his reasoning “fool” meant both the “natural” fool and the Jester, in fact, its combination could be evoked even without the word “fool” itself. “The group of ideas in question is very ancient and widespread, and clearly did not depend on having a single world to express it”\(^{190}\). Words are made up and forgotten, sometimes strict in their meaning, and at other times loose and “fuzzy”. Some kind of phenomenon behind the “fool” should still exists. A complex set of relations between different notions held together by “an inner grammar, like the overt grammar of sentences”\(^{191}\) has still to be there. Is there any reason then, in describing an archetypical notion through only one word? With the *clown or fool par excellence* I am trying to mark a *thing* I am not blindly believing to be *one* with the word used for it (especially while rather arbitrarily shortening it to *clown*). What follows here is every collectible sense of this *thing*, a set of functional aspects that does not only explain but also creates the notion being spoken of. When I use the term, *clown* (without any other comments), I *mean* this “structure”\(^{192}\) of functions or “meanings”. And this “structure” is actually never consistently denied by historical or non-historical evidence. Foucault, the famous denier of “truth” as a constant structure of meaning, wrote a book about folly\(^{193}\). He himself mentions the “enigmatic truth hidden” behind the recurring and overshadowing discourses of power, moreover other scholars with less theoretic orientations did not preclude this kind of “truth”. Even Southworth, for example, with his admittedly rigid historical attitude\(^{194}\) avoiding theoretical questions and literary sources assumes,


\(^{191}\) *Idem*, p. viii

\(^{192}\) The word, “structure” could be provoking, but the “structure of the *clown par excellence*” is actually everything but a “structure”. It is the antithesis of “structure”.


\(^{194}\) “Though the information I have come up with may disappoint those who are looking for simplistic answers to the questions I have posed or merely for confirmation of their preconceptions, I console myself with the
Clowns, fools—comedians of one kind or another—have been a feature of virtually every recorded culture in the history of civilisation and have made significant contributions to the development of early theatre and literary drama. This is certainly true of western European culture, and nowhere more so than in England, where the fool in various disguises is found at the heart of popular dramatic activity from its earliest recorded beginnings.\textsuperscript{195}

The search after the relations between the “historical realities” of different clown-types may be speculations, but “speculation of this kind need know no limit”\textsuperscript{196}, because “the more he changes, the more the clown is the same”\textsuperscript{197}. Their involvement in carnival and conversely, how they absorb carnivalesque was often forgotten and nearly never questioned.

The Lord of Misrule does not rule and govern from above: he is immersed in the folly he undertakes to regulate ... Misrule may himself be a clown, or he may be attended by fools, jesters and other projections of his own asinine majesty.\textsuperscript{198}

As the complex words, meaning is reached through countless comparisons and actually never final. It is at least never limited to one term, the clown, which still will be used. I will try to describe a phenomenology of the clown par excellence entirely based on the phenomenology of the carnival, more as a function (or a collection of functions) then a historical reality (or a collection of historical, biographical realities), but a function historical realities also may reveal parts of.

His Liminality

“Disorder belongs to the totality of life, and the spirit of this disorder is the trickster”, more specifically: the clown.

His function in an archaic society, or rather the function of his mythology, of the tales told about him, is to add disorder to order and so make a whole, to render possible,
within the fixed bounds of what is permitted, an experience of what is not permitted.

The carnivalesque world where we enter hand in hand with the clown is a liminal world in Victor Turner’s sense, what is more, also a striking example. The topsy-turvy world twisting the social hierarchy of the ordinary, “official” world is well described by Turner’s symbolic anthropology. The “abnormal” or “irregular” world order of the carnival comes from a ritual tradition found in nearly every culture in the world and has its own “rules” or “conditions”, frequently not functioning as the “rules” of the “normal” or “regular” world, but only existing in opposition to them. Turner actually never denied his approach is partly or mainly from the academic tradition of “popular”, festive and carnivalesque studies, Bakhtin himself, or C. L. Barber from the Welsfordian branch. But the basic term, liminality came from Turner’s own discipline, particularly from Arnold van Gennep’s formulation of rites de passage, or “transition rites”. These rites of Gennep are marked by three different phases.

1. separation,
2. margin (or limen—the Latin for threshold, signifying the great importance of real or symbolic thresholds at this middle period of the rites, though cunicular, “being in the tunnel,” would better describe the quality of this phase in many cases, its hidden nature, its sometimes mysterious darkness),
3. and reaggregation.

In this theory the balance of the worlds became the first issue.

204 Les Rites de Passage. Paris: Nourry, 1909. His book was also translated to English only very late, in 1960.
The liminal phases of tribal society inverts but do not usually subvert the status quo, the structural form, of society; reversal underlines to the members of a community that chaos is the alternative to cosmos, so they’d better stick to cosmos, i.e., the traditional order of culture.206

This stance, very similar to Barber’s work—which termed this process Saturnalian—is thus frequently the subject of controversies because of its unbalancedness, casting the carnivalesque (or liminal) to the periphery, setting it up as “marginal”. The carnivalesque time is actually not comparable with the “official” time, because it “precedes” it in determination. Only through this overtaking is the carnival able to assign the “official” time, to separate it into the intervals of seasons, so carnival and “official” only come in a well-balanced pair.207 This argument still separates the scholars of the liminal carnival. If we take, for example, the traditional interpretation of the carnival as an annual “safety valve”, we see how the thinking only based on social questions—seeing “popular festivity” as the exclusive event of the plebs—may immediately mistake the carnivalesque catharsis for a mere tranquilizing tool of authority208. This tradition, of course, has its convincing sources as well.

[The defenders of the Feast of Fools] say, we act thus in jest and not seriously, as has been the custom of old, so that the foolishness innate in us can flow out once a year and evaporate. Do not wineskins and barrels burst if their bungs are not loosened once in a while? Even so, we are old wineskins and worn barrels; the wine of wisdom fermenting within us, which we hold in tightly all year in the service of God, might flow out uselessly, if we did not discharge it ourselves now and then with games and foolishness. Emptied through play, we may become stronger afterwards to retain wisdom.209

The problem is closely the same with the trend of the “archaic survival”, which accepts the Chamberian-Frazerean myth without further considerations of changes in the tradition. For this position, the carnival has to be “dictated”, organized or at least supported from above to discharge the criticism against the authority forming in the lower regions of society and to “discipline them”. Believing in this, somewhat generalizing the social-political

208 Idem, Second chapter. Brief note: the “safety valve” is not the problem at all. The belief of the “exclusive event” seems wrong. If the plebs and the authority become separated, there should be no carnival at all.
approach, Naomi Conn Liebler argues that “licensed transgressions are no transgressions at all, but are instead alternative forms of permissible behavior that serve to reinforce the status quo”\textsuperscript{210}.

However, the other side also has lots of evidence to disprove such generalities. Already Emile Durkheim had a different view, only by refusing to generalize society into the dialectical opposition of authority and folk. If the \textit{liminality} of these ritual forms is universal throughout the participation of the entire society, the “popular festivity” itself is not produced “for” a group or “by” a group. Durkheim in \textit{The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life} believes the \textit{liminal} time to be important for the whole society. Opposing him, René Girard also takes the traditional roots of the archaic survival but takes it a step further. He emphasizes the forms of true aggression, the act of violence behind the symbolic fights; how a substitute victim is murdered in order to ward off a more terrifying, indiscriminate violence among the members of the same community\textsuperscript{211}. And many historians found the search for true violence promising, especially since many instances exist of actual destruction, going on with the background decorations of the apparently \textit{liminal} carnivals\textsuperscript{212}.

Of course—to turn now to the dialectical view of history—a third party followed, giving the reason for carnival mainly to the plebeian community itself. Bristol also supported the theory that the people were eager to express their discontent and to give voice to their criticism of the “system”, and this was increasingly true and demonstrable through historical sources found by Natalie Zemon Davies\textsuperscript{213} and partly by Le Roy Ladurie. After getting here with the literary history of “popular festivity”, it becomes hard to reconnect the concept of \textit{liminality} and carnivalesque, and the same occurs as, with the concept of \textit{grotesque realism} in the book on Rabelais: it becomes lost somewhere along the way.

True carnival in the \textit{liminal} sense, never lacks the act of carnivalesque laughter. And this ritual laughter is not just a particular detail. It is the essence of the carnivalesque perception the scholars above should not have ignored. From the several laughter-theories in circulation

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\item That’s one of the results of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s case study, the \textit{Carnival in Romans. Mayhem and Massacre in a French City}. (translated by Mary Feeney) London: Phoenix, 2003.
\item In her “The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth-Century France.” \textit{Past & Present}. 50. (February 1971), pp. 41-75
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
I have selected Joachim Ritter’s short but very important essay\textsuperscript{214} some parts of which I have translated.

The comic thus comes into being here through a double movement, once in the exit from the prevailing order given, into another area excluded from it, and twice in that this excluded area is made visible in and on the area excluding it. Only when one sees this [...] movement can one understand, what it is all about that the opposing or the null [das Nichtige] laughable and can be acknowledged and accommodated through the positive and affirmative response of laughter. It has been said that the opposing or null [das Nichtige] isn’t something solid, neither something generally or absolutely negative, but always non-existent in comparison to the substance determining reality. [...] What makes the null to be nothingness [das Nichtige zum Nichtigen], the opposing to be opposing [das Entgegenstehende zum Entgegenstehenden] and excludes it as a dropout [Ausfallendes], unessential, nonsensical, incomprehensible, etc depending on the positive order given for itself by existence [Dasein]. But the excluded doesn’t disappear at all, it is not eliminated, it stays preserved in what is called null [das Nichtige], in the background, but nonetheless really persists in the everyday world [Lebenswelt]. In custom [die Sitte] and decency countless possibilities of human conduct are excluded, displaced as untouchable and invisible, into the background, without these possibilities ceasing to exist and having an impact on this customary [der Sitte] order of life comprehended. And this is generally true. [...] So it is in the nature of the positive determinants of existence [Dasein], like order, morality, decency and factual seriousness to force one half of the life-world to exist in the form of the opposing, the null [das Nichtige], not because the man lives in two worlds, but because—in a Platonic way—if something is placed as being existent [als wesentlich seiend], something, as the other, has to become non-existent at the same time. [...] What is played out and grasped throughout laughter is the null’s [des Nichtigen] secret affiliation to existence; it is grippen and played out not through the exclusionary seriousness, which can only keep it away from itself as the null [das Nichtige], but through the null’s [das Nichtige] reflecting itself and speaking from inside the order which excluded it, as something that belongs to it.\textsuperscript{215}

Ritter’s philosophical work on laughter very subtly merges with carnivalesque theory.

The liminal world of the carnivalesque defines itself exactly as Ritter’s null, and even more as the opposing. The carnivalesque act is only laughable while it stays in opposition to the “ordinary”, which is not a particular, solid thing (not even in a very concrete moment). “Ordinary” is permanently refined in every act of the lifeworld\textsuperscript{216} by many aspects (as morality and decency), and in a sense carnival is also one of them, because it shows misrule, the excluded side of life. They are not able to exist without each other and the sudden


\textsuperscript{216} Lifeworld in the Husserlian sense: Lebenswelt.
perception of this inevitability is that triggers laughter. As Welsford justly sets out, “all of us feel an instinctive pleasure in an occasional reversal or topsyturvydom, an occasional reminder that no human barriers are unbreakable, no human judgments final”\textsuperscript{217}. The carnival, “betwixt and between” the life of “normality” is an event not working without laughter, or at least not working the way it should work. To enter this \textit{liminal} world of \textit{misrule} and laughter there is an agent helping us or rather drag us to the other side.

The clown himself is out of the line, an outsider creature par excellence [ausgefallene Kreatur schlechthin], but his outsideness is known [...] His robe differs from all the ordinary, but the long gloves, the countless wets and the huge pants sites are actually the reversal and distortion of the ordinary clothing. He carries with him a meaningful device, the garden gate, but now taken out of its context, in order to \textit{constantly enter through it into that space of nonsense}, which comes into being as the nonsense sticking to sense and herewith triggers liberating laughter, breaking the bounds of the seriousness and measure.\textsuperscript{218}

The \textit{clown} himself is part of the matter the carnivalesque is constructed by. He carries with himself his matter of \textit{misrule} also out of the time of carnival, as Bakhtin observes, as a “constant, accredited representatives of the carnival spirit in everyday life”. He is an “outsider”\textsuperscript{219} with a position actually not being anything special in time of the carnival, when everybody becomes part of the ruling \textit{misrule}. In its ritual form, Gennep explains, “the novices are outside society, and society has no power over them, since they are actually sacred and holy, and therefore untouchable and dangerous, just as gods would be”\textsuperscript{220}. Still, this outsideness, especially in the permanent “outsideness” of the \textit{clown} needs further investigation.

\textbf{As Homo Sacer}

The \textit{fool} (or \textit{clown}) sits alone at his table in the court\textsuperscript{221}. He is not part of the lower or the higher stratums, he is outside of the hierarchical structure of society, excluded from the logic of any hierarchical structure. Erns Kantorowicz compares him to the “king” or even “God”

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item Enid Welsford, \textit{The Fool. His Social and Literary History}. Gloucester, MA: Faber and Faber, 1935. p. 50
  \item van Gennep, Arnold, \textit{The Rites of Passage}. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960. p. 114
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
because he is twin-born as they are.\footnote{Ernst H. Kantorowicz, The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. p. 27} Based on Kantorowicz's political theology these twin-born figures possess two different bodies, a “natural body” every human has, and a “body politic” which is immortal and which can be transferred to another, e. g. to the next king that is crowned and follows in authority. The fool as twin born figure can also have his body politic when crowned as mock-king of the festive performance. As Lord of Misrule, he is the caricature of the two-bodied king, a distorted image of power. His carnivalesque crowning and uncrowing is the structural sketch of death and return of the \textit{par excellence} king, and his immortal “body politic”. As the king, the sovereign, the fool, without a political body, is a \textit{homo sacer} as well. He is “nothing”, as also Nicholas Breton—Shakespeare’s contemporary—mentioned:

> A Foole is the Abortiue of wit, where Nature had more power then Reason, in bringing forth the fruit of imperfection, his actions are most in extremes, and the scope of his braine is but Ignorance: onely Nature hath taught him to feede, and use, to labour without knowledge: Hee is a kind of shadow of a better substance, or, like the Vision of a Dreame, that yeelds nothing awake.\footnote{Nicholas Breton, The good and the badde, or Descriptions of the vvorthies, and vnworthies of this age. Where the best may see their graces, and the worst discerne their basenesse. London: Printed by George Purslowe for John Budge, and are to be sold at the great south-dore of Paules, and at Brittaines Bursse, 1616. p. 23}

In Giorgio Agamben’s book\footnote{Giorgo Agamben, Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life. (translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen) Stanford: Stanford University Press, Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics, 1998} the \textit{homo sacer}’s relation to everyday rules is highly problematic and particular. As \textit{homo sacers}, they have already transgressed all the borders of law and reason, so they are not reachable as the subjects of these languages. In fact, they are hard to define through language itself, also ruled by the order of \textit{λόγος}. Their “outsideness” is not caused by the exile of any ethics or laws (as the exile into being “outlaw”), because the ethical and legal systems “contain” these \textit{outs} as pure negativities, they rule them and can turn them back. The \textit{homo sacer} cannot be grasped by these functional authorities. Their demonstration of everything forbidden is accompanied by a particular positivity, the innocence that triggers ritual laughter. And that is the reason why the \textit{clown} is allowed to do actually anything\footnote{See Mihail Jampolszkij about the \textit{homo sacer} phenomenon in his “A király mint homo sacer.” [The King as Homo Sacer] (translated by Goretity József) 2000, (May 2005) pp. 13-23}. The court clown’s principal feature is, that he
is the only courtier who is not subject of the legal order, becomes neither the subject of the monarch’s words (as the sovereign himself is not a subject of the legal order controlling everybody else). And of course, the reason is that the clown’s transgressions do not mean any harm. His harmless violations and guiltless sins are more treated as cures. As Fuller states about Tarlton, “he told the queen [Elizabeth] more of her faults than most of her Chaplains, and cured her Melancholy better than all of her Physicians”\(^ {226}\). Erasmus also noticed this feature in his *The Praise of Folly*.

That’s how it actually is, princes do hate the truth. But a strange thing happens with my fools, that when they speak truths, even unwelcome truths, they are received with uproarious laughter. In fact, the very same word which, spoken by a wise man, would cost him his life are accepted with incredible pleasure when spoken by a fool. For truth has genuine power to please, if not accompanied by anything offensive; and this gift god has granted only to fools.\(^ {227}\)

“Natural folly” was also treated this way. The natural fools are “innocents”, they wear their “Petticoat for priviledge”\(^ {228}\), because it shows us that they are “not in control of their actions”. They are excluding themselves from our daily reasons, our carefully maintained systems of order, law, morality or decency, which they don’t seem to care about. The privilege of innocence is absolute: it transforms anybody who pulls up their dress, and it is clearly woven from carnivalesque material. When in Flecher’s *The Pilgrim* Roderigo remarks on Alinda, who is disguised as an idiot, the clothes exclusively are able to alter personality:

“The devil in a Fool's Coat, is he turdn'd Innocent?\(^ {229}\)

**As Transgressor**

Travesty as Bristol observes is itself a comprehensive transgression of signs and symbols, a general “refusal of identity”\(^ {230}\). And of course these transgressions are part of what the carnival is about. The travesties, the taunts and gibes, the extreme expressions of folly as unreason themselves are the transgressions of the ordinary into the liminality of misrule.


\(^{228}\) Hotson quotes Davenant’s *News from Plymouth*, where an insolent antagonist is called to account with the angry warning “You weare no Petticoat for priviledge!”, in his *Shakespeare’s Motley*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1952. p. 54.


These travesties and transgressions weren’t political in any sense or ideological in any way—contrary to most travesties nowadays—, but as all actions of the carnival, the topsy-turvy null in the opposition of something, the “official order” of ideologies. While this official, ruling order assigns roles, shares personal social attributes and divides the community into a hierarchical society, the carnivalesque order takes all roles, personalities and ranks back. Carnival is not about the redistribution of identities (these arguments are in my opinion highly anachronistic) but about the mocking of the idea of identity itself.

Therefore clown identities are special: springy and elastic as their bodies are. Bakhtin argues that they have no identity at all,

[… the very being of these figures does not have a direct, but rather a metaphorical, significance. Their very appearance, everything they do and say, cannot be understood in a direct and unmediated way but must be grasped metaphorically […] their existence is a reflection of some other’s mode of being—and even then, not a direct reflection.  

Through their flexible nature and the represented opposing’s, or null’s permanent inherency to the lifeworld—as Ritter put it—, they are able to transgress nearly every known epistemological border. The borders of law are no borders at all for them, but neither are those the borders of sanity. Sometimes their sanity adapts to their audience, behaving as a madman and other times as the only voice of reason (rarely according to how they are described by the narration, as “playing” or “being” fools), or being both at once, as Hamlet does when he speaks madness, “yet there is method in’t”. The words of the clown are not pre-determined as words of madness but as words directly opposed to the recipient’s language, who is stuck in the “official world” and awaits everybody speaking her “official language”. The clown mocks the official language as it mocks ranks and the whole “social dimension”. As we have seen in the very historical reality of the Early Modern, clowns never kept up with jumping up and down on the hierarchical ladder. In the Tarot “the Fool is sometimes regarded as the last card, sometimes as the first, and sometimes as being outside the sequence of the cards and forming a link between the last and the first making the linear arrangement of the cards into a wheel”  

their easiest stunts on stage and in their actual life as well. Because while they are able to
transgress social borders, they also transgress the boundary of fiction and reality.

Crushing the Fourth Wall

Probably also coming from their ritual heritage, the clowns were able to crush the fourth
wall in their whole history. They are the ones transgressing the borders and they also have
the force to take others with. They, while rowing here and there on the border rivers, are
able to take companions—as all the psychopomp tricksters—in their boats. Through their
mockeries and tricks they involve their audience, and that’s how they become participants of
the carnivalesque act. Their improvisations, their accosts on the stage calling the spectators
by their names are obviously acts transgressing these borders between the world of art and
reality, the “border line between art and life” and pulling others also into the comic reality
of the play by mockery. The crushing of the fourth wall in the English theaters is basically
their only skill referred to in the majority of the summarizing works on Early Modern
drama. This mobility is still clearly visible in the movement of the circus clown as well.
Since he is the only one to leave the circus ring for the audience and go back again. While
the members of the audience are not allowed to enter the ring, and the acrobats are
similarly limited to their own round space, the clown can even grab people outside and pull
them over, into the world of performance, where he can “make a fool” of anybody. As
others can accompany them, they can also accompany others and help them to cross any
barriers they can cross. And therefore the transgressing clowns as psychopomps can also
accompany others to the world of the dead. Mephisto himself also stands as a Court Fool in
the court of the emperor, with the honest desire to cross all borders with Faust himself or
the soul he promised.

233 The psychopomp (Greek: ψυχοπομπός) is the guide of souls between this world and the after-life. It is
frequently the function of shamans who are free to walk around these dangerous border regions because they
already “know” these regions from their former visits (see Mircea Eliade, A sámánizmus. [Shamanism]
(translated by Saly Noémi) Budapest: Osiris, 2004. pp. 173-175). Also mythological creatures are functioning
like that, with the best example being Charon. The psychopomp does not judge any of the guided souls, she
accompanies them on their transgressing journey “to show them the way”.

234 Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World. p. 7

235 Bristol’s work is of course a refreshing exception, Carnival and Theater. Plebeian Culture and the Structure of

236 Not to mention his clown-characterization by Klaus Maria Brandauer in Mephisto (1981) introduced in a
thrilling play in a play situation.
His Contra-behavior

As a homo sacer, especially one transgressing the borders of life and death, the clown evokes the possible heritage of the pharmakós, the ritual exiled in early Greek culture. The pharmakós takes up all the sins and grudges, the foolishness of the community, and carries it out from the public space, he “carries out death”. He is the one sitting on the mast of the Ship of Fools painted by Hieronymus Bosch, the ship carrying away human folly, as also written by Sebastian Brant. The par excellence clown has to be an impenitent little devil, the total opposite of anything that is orderly or regular. His behavior is not a reasonable representation of the details of his motivation, reflecting an individual character or personality, but contra-behavior in the first instance. With every act he has to demonstrate his opposition to “normality”. Contra-behavior’s key function is to point out “normal” by reflecting it in the distorted mirror of the carnival.

Cognitively, nothing underlines regularity so well as absurdity or paradox. Emotionally, nothing satisfies as much as extravagant or temporarily permitted illicit behavior. Rituals of status reversal accommodate both aspects. By making the low high and the high low, they reaffirm the hierarchical principle. By making the low mimic (often to the point of caricature) the behavior of the high, and by restraining the initiatives of the proud, they underline the reasonableness of everyday culturally predictable behavior between the various estates of society.

The clown’s contra-behavior shows the logic of the carnivalesque performance. This logic is not simply about the “mirroring” of society, but heavily exaggerating the rules played. None of the participants mimics real personalities but show how real persons in their social positions shouldn’t be. The carnivalesque behavior shows how not to behave, and while people from the lower stratum display the inappropriate demeanors of the superiors, the superiors also enter the game and demonstrate what they wouldn’t like to see from the

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238 It has to be clear that it is not René Girard’s scapegoat notion that I use (from his Violence and the sacred). “Aggression” or “violence” towards a “victim” here is completely on the sideline while these were the main questions for Girard. If anything, a symbolic form of “violence” might be in involved that laughter itself “contains”. When “violence” becomes apparent “laughter” instantly eliminates itself.
subjects²⁴⁰. And the exaggeration of behavioral forms always triggers laughter, laughter “that is also directed at those, who laugh”²⁴¹.

**Provoking Festive Laughter**

The buffoon, as we have seen, is a spiritual as well as a material parasite, he can only be himself in congenial society, he is nothing at all apart from the companions who enjoy and encourage his antics, and when he is really successful he breaks down the barriers between himself and his patrons so that they too inhabit for the moment a no-man’s-land between the world of fact and the world of imagination.²⁴²

The “universal” laughter of the carnival was closely connected to participation. To “enter” the carnival, laughter was enough. Everybody who laughs, laughs at the whole world he is also part of. Ritter quotes Ruge’s phrase that the one being laugh at, and the one laughing, is always the same person²⁴³. When she is part of the world laughed at, she already is a participant of the festive reality. Laughter theories in the tradition of Hobbes (laughing at inferiors) and Bergson (laughter as the distinguishing mark of a group) base themselves on the “separating laughter” partly originating from the great critic of carnival, Sir Philip Sidney. The “separating laughter” may not be laughter at all, because it is the reflection of laughter for “the one not laughing”, the one standing outside the laughing group and observing them. And the one not laughing and having no part in laughter, should not know what laughter is about²⁴⁴. The question on how laughter manifests itself before the outsider is ontologically alien to carnivalesque reality, which never asked for participation.

As Roger Caillois mentioned in the *Man and the Sacred*, the festival is “the paroxysm of society”, a laughing outburst of the collective mind, and no festive theory should abandon this essential relation. The communal laughter at the carnival naturally corresponded to the laughter of the *pharmakós*, the *par excellence* clown. Furthermore, this ritual laughter as the derision of the whole world we are also part of, always means laughter at the present. The present, in the notions of the “present order”, the “present rules” and “present hierarchy of

²⁴⁰ See Natalie Zemon Davies’ mentioned study on fool societies or Abbeys of Misrule.
²⁴⁴ With the words of William Willeford, : “[W]e cannot describe a joke and its workings unless we get the point of it. If we do get the point of it, we were, while we laughed, inside the thing we wish to describe, and our description will have little meaning unless it conveys a lively awareness of that experience.” William Willeford, *The Fool and His Scepter. A Study in Clowns and Jesters and their Audience*. Northwestern University Press, 1979. p. xviii
society” can be laughed at, and the null, the opposing also has to emerge from the exclusion of (or even more, the excludedness by) the present. It is very rare to laugh at transgressions of past rules and orders, and all the same, things visioned as true in the future are also rarely laughable. The sudden relax of stress in the paroxysm of laughter is what makes the thing funny, and there is no such stress between the given and the excluded when envisioned in the future, or already expired in the pass. Clowns only parody present people or people having still impact in the present. Bakhtin also argues, that “the past (in distant view) cannot be the object of laughter”, and that the “present time (‘my time’) is the object of invective par excellence”, because it is “the present time, our age that is always derided”\textsuperscript{245}. The liminal time, “betwixt and between” liturgically recognized cycles is not strictly speaking part of the liturgical year. The laughter at the present moment, in the carnivalesque opposition, itself mocks the ruling notion of time\textsuperscript{246}. The Judeo-Christian linearity is eliminated in the festival which is “untimely” and is marked with customs like ringing the church bell at the wrong time or changing the hands on the clock\textsuperscript{247}. The misrule of the carnival was disjoint time, and this is the particular reason why the concepts of “the Golden Age” and even “Utopia” does not have any business here. Long forgotten paroxysms (triggering long forgotten laughters) take us to nostalgia, future visions and utopia to the will of revolution, which is the will of an ideology, which rebels against the other, ruling ideology. But the will is also unsmiling and serious, to the extreme, and has nothing to do with the releasing carnival.

Carnival brought freedom, as carnivalesque laughter is “indissolubly and essentially related to freedom”\textsuperscript{248}. Bakhtin denies the notion of “utopia” while arguing with Veselovsky’s opinion on carnivalesque laughter as a camouflage,

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[... a defense of human value in general, which the clown proclaimed using this external form. If there had been no repressions, no stake, truth would have cast off the clown's attire; it could have spoken in serious tones. Such an interpretation of medieval laughter appears incorrect in our mind. No doubt, laughter was in part an external defensive form of truth. It was legalized, it enjoyed privileges, it liberated, to
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\textsuperscript{245} Mikhail Bakhtin, “Bakhtin on Shakespeare. (Excerpt from “Additions and Changes to Rabelais”)” (translated by Sergeiy Sandler) PMLA. 129/3., (2014) p. 524

\textsuperscript{246} See Aron Yakovlevich Gurevich’s second chapter his A középkori ember világképe. [The worldview of the medieval man] (translated by Előd Nőra) Budapest: Kossuth, 1974. This is exactly, how the “eternal return” triumphs against the “terror of history” in Eliade’s The Myth of the Eternal Return.


\textsuperscript{248} Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World. p. 89
a certain extent, from censorship, oppression, and from the stake. This element should not be underestimated. But it would be inadmissible to reduce the entire meaning of laughter to this aspect alone. Laughter is essentially not an external, but an interior form of truth; it cannot be transformed into seriousness without destroying and distorting the very contents of the truth which it unveils. Laughter liberates not only from external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor; it liberates from the fear that developed in man during thousands of years [...] Its external privileges are intimately linked with interior forces; they are the recognition of the rights of those forces.249

The laughing community is losing its differences through this laughter, they are losing their ego in the flow of paroxysm. The ego which holds every memory of being something in the past and having goals in the future. Everything fixed becomes flexible particularly by the play of the clown.

[The Shakespearean fool] as comical element lives from substance he is carried out in, from the fixity of the world understood in concept and word, which is twisted by the folly of the fool as it were pierced and dissolved. The joke is nothing else than joining the play [with this fixity] [...]250

**Always Returning**

Quite obviously, laughter only fell when the violence—inseparable from the carnivalesque gag—remained harmless, and stayed mock-violence. If the caused pain appeared to be serious, the laughter of the audience has faded into silence and fear emerged. Laurent Joubert’s statement from the 16th century reveals this derailment.

It is equally unfitting to show one’s arse, and when there is no harm forcing us to sympathize we are unable to contain our laughter. But if another suddenly puts a red-hot iron to him, laughter gives way to compassion unless the harm done seems light and small, for that reinforces laughter [...] children and drunkards fall often, and make us laugh: but we will laugh incomparably more if a great and important personage who walks affectedly with a grave and formal step, stumbling clumsily on a heavy stone, falls suddenly in a quagmire.251

Laughter itself is nothing else but the celebration of the absence of fear, and in a very plain, existential sense. The burlesque movies and cartoons nicely demonstrate this fact, which also connects us to the notion of carnival. This is the “uncrowning laughter” spoken about by Bakhtin.

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249 *Idem*, pp. 93-94
It was the victory of laughter over fear that most impressed medieval man. It was not only a victory over mystic terror of God, but also a victory over the awe inspired by the forces of nature, and most of all over the oppression and guilt related to all that was consecrated and forbidden (“manna” and “taboo”). It was the defeat of divine and human power, of authoritarian commandments and prohibitions, of death and punishment after death, hell and all that is more terrifying than earth itself. [...] This feeling is expressed in a number of characteristic medieval comic images. We always find in them the defeat of fear presented in a droll and monstrous form, the symbols of power and violence turned inside out, the comic images of death and bodies gaily rent asunder. All that was terrifying becomes grotesque. We have already mentioned that one of the indispensable accessories of carnival was the set called “hell”. This “hell” was solemnly burned at the peak of the festivities.\(^{252}\)

The laughter rises in the absence of fear, and what is more, its cause is also the existence of fear itself, because existential fear is not naturally supposed to be negative. It only means “Rule” in an absolute way, and all rules within that absolute “Rule”. The magical taboo while being “fearful”, its sacredness also brought “holiness”, which was surrounded by respect and honor, at least in the days beyond the carnival. The absoluteness of “Rule” and “Death” is not fixed to any ethical or moral point of existence, it only became “bad” or “good” when ideology became involved. The time of misrule is the suspension of seriousness, when “Rule” itself becomes suspended. And this means every little rule constituting the hierarchical, legal, “normal” system of the “official” world, and also the rules defining the lifeworld itself, with the most significant rule of humankind from the birth of human consciousness, the rule of Death\(^{253}\). In the carnival the basic taboo, that is defeated, is Death itself. In the very ritual form “thus arises a simple drama, in which a revival is added to the death, and a consciousness of the waning and waxing of the seasons is reflected”\(^{254}\). The carnivalesque victory of Life upon Death in the mock-fights, through the revival scenes at the end of the carnivalesque act, is also mirrored in the “crownings” and “uncrownings” of the mock kingdoms, as the annual “status reversal rituals” and back-and-forth swaps of kingly authority (the body politic)\(^{255}\). The ritual, through mock-violence and false-Death already...
“pregnant with Life” is actually identical with the source of laughter. This laughter, which is, from the beginning, not a marginal, incremental, but an essential and inherent determination of people, who “defeat, through laughter, the strangeness of life appearing in death”256. Laughter has always been a savior, because it literally redeems us from Death, giving life and resurrection. Violence is laughable even—and especially—in the most savage form, where it avoids seriousness, where Death is not part of it and is excluded from the “play”.

Mock-violence is thus internally connected with the clown or fool par excellence. In St. Chrysostom’s definition the term “fool” itself means him “who gets slapped”257. The clown-play as the most basic function of the clown is the most easily demonstrated by the Roly-poly toy, which can be hit whenever and no matter how hard, it always returns into its “healthy” position. The clown-play as the core of carnival is also the point of Bakhtin in Rabelais, when speaking about the “red-snouted” catchpoles (Rouge musaeu), who “earn their living by letting themselves be trashed” and the slanderers being beaten on the wedding in the house of the Lord of Basché258. Rabelais’s carnivalesque side is connected to their “apparent death, sudden return to life, and jumping up like a clown who has received a beating”259.

As immanently pagan, the clown-play only functions in the always recurring notion of time where death is an inevitable part of life, the point of the new beginning, the driver of the constant repetition. It is important that Christianity’s linear notion of time (a Jewish legacy) marks another paradigm, sometimes threatening the older, at other times transforming it for his own purposes260. As Bakhtin argues,

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258 See the third chapter of the Rabelais-book, more precisely, Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World. pp. 196-208
259 Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World. p. 197
260 I already wrote some articles about the role of Jesus, as ritual clown and the connecting tradition of the „Eastern laughter” (risus paschalis). Bársny Márton, “Isten Bohóca’ és a ‘halál halálá’ – Az archaikus bolond-rituálék hűsvéti öröksége.” [“God’s clown” and the “death of death” – The Easter heritage of the archaic fool-rituals] In: Vidimus enim stellam eius... (edited by László Szávay), Budapest: L-Harmattan, 2011, pp. 25-32, and GOD’S CLOWN, STUDIA RELIGIOLOGICA IN PRESS
either its essential collective or historical aspect), but was perceived rather as a limiting phenomenon, one lying on the fixed boundary between that perishable temporary world and eternal life, like a door opening out on another, transcendental, world. Death was, therefore, conceived not as part of an all-encompassing temporal sequence but rather as something on the boundary of time, not in a life series but at the edge of that series.²⁶¹

The perceived structure of time cannot be left without attention. The basic mistakes and falsehoods of the works on carnivalesque are caused by missing this problem. In a world of linear time, change is part of history and has to be identified in history, not only as historical truth, but as the intensifying “in-order” (and not misrule) of the system, as dissatisfaction already “pregnant” with change and the new paradigm soon coming into life. The knowledge in the world of linearity is not functioning like the knowledge of the world where carnival marks “change”. Because the carnivalesque “change” of the world is equally “un-change” at its core. Carnival theories—as Turner’s himself—tend to forget Gennep’s whole structure, constituting from separation, margin (or limen), and reaggregation, only emphasizing the middle element of the three and totally forgetting the last part of the ritual process.

Making Him Apophatic

Reaggregation means reincorporation, returning-to-the-same-place, reinforcing the mode of being outside the liminal mode. It means that the things that got separate become again reunited into the whole. It means the ritual restoring of the self by the self. As Durkheim argued, the question of festive accommodation and reintegration should not be read as a resistance to change, or as the suppression of difference, but rather as the active promoting of social continuity. The generations after him added that the social continuity strengthened by the carnival was quite metaphysical in a way, in addition of being very prophane. Still, Durkheim was very right in emphasizing the common mistake of using the carnival as a weapon of ideologies, either by the ruling authority, or by the oppressed mass. As Bristol also mentions, “there is a positive critique, a celebration and reaffirmation of collective traditions lived out by ordinary people in their ordinary existence”²⁶². The critical, taboo breaking attitude and the contra-behavior of the clown also works in the apophatic

way of the carnival. Bakhtin himself has a tendency to forget *apophaticism*, especially when the obligatory lines of class struggle come in question263, but at other times, he clearly emphasizes it.

We must stress, however, that the carnival is far distant from the negative and formal parody of modern times. Folk humor denies, but it revives and renews at the same time. Bare negation is completely alien to folk culture.264

Lacking the need for negative criticism means the lack of need to change, but at least the lack of true desire. The clown’s repeated “returning-to-the-same-place” apophatically reaffirming “the-same-place” is related to the order of the annual returns of the seasons, but it also marks the returns to the order of the medieval social hierarchy, or any other rule in the “official” order of the world. As life comes after death, the ritual process has to be finished through having its last part, reaggregation also “walked through”. When it is cut off, the aesthetic experience changes and the whole process “goes wrong”.

In *Carnival and Theater*, Michael Bristol considers Turner’s theory to be one of the best accounts265, because Turner was able to write on two “somewhat distinct” forms of status reversal rituals: the one marking the turning points of individual life, the steps of a person’s development, and the other, seasonal celebrations (here: carnivals). While Turner’s source, Gennep, in his *Rites de Passage* already started out from both of these festive forms, Turner argued that Gennep only addressed the “individual life-crisis” festivals and only brought examples thereof266. This question of the two traditions, which should be dealt with simultaneously, was a major issue for both Turner and Bristol. Actually, this has no real relevance for us, because while many customs have been found having both functions at the same time (carnivalesque events were frequently occasions of inauguration as well), the actual difference itself is hard to argue for267. The points of development in an individual life,

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263 Even the most careful scholars, as Natalie Zemon Davies (“The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth-Century France.” *Past & Present.* 50. (February 1971), p. 49) misread Bakhtin in the question, while others constantly refuse to deal with any other question, than Bakhtin’s theoretical corruption due the Marxist language he had to use in some places.


267 To be honest, while making them, Turner himself questions the sense of these and like differences made: “[...] it is appropriate that rituals of status reversal are often located either at fixed points in the annual cycle or in relation to movable feasts that vary within a limited period of time, for structural regularity is here reflected
in the experienced notion of time, have nothing to do with modern linear personality: someone who is born, lives and dies. The annual returning of the festival also symbolizes the return of these turning points, regardless to the *individuum* and his short life on earth. Especially so, because death is part of life, a similar turning point like all the others, followed by the others again and again, as the years and seasons follow each other. This made-up “difference” between “was once” and “will come” shows an actual mistake already hiding in the theoretical structure. This thinking makes the results questionable because it shows the notion of linear time worming itself into an area where it does not belong. That turns Turner’s carnival study into a twisted remake of Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, when he begins to see the carnivalesque/liminal “as a kind of institutional capsule or pocket which contains the germ of future social developments, of societal change.” The developing time, the revolutionary time is the possibility of the linear time, getting from A to B. The time of popular festivity is A-B-A, where B is the short, but defining time of the carnival.

The actual historical examples of festivals turning into bloodshed mean no harm to the apophatical interpretation of carnival. Le Roy Ladurie’s wonderful account of the *Carnival in Romans* about the mock-violence turning into serious violence, a tax revolt, an attempt to throw over the rule of nobility with its ending in the massacre of the poor, is the best study written in the topic. But the book also emphasizes how the “war” in 1580 in the French city is actually fought by many different groups, religious and economic interests. While Ladurie is eager to find an integrated, visionary thought, ideological motivation behind the

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269 “Large groups of the peasantry had taken up arms. They combated the outlaw soldiers of noble birth who had been terrorizing the countryside. They fought against certain aspects of domination by the landlords, and most of all against the tax-exempt status of the nobles. The urban bourgeoisie was to varying degrees in conflict with the two privileged ranks. The craftsmen and the common folk locked in a struggle with the bourgeois participants. Finally, the nobility itself was no longer unified. The rift between Protestant nobles and their Catholic brothers was destructive.” Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival in Romans. Mayhem and Massacre in a French City*. (translated by Mary Feeney) London: Phoenix, 2003. p. 33
revolts ("the forerunners of equality"), he also concludes the few given texts, written by lawyers, about the harms caused by the privileges of the nobles, obviously not being "enough"\textsuperscript{270}. What is more, these were not particularly relevant to the carnival. Since Ladurie is writing about an isolated bloodshed, mobilizing large masses against each other, who hid their true intentions behind the masques of the carnival, the argument becomes more like a confirmation of the carnivalesque apophaticism. Because "hiding" means here that every participating group, faction and party took the carnival as an opportunity to disguise his actions and objectives. Ideology was not announced through carnival as a medium but was hidden behind it, as being totally absent. If carnival had been unusual, the "hidden" war maneuvers would easily have been identified. The groups taking part in the killings had only one goal in common: to maintain the presence, the screen of carnival, the misrule that can hide the serious clash of weapons. The actual rush into fighting was caused by the uncertain suspicions and fears of the parties who saw each other "behaving in a carnivalesque manner" but guessed the serious intentions "hidden" behind one another’s masques. The breakdown (the splitting) of the carnival, the silencing of laughter itself anticipated the events turning violent. The carnival in Romans probably was not an isolated incident, but a perfect example of how a carnivalesque event becomes decarnivalized in historical reality, "in the most profound levels of social intercourse, where tragedy and comedy often intermingle"\textsuperscript{271}.

In Marcus’s opinion also Natalie Zemon Davis’s study\textsuperscript{272} proves the inadequacy of apophaticism\textsuperscript{273}. His words seem to be confirmed by her questioning.

There are fascinating examples [...] both in city and countryside, of carnivals where the tension between the festive and everyday official realms was broken and uprising and rebellion ensued. Sometimes this was partially planned ahead of time, sometimes it was spontaneous. Thus in 1513, three hundred young peasants from villages near Berne, Switzerland, marched on the city after some June revels to

\textsuperscript{270} Idem, pp. 339-370
\textsuperscript{271} Idem, p. 206
\textsuperscript{272} Natalie Zemon Davis ("The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth-Century France." \textit{Past & Present}. 50. (February 1971) pp. 41-75
\textsuperscript{273} The phrase "reaffirmation of the status quo" he is using with others is very narrow, only noting the problem of the "social order" in carnival, not speaking leaving room for the other ongoing transgressions. Of course, I would add, it is true, that when only one of the transgressions is obstructed, the whole picture of carnival (the whole cathartic structure of the ritual) becomes obstructed. Leah S. Marcus, “Shakespeare and Popular Festivity.” In: \textit{Shakespeare and Elizabethan Popular Culture}. (edited by Stuart Gillespie, Neil Rhodes) London: The Arden Shakespeare, Arden Critical Companions, 2006 p. 51
punish the “mangeurs de couronnes” and sacked it. During the revolt of the
Netherlands, in Cambria (where the Abbe de L'Escache-Profit and other dignitaries
held court), the rebels were costumed and carried fools’ scepters with the head of
the hated governor Cardinal Granvelle. [...] Finally, a 1630 uprising in Dijon against
royal tax officers took the form of a masquerade [...]274

But Davis actually never stated that carnivals ending in political conflicts were wide-
spread. She rather states, that “total violence or disorder in the course of misrule was a
mistake, an accident (so we learn from the brawls and murder cases which ultimately found
their way to the royal courts)”275. She, as a historian, very clearly demonstrated, how the
carnival license to deride could be turned against the political authorities, with the “changing
social and age compositions”276. And here the question comes down to the issue of how we
define a phenomenon like the carnival. We can either say that a particular being of the world
can evolve into something else (the carnival into revolution, liminal into liminoid277), or say
that the carnival is over when the act of reaggregation is lost. I very strongly recommend the
latter.

Ritter’s essay about laughter mentions the issue of the “dispositional width”278, which is
closely related to apophaticism. When the joke “no longer fits positively into existence”, it
stops being funny. And nearly every joke can go beyond positivity, so this has to be a
common process. In the case of the carnival the problem is more clearly demonstrated. As I
earlier mentioned, if we follow Bakhtin, the carnival can hardly turn into ideology. The world
believed to be movements and collisions of ideologies itself is questioned in carnival,
because it is pure anti-ideology, pointing its finger at ideology and laughing at ideology.
Ideology always is a set of rules, which is turned into misrule. There is a source from 1646
about how the professors had been trying to suppress the carnivalesque traditions in
Cambridge 60 years earlier, when some “grave Governors mentioned the good use thereof,
because thereby, in twelve days, they more discover the dispositions of Scholars than in
twelve months before”279. The clash of ideology and anti-ideology is unlike the clash of

Past & Present. 50. (February 1971) p. 69
275 Idem, p. 54
276 Idem, p. 66
277 Turner’s later finding, meaning the revolting, carnival-like events in the new world of commercialization and
industry.
278 Joachim Ritter, “Über das Lachen.” In: Subjektivität. Sechs Aufsätze. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag,
1974. p. 83
279 Thomas Fuller, Good Thoughts in Worse Times. 1647. p. 193
opposed ideologies. In the latter both (or all) partaking ideologies (having the will to influence) have their chances to win. Anti-ideology is destined to loose, and with its loss and still coming back next year, it releases the stress established by ideologies. When ideologies clash, there is a point when the new, weaker ideology suddenly overcomes the other ideology, stronger before (and this does not necessarily mean the end of their war). That is also an indicator of the total absence of carnival “in the affair”. It can be either the clash of ideologies, or decarnivalization, when the very conscious creative mind changes the clowns on the stage into the man-eating-clowns of the horror movies of today.

Both the Whiteface and the August

Still, if there is an opposition between the carnival and the “official” world, how is it symbolized in the very rich and diverse tradition of mock-violence\(^2\)\(^{280}\) How can we capture this antinomy? Obviously, the opposition between the conscious “class characteristics” of the two main “social classes” is the most common response but this consciousness was probably not present in tribal societies already knowing the liminal time of misrule\(^2\)\(^{281}\). What is more, as we have seen, social position is by no means the only one transgressed in the carnival (as exemplified by the travesties of gender). Still, “something has to fight something”, two opposed characters are needed, who can include all the aspects, mediate the essence of the carnival, act out the always recurring clown-play. We need two opposed characters, who are themselves able to transgress phenomenological borders, but still keep their own mock-battle alive. The arising symbols of this confrontation are the two clown figures from the circus, the always rebelling, naughty August and the neat freak, artistic Whiteface. A clown is always either an August or a Whiteface and he is always facing the other type on the stage.

They are facing each other, but not exclusively unaccompanied. The aspects making up the “official”, the “order”, the “world of ideologies” are uncountable, as “carnival”, “misrule” and the “world’s positive denial” as well. The question of “how many” clowns are being needed for the clown-play is pointless. They also tend to change their clothes. Southworth


\(^{281}\) Perhaps Roger Caillois is the only one with contrasting opinion in Man and the Sacred (beside Marx, of course).
sees them as “king” and “fool”, “master” and “servant”, “substance” and “shadow”, “a universal, symbolic expression of the antithesis lying at the heart of the autocratic state between the forces of order and disorder, of structured authority and incipient anarchy”\(^{282}\), and he is right, with the only addition that any ideology, any “order” and “disorder” could be feasible, like the “non-autocratic order” of our very time, called democracy. Everything “normal” or “adopted” can be transgressed by the clown. Their shifts between the transgressed territories are frequently mistaken for “different personalities”\(^{283}\). There are “trends” the clowns also adopt to (in opposing them), because they always have to depend on the present.

Carnivalesque is needed for a change in our interpretative mechanisms related to the Early Modern. Bart van Es reads the first story in Armin’s *Fool upon fool* for his very recent book. The story is about the opposition of the Fool from the court, Jack Oates, who is replaced by “another type”, a minstrel fool. Hereafter comes the brutal showdown, when Jack beats the hell out of his successor, until “my poor Minstrill with a fall had his head broke to the skull against the ground, his face scratcht, that which was worst of all, his left eye put out, and withall so sore bruzed, that he could neither stand nor goe”\(^{284}\). What van Es sees here with the eye of New Historicism is Armin’s (and his clown-type’s) symbolic victory upon Kemp (and his clown-type)\(^{285}\). What Bakhtin would have seen is a story similar to the carnivalesque fights between the catchpoles in Rabelais, a mock-fight between clowns, with the skill to symbolize much more, than, for example, the historical reality that surrounds the author. An opposition of “eiron” and “alazon”, or *jours gras* and *jours maigres*, “carnival” versus “lent”\(^{286}\) also meant the same. In the latter, lent wins, as death always ends life, but always “pregnant” with the promise of the return of life, the return of carnival and the return of its new challenge against its archenemy. The clown-play—in a closely unchanging form in the history of human culture—stages the recurring fight between the disciplining element, the Whiteface and the mischievous element, the August.


\(^{283}\) Wiles’s big difference found between Kemp and Armin is like picking two television comedians. One of them with an Academy Award from 2013 and the other from 2014. Can we really determine “comedian” just from the difference of their (and their roles) personalities?

\(^{284}\) Robert Armin, *Foole upon Foole. or Sixe sortes of sottes*. London, 1605. p. 8


\(^{286}\) Which is essentially the same as the opposition of “carnival” and “official”, but with a caricature of the real “official”. See also: Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*. London: Temple Smith, 1978. pp. 188-189
In the end it always comes to Life’s victory upon Death. A victory achieved through never
winning a fight, but always repeating it. The August never gives up the fight against the
Whiteface, who constantly kicks him back to the starting point. But the *clown par excellence*
cannot “die” a negating, disappearing death. Through his permanent mockery, he also
“makes a fool” of Death, as it happens in *Wits Pilgrimage*, written by John Davies of
Hereford. Maister here makes a fool of Death, by—as a true *psychopomp* and master of
travesty—lending his “costume of folly”.

Then, Meece sith Death doth play the Foole with thee,
Showing his Teeth, laughing illflavour’dly,
Put on his Pate, thy Capp; and on his Back
Thy pied-Coate put, with ev’rie foolish knack:
And say (sith hee sittes quite beside the Stoole)
Looke on the Foole that cannot kill a Foole![287]

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[287] In *An Epitaph, or what you will, on the death of Maister Meece an harmlesse professed Foole, who shall
decease, when it shall please God, and him, made at his earnest request*. John Davies, *The Complete Works of
John Davies of Hereford (15..-1618): For the First Time Collected and Edited: with Memorial-Introduction, Notes
and Illustrations, Glossarial Index, and Portrait and Facsimile*. (edited by Alexander Balloch Grosart) Blackburn:
Thomas and Archibald Constable, vol. 2. 1878
3. King Lear: Deconstructing Folly

How does one know what she has to look for as carnivalesque when she is watching one of Shakespeare’s plays? Michael Bristol, who wrote one of the most important works on the topic, claims that we have to look for signs that speak up for the interests of its own times\(^{288}\) and this obviously covers the area of interest of new historicist critics as well. According to this reasoning, carnivalesque elements like all the other “worth for a research” only spoke “directly” to the contemporary audience. For us, taking this view, in the 21st century a historian is needed to sit on the edge of the stage and explain the context, wherein the strange figures of speech and the unintelligible situations of the ongoing play can make actually sense. This historian who has to comment on the play and translate it to the language of our present reality—who thus mediates “between life and art, in a peculiar midzone as it were”\(^{289}\) actually resembles the clown itself, so in one stroke a function of the carnivalesque medium is already back into picture. While I naturally agree that the possibilities of interpretation became different from those that were once available\(^{290}\) (and also accepting the hermeneutical thesis that every interpretation is unique and unrepeatable), all these conceptual twists of the thinking mind proved to be unable to answer the real question: where does Shakespeare’s exceptional and more or less constant popularity come from? Whatever literary criticism can “find” in Shakespeare has somehow to be perceptible for any audience in history: that is what art’s autonomy tells us.\(^{291}\)

Paradoxically, it seems especially hard to argue in favor of this “timelessness” from the point of the carnival. In her book Enid Welsford writes about the sottie: *Innovating Moderns*


\(^{290}\) Obviously there are also extreme thoughts on the other end of the spectrum, like some interpretations of gender scholars. To take “transdressings” on the Early Modern Stage as an exclusively gender-issue (as “crossdressing”) is an enormous anachronism that has to completely neglect e.g. the whole notion of carnivalesque for the sake of its argument. A rather interesting essay balancing narrowly on the verge because of this omission is Catherine Belsey’s “Disrupting sexual difference: meaning and gender in the comedies.” in *Alternative Shakespeares*. (edited by John Drakakis) London – New York: Routledge, 1985. pp. 166-190

\(^{291}\) A work of art can never be easily explained by direct historical (social, economic, political or administrative) bodies of knowledge, mainly used by historians. Art always stands in the way of its own decryptability and always questions one-sided solutions. That makes it memorable, and superior to any other “heteronomous beings” of the world.
(Gens Nouveaux) who devour the World and bring it from bad to Worse. The story of the production is quite obviously saturated with carnivalesque elements, such as mock-battles of fools, playful exclusions of the pharmakós and hilarious revivals, but that is not really my point here. After the introduction of the notion of the “festive play”, Welsford is quick to acknowledge Petit de Julleville’s suggestion that the sottie should be affiliated to the masquerade rather than to the drama, because “both the sottie and the masque have the topical evanescent character of reveling rather than the permanence and detachment of art”. She argues that the festive medium differs from artistic drama by not having a “real plot” — which is obviously not true about the plays she is describing — and this raises some uncomfortable questions of the media (“medial questions”). Dramatic art — as the written texture of drama — is supposed to be made for eternity, while festive theatre — as an event-like performance — is supposed to be evanescent, concentrating on the “ritual” merrymaking “in the present”, like the masquerade does. This comes down to the question whether Shakespeare was rather a dramatist or a playwright, living in the economy of capitalism or the Middle Ages. Did he obey modern aesthetics, or did he adhere to “religious” approaches to art? Or, eventually: was he the man of the popular tradition and the cyclic perception of time, or the man of “linear history”, and one who wished “to be remembered”? Probably, in between. As being — as most of Shakespeare’s admirers acknowledge — the man who represents the change itself, he is to be reckoned with always in both perspectives: he was both the man of the past, and the man of the future. Still, we have to see how this becomes an actual question of the medium Shakespeare’s work is confronted.

A. C. Wheeler actually thought that theatre, as the staged form of performance, “materializes Shakespeare, and doing so vulgarizes him” while “intellectual good taste outside of the theater spiritualizes him”, which I take as his — latent — observation of how the actual performance is naturally more connected with the carnivalesque than the written text could ever be. Clowns — often improvised — played out puns, sang songs and stumbled up and down the stage, making a slapstick comedy out of the main plot, while shamefacedly touching matters of Jacobean reality. They, between “life and art” are prominent

293 *Idem*, p. 230
294 *Idem*, p. 230-231
representatives of meta-theatre and also use many more non-verbal forms of action than words. These practices cannot easily be unraveled from the textual sources. Weimann and his *Shakespeare und die Tradition des Volkstheaters* takes the concepts of *locus* and *platea*. The carnivalesque clowning is not primarily happening in *locus*, the space of the world created by the author, but in another “fictional location”, *platea*, which means an in-between-space closer to reality. Inhabiting *platea* actually means the *clown’s* transgressing skill which, by this medial peculiarity, frequently hides him “between the lines”. For example, it is hard to identify Elizabethan and Jacobean catchphrases (coming from a drama’s *platea*) in the language of the clown that are supposed to be funny because—from our perspective—they can also be part of the play’s fictional reality (*locus*). They are not referring to “our” world, which does not mean that they were not once funny in the context of their own. It only means, that “we do not understand the joke”. Bristol also remarks that the *clown’s* extraliterary status confers a distinct cognitive advantage\(^{296}\), but this also means that clowning cannot be understood in context as a literary device, because it belongs to the bigger, extra-literary context of everyday life\(^{297}\). The “textual impossibility of disclosure” in Shakespeare’s theatre shows itself even more in the performative action (especially by the clowns) on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage. *Folly*, or in another way: “truth being understood from the carnivalesque point” is often “concealed” or even “missing” in the text, as Feste also observes in *Twelfth Night* or *What You Will*: “Truth, sir, I can yield you none without words, and words are grown so false, I am loath to prove reason with them”.\(^{298}\)

Bakhtin himself is at least prepared to consider this:

In the speeches of tragic (high) heroes [...] the prevailing images are those of cosmic topography (the earth, the sky, hell, paradise, life, death, angel, demon, the elements), while in the speeches of fools [...] the prevailing images are those of bodily topography (face—rear, copulation, a beast with two backs, food, drink, bed, excrement, etc.), i.e., lowering images. [...] On a stage, the topographic nature of which is felt, the gesture inevitably retains some degree of topographical (symbolicity), it points, as it were, to top and bottom, to sky and earth (as in taking oaths, and in ritual gestures in general), the expressive (in our sense) psychological gesture is fitted into the frame of the topographic gesture (after all, words too clothe the hero’s experiences in topographic images, not in explanatory similes in the spirit of recent times); after all, the room (palace, street, etc.) in which the hero acts and gesticulates, is not the


\(^{297}\) *Idem*, p. 143

\(^{298}\) Feste’s wonderful lines in *Twelfth Night* (3.1.20-21)
room (palace, street) of ordinary life either, for it is fitted into the frame of the
topographic stage, it is on earth, hell is underneath it and heaven above it, the action
and the gesture, taking place in the room, are at the same time taking place in a
topographically understood universe, the hero keeps moving all the time between
heaven and hell, between life and death, next to the grave. [...] The topographic
gesture is particularly clear in comic (laughing) theater and is still alive in puppet
shows and in the circus arena.  

The “topographical gestures” on stage point to the “total reality” of the play’s world, but
this pointing actually also mimics the world the play is viewed from. The stage becomes the
world, the world becomes the stage; the theatre becomes the “globe” by means of these
“topographical gestures”. These “gestures” become invisible after the Renaissance because
they—and especially through textuality—transform into clichés. This way the theatre of
Bakhtin’s disliking emerges. To “turn away one’s face” is one of the most enduring
“topographic gestures”, which corresponds to the gesture of “showing one’s butt (or
offering to kiss one’s butt) or the softened gesture of turning one’s back)”  

Bakhtin’s semiotic approach very clearly revokes the ritual origins of the theatre.

How can we account for Gloucester’s and Edgar’s famous “climb” onto the rock of Dover
in a theatre like this? Harry Levin was eager to explain the strange “leap” of Gloucester in his
The Heights and the Depths: A Scene from King Lear  

In his opinion the theatrical convention of the Early Modern prescribed the audience to accept whatever was said on the
subject of immediate place as the setting. There could be no clue (at most some suspicion)
that the stage is not turning into a cliff where Gloucester can fall from until it becomes
verbally clarified. But concepts like Levin’s that apparently concern the happenings on stage
do not address “action” on stage at all. It not simply neglects any kind of “topographical
gesture” but non-verbal gestures as well. Speech is probably not “everything” that is going
on “on the cliff of Dover”.  

300 Idem, p. 533
302 There is a perfect example in Midsummer Night’s Dream. The first scene of the third act begins with the
craftsmen planning their performance of Pyramus and Thisbe exactly in the manner of Harry Levin’s argument.
They install introductory commentaries for the actor playing the lion—imagined to be too threatening—and
the one personalizing moonlight and the wall as well. This, first of all, presents the theatrical experience “too
credible”. On the other hand, the verbal exaggeration of the sets which is obviously rough and excessive is
more the mockery of this kind of theater-making then the praise of it. It shows how immoderate or
Jan Kott’s approach in *Shakespeare, our contemporary* may be more insightful for a play primarily imagined for the stage. Gloucester’s leap in its topographic realization is a performance of “philosophical buffoonery”. The climb already is a “pantomime performed by actors, and has something of a circus about it. The blind Gloucester who has climbed a non-existent height and fallen over on flat boards, is a clown.” The somersault becomes identical with the oldest topographical image that exists: the fall and rise, the mock-death of the *clown*. The carnivalesque moment of Life’s triumph over Death is staged here. A dying and reviving carnivalesque clown-figure is essentially comical so—from pure topographical reason—the ritual mockery of death should be thanked with unrestrained laughter. Still, “it is deceptive and unsuccessful on the factual as well as on the metaphysical plane.”

“The worst returns to laughter”?

As also Kott emphasizes, Gloucester’s leap was not understood for many centuries in the play’s history of reception. Productions in the 19th century regularly omitted the scene. Considering this long known uncanniness of the scene, it is really hard to guess its effect on the Jacobean audience, what is more, it appositely simulates the uncanniness felt about the whole play in particular. For some time now, the interpretation of the play as a “simple” example of the tragedies has been successfully called into question. When Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism* correctly criticizes scholars who carry the theory of real emotion over into Shakespeare himself, and still insist on the supposed “tragic period” of Shakespeare from 1600 to 1608, he takes *King Lear* as an example:

Most people, if they had just finished writing a play as good as *King Lear*, would be in a mood of exhilaration, and while we have no right to ascribe this mood to Shakespeare, it is surely the right way to describe our response to the play. On the other hand, it comes as something of a shock to realize that the blinding of

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inappropriate verbal assistance to the scenery actually can ruin the theatrical illusion, or at least make it comical (as we will see in the last act of the play).

304 Ibid.
305 Ibid.
306 *King Lear* (4.1.6)
308 Uncanny as “Unheimlich” in the Freudian sense.
Gloucester is primarily entertainment, the more so as the pleasure we get from it obviously has nothing to do with sadism. If any literary work is emotionally “depressing,” there is something wrong with either the writing or the reader’s response.\(^{309}\)

The stereotypical view of Lear as the darkest (and therefore almost unbearable) play of Shakespeare has slowly expired in the 20th century and many of the new approaches also bravely challenged the genre conventions of the former criticism. Already Harbage and Schoenbaum classified the play as a legendary history. It was G. Wilson Knight in *King Lear and the Comedy of the Grotesque*\(^{310}\) who started to suspect that laughter and humour probably should have a role in the play and he also showed many passages in the texts that supported this hypothesis. Furthermore, Knight already noticed that, from the start, the whole situation of the play has a “comic aspect”\(^{311}\). Still, it was Susan Snyder who was ready to go one step further, stating that Lear’s “history is cast in the mold of comedy-romance, the familiar movement from folly through tribulation and testing to reconciliation and renewed social health”\(^{312}\). In her *The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare’s Tragedies*, she collected a heap of evidence on King Lear, the only one among the tragedies where Shakespeare—according to her reasoning—worked from a comedic source. Among the pieces of evidence there are structures, motifs, and devices of comedy, like the double plot itself, or the figure of the Fool, the topic of the passing of power from the old to the young, the disguised characters and the protagonists forced out from society into the wilderness (educative confrontations in a natural setting). Not to mention how Shakespeare’s Lear actually “derives from one comedy [*King Leir*] and gives place to another [*Nahum Tate’s “cut”*]”\(^{313}\). Snyder’s pattern on the romantic (i.e. “romantic comedy”) features of Lear is already present in Maynard Mack’s “*King Lear* in Our Time” and David Young’s *The Heart’s Forest: A Study of Shakespeare’s Pastoral Plays*\(^{314}\). Still, the uneasiness of the play, despite of its comic structure, or even more: in opposition to it, bumps up in *The Comic Matrix* as well.

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\(^{311}\) *Idem*, p. 161


\(^{313}\) *Idem*, p. 140

\(^{314}\) *Idem*, pp. 140-141
Fathers may well become children in this world of upsidedowns where madmen counsel kings and servants lead their masters (or defy them, like Cornwall’s servant at the blinding of Gloucester), and where women are better soldiers than their husbands. Here are the typical inverted hierarchies of comedy, but few of them give any joy.\textsuperscript{315}

Frye is also keen on emphasizing the importance of the subplot, which seems to be an ironic version of a stock comic theme. He sees Gloucester’s story as a regular comedy theme of the gullible senex swindled by a clever and unprincipled son\textsuperscript{316}. As Knight and Kott, he also tries to explain the uneasiness through the concept of grotesque. \textit{Lear} seems for him like an ironic parody of the tragic situation, most elaborately developed\textsuperscript{317}. But the term, grotesque, as an aesthetical category is not without problems. Bakhtin himself tried to develop “grotesque realism” to help him with the classification of carnivalesque works of art from the Renaissance, but this “grotesque realism” has hardly anything in common with the somewhat more elaborate grotesque of Wolfgang Kayser for example.\textsuperscript{318} And, like most of the aesthetical categories it is nearly impossible to follow through the changing reflections of the ages. The “grotesque” argument in the end would take us far from the actual problems.

It is still clearly visible that the pre-carnival criticism already (re)discovered the paradox nature of the play which seems to consist from a primer comic substance that is somehow “pushed backwards” into tragedy. But without noticing the carnivalesque nature, which I believe to be the major issue at hand, in \textit{The True Chronicle History of King Lear} and also the \textit{The Tragedy of King Lear}, the key to this paradox would be hard to find.

\section*{The Stepheening Lear}

There is an honest possibility that the gloom of \textit{King Lear} is partially the fault of Nahum Tate who not only tore out the most tragic parts but also the parts with the most direct connections to the carnival: the whole figure of the Fool, for example\textsuperscript{319}. After the welcomed

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{315} \textit{Idem}, p. 146
  \item \textsuperscript{316} Northrop Frye, \textit{Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays}. Princeton University Press, 2000. p. 175
  \item \textsuperscript{317} \textit{Idem}, p. 237
  \item \textsuperscript{318} Who in his book, \textit{The Grotesque in Art and Literature} describes a more uncanny, devilish notion of grotesque that is aligned with tragedy and that never meets laughter in fact. Bakhtin himself leaves the term of grotesque realism by the time he writes his excerpts on Shakespeare, which he wanted to add to his Rabelais-book.
  \item \textsuperscript{319} Keith Thomas, “The Place of Laughter is Tudor and Stuart England.” \textit{Times Literary Supplement}. (January 1977), pp. 77-81
\end{itemize}
reanimation of the drama in the 19th century by Macready\textsuperscript{320} Shakespeare’s texts could be again the textual base of the play, but the theatrical practice of almost 150 years did leave an effect on the reception of the play. Tate’s impact cannot be ignored, and can probably never be severed entirely. But the uncanniness Tate is responsible for does not noticeably soften much if the play is recharged with its original carnivalesque features. As Patterson puts it, King Lear is “Shakespeare’s darkest experience in role reversal and carnival exposure.”\textsuperscript{321} Jan Kott has a simple but remarkable insight into how carnivalesque structure is constructed by mainly Shakespeare’s histories. The view of history as the “Grand Mechanism” bases itself on the Bakhtinian crowningings and uncrowningings, which are repeating themselves in an endless process as the Wheel of Fortune (or the “wheel of fire” at 4.7.47\textsuperscript{322}) spins. He bases his efforts entirely on Bakhtin:

\begin{quote}
The analysis we have applied to Rabelais would also help us to discover the essential carnivale element in the organization of Shakespeare’s drama. This does not merely concern the secondary, clownish motives of his plays. The logic of crowningings and uncrowningings, in direct or in indirect form, organizes the serious elements also.\textsuperscript{323}

Kott’s concept of the “Grand Mechanism” is a monotonous clatter without the linear notion of “development” (he was a disappointed Marxist after all). Still, in the process of history in Shakespeare there is “a glimpse of the possibility for change”. This repetitive circular history with its “darker” carnivalesque kingdoms, that flash “the glimpse of the possibility for change” just to cruelly withdraw it thereafter, is an excellent approach to Shakespeare, where carnivalesque folly can also have its “dark” functionality.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
For within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps death his court, and there the antic sits,
Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,
Allowing him a breath, a little scene
To monarchize, be feared and kill with looks,
Infusing him with self and vain conceit,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{320} There is a brand new article on the stagings in 1834 and 1838 by Gabriella Reuss, “The Genesis of Macready’s Mythical Lear: the New Tragic Lear, according to his 1834 Promptbook.” \textit{Shakespeare en devenir.} vol. 9. 2015 and see also the part of Dickens in the reinvention of the original Lear, written in an by Géza Kállay, “‘Vén ember, mit cselekszel?’ – A ‘haláló betegség’ szorongató öröme: Scrooge, Lear és Kierkegaard.” In: És most: beszélj! Nyelvfilozófia, drama, elbeszéléts. Budapest: Liget, 2013


\textsuperscript{322} Not as it was meant by Wilson Knight, in this case.

\textsuperscript{323} Mikhail Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais and His World.} (translated by Helene Iswolsky) Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984. p. 275
As if this flesh which walls about our life
Were brass impregnable, and humoured thus
Comes at the last and with a little pin
Bores through his castle wall— and farewell king.\textsuperscript{324}

But the appealing concept of the “Grand Mechanism” has a glaring weakness, that is, the absence of laughter, and even more, the absence of the possibility of laughter. So the whole question of the play’s carnivalesque qualities have to be revisited, because Kott’s invention seems to be unable to meet the ritual completeness of the carnival demanded.

That \textit{King Lear} has its connections to the carnival seems to be obvious, considering the readily recognizable festive elements that frequently affect the process of the drama as well. As it is generally known, the Quarto version of the play from 1608 has a title page with the following text:

M. William Shake-speare: His True Chronicle Historie of the life and death of King LEAR and his three Daughters, With the unfortunate life of Edgar, sonne and heire to the Earle of Gloster, and his sullen and assumed humor of TOM of Bedlam: As it was played before the Kings Maiestie at Whitehall upon s. Stephans night in Christmas Hollidayes. By his Maiesties servants playing usually at the Gloabe on the Bancke-side

The title thus contains the very significant information that it was played before the monarch of England at the night of St. Stephen’s day a feast day of the Christmas revelries, the 26\textsuperscript{th} of December (The Second day of Christmas), in 1606. While there is an enthusiastic discussion on how the personal presence of King James I could have affected the play and its intrinsic political subject, several readers forget to consider the occasion of the event which was probably surrounded with Catholico-pagan customs of the carnival season.\textsuperscript{325} And the text does contain signs of that. In Act I, Scene 4, the absence of the Fool becomes the

\textsuperscript{324} \textit{Richard II} (3.2.160-170)

\textsuperscript{325} Not to mention how this critical discussion suffers to explain the apparent paradox of this quarto version being much more aggressive with its political messages as the folio edition. Considering what we know about the carnival (the subversion of the world in order to give it rebirth) and the fact that James I supported it, this question should be given much less effort. At least from the point of Shakespeare’s involvement in the actual politics. Example of these struggles: \textit{The Division of Kingdoms: Shakespeare’s Two versions of King Lear.} (edited by Gary Taylor and Michael Warren) Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, or Glyne Wickham, “From tragedy to tragi-comedy: \textit{King Lear} as prologue.” \textit{Shakespeare Survey. 26. Shakespeare’s Jacobean Tragedies.} 1973. pp. 33-48. Of course many scholars realized how contemporaries were far more flexible with such issues, like Annabel Patterson in her \textit{Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England.} Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984. p. 69. Some also realized how the monarch himself was much more flexible than suspected, especially on a festive occasion: Leah S. Marcus, \textit{Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and its Discontents.} Berkeley – Los Angeles – London: University of California Press, 1988. p. 152. So actual Jacobean political issues directly read into King Lear will not be considered in detail.
indicator of the unsettled state\textsuperscript{326} of the household (they call him in 1.4.42-43, 1.4.47-48, 1.4.67, 1.4.72), and the Fool has not been seen for two days (1.4.67), which not only marks Cordelia’s exile in \textit{locus}, but indicates a lack, and “empty hole” in the English “reality” of the day: with the beginning of the Christmas revelries, the Fool should be present as a central figure. The time of misrule had already started: the contemporary audience may easily have been eager to finally see the popular clown character (probably Armin) of Shakespeare’s play.

The plot—this is a remarkable observation of Leah S. Marcus—itself seems to echo the philosophy of the actual festive event of the performance: St. Stephen’s Day,\textsuperscript{327} the day of the “opening the gates for those in need”. On St. Stephen’s Day (later called “Boxing Day”) the poor and the unprivileged flocked together in groups and went “Stephening” from house to house in order to collect donations and gifts\textsuperscript{328}. So-called “poor boxes” were broken open: in these cash donations were collected throughout the whole year. On St. Stephen’s Day, when various social groups celebrated benevolence, hospitality became actually mandatory. The houses of those people who refused to commend their hospitality and left their gates closed were often smashed and plundered. But “wealthy individuals who participated in the spirit of the day took pride in having an estate on St. Stephen’s filled with as many guests as the ‘howse wolld [sic!] hold’”\textsuperscript{329}. This hospitality seems very much like the hospitality that has been withheld by Goneril and Regan through the play. Quite obviously, their rejective attitude seems also somewhat like the serious, lentish, Whiteface attitude towards the noisy and troublesome carnivalesque carousal, the misrule of the August clown. This way the

\textsuperscript{326} Bart van Es, \textit{Shakespeare in Company}. Oxford University Press, 2013. p. 75
\textsuperscript{328} This actually also resembles other carnivalesque “housing” customs, like when the village mummers: “guisers” or “geese-dancers” claimed the right to enter every house in the village. Clement A. Miles, \textit{Christmas in Ritual and Tradition, Christian and Pagan}. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1913. p. 297. This transgressing mobility is also significant in \textit{Twelfth Night or What You Will}, as we will see.
fourth scene actually refers to the mock-combat of the carnival between Whiteface and August, Lent and Carnival. Goneril accuses Lear precisely this way.

Here do you keep a hundred knights and squires,
Men so disordered, so debauched and bold,
That this our court, infected with their manners,
Shows like a riotous inn; Epicurism and lust
Make it more like a tavern or a brothel
Than a graced palace. (1.4.222-227)

Lear and his companions, this “disordered rabble” even “make servants of their betters” (1.4.237-238) in the subversive logic of the carnival. Lear himself tries to “keep Christmas”, as Bristol observes, to celebrate hospitality all the year along. The tension between the rules of the “official” and the rules of carnival begins to become more and more stressing. From Goneril’s point of view – who believes herself living in the world of “Rule” Lear and his companions are the violators of peace and they are parasites of her household. Lear’s men become the “knaves and thieves [to whom] men shut their gate” as this is also heard in the extended version of the song in Twelfth Night (5.1.372).

From Lear’s perspective, Goneril, who denies hospitality in the time of carnivalesque “Misrule” becomes the offender, as Regan thereafter does, too; Regan manages to ban him from entering a house she does not even own. These houses thus become “hard houses” in the terminology of Early Modern carnival customs actually used by Kent in the third act.

Repose you there, while I to this hard house—
More harder than the stones whereof ’tis raised,
Which even but now, demanding after you,
Denied me to come in—return and force
Their scanted courtesy. (3.2.63-67)

And after Lear and his group becomes a group of cast out madmen on the heath, wondering around as poverty-stricken wretches (and the other 100 attendants “sent home” in the name of seriousness), they really become identical with the people in need, the “true

331 Actually from Malvolio’s stance in Twelfth Night or What You Will.
protagonists” of St. Stephen’s Day. From becoming part of “this stratum” can Lear, “a poor old man” speak for his fellows in the name of carnivalesque hospitality (which the present James I also supported and that may perhaps explain why the Quarto is even more into this logic).\textsuperscript{334} The storm they have to face, as Marcus notes, “resembles a holiday inversion writ large, in that the elements, at least, in the king’s own interpretation, seem bent on erasing distinctions between high and low”. And in this carnivalesque reality Lear “commands, like some cosmic Lord of Misrule”\textsuperscript{335}. In the essence of these “cast out wretches” I hope to find King Lear’s true carnivalesque qualities, “the secondary, clownish motives” Bakhtin also mentioned (in passing).\textsuperscript{336}

“This great stage of fools”\textsuperscript{337}

The fools, clowns and madmen in King Lear are admittedly in the spectrum of my research. And while the comparison of these figures will obviously shed light on their differences, I will take them entirely as par excellence clowns: essential representatives, mediums of the carnival. In the first volume of the Mediaeval Stage Chambers analyses 29 different folk plays, and in these plays—as mentioned before—there is always a clown acting in a “presenter role”\textsuperscript{338}, mostly madmen or characters who adapt the performance to the relevant season of the year or to the customs of local regions: “Old Father Christmas”, “St. Patrick”, “Saint George”, “King Cole”, “Captain Slasher”, etc. These presenter clowns, mock-kings or fool-kings have their own “individuality” according to the feast and region, but they primarily are all “cloth changing clown characters”. In King Lear at least all the “positive characters” (i.e. those on Lear’s side, supporting him) are made “fools”, at least once. Lear’s tragedy is the “investing of the King with motley”, and it is also “the crowning and apotheosis of the fool”\textsuperscript{339}. “Folly” of a kind literally conquers the whole cast, while a

\textsuperscript{334} See also François Laroque, Shakespeare’s Festive World. Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage. Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 148-149
\textsuperscript{336} Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World. (translated by Helene Iswolsky) Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984. p. 275
\textsuperscript{337} King Lear (4.6.177)
universal “folly”—through the upcoming comparisons—also becomes “crossed out” and deconstructed. This means a process that, in multiple parallel ways, problematizes the carnivalesque world of the play. In the raging storm, different interpretations of “folly” become personified and walk hand in hand through the heath. They all possess, for some time, “the voice of the Other”. As Empson noted, “you are losing a good deal if you do not give its full weight to fool”, the key term “which is used forty-seven times”\(^{340}\). Kott cites Camus: “there are four of them, one by profession, one by choice, two by the suffering they have been through. They are four torn bodies, four unfathomable faces of the same fate”\(^{341}\). But the categorizations, of course, differ. Bristol lists the “liminary outcasts” as “the mocking, fool, madman and the carnival bully”\(^{342}\). Welsford’s grouping:

Lear’s dread is justified, ‘sweet heaven’ rejects his prayer, and the central scenes on the heath are peopled by a blind, half-crazy nobleman, guided by a naked beggar supposed to be mad, and by an actually mad King served by a half-witted court-jester—an amazingly daring version of the culminating moment of the [carnival]: the great reversal when the highest dignitaries appear as fools, and the World or even Holy Church herself is revealed in cap and bells.\(^{343}\)

Folly has its innumerable issues in King Lear that still wait for enquiry. But the notion of diversity always starts out of a believed unity, and this unity, the carnivalesque folly, always stands there in the background. My interpretational principle here stands on the pairing of these issues with the figures of the play. No matter how the problems could seem sometimes far from each other because they are all connected through the carnivalesque as “a way of being” and the term: “folly,” which permeates the plot and glues the parts of this complicated drama together as a spider web into which everyone gets stuck sooner or later.

**The Fool and the Wisdom of Folly**

If the Fool represents the typical carnivalesque clown character in the play, then a kind of “decarinalization” seems to be literally done by Nahum Tate, who mercilessly eliminated him for over 150 years (from 1681 to 1838) for political and aesthetic reasons under the


mutually censorious influences of neoclassicism and the "crisis years of 1678–82," particularly in the wake of the trumped-up Popish Plot of 1679\textsuperscript{344}. Still, in recent criticism the circumstances of this radical exclusion—least its potential message about the history of the carnivalesque—has not been in the focus of attention. Much more, because Jacobean politics could be involved, the interest in the differences between the Quarto’s and the Folio’s Fool became the issue of scholarly discussions. Also recently written works, like Robert Hornback’s book on the English clown tradition concentrates entirely on the 54 lines that separate the two editions. As Hornback argues, for a long time the Fool in the Quarto was considered inartful because of its “impulse to comment on contemporary abuses”\textsuperscript{345}. Without admitting to any of the sides taking Lear either as a rebellious or propagandistic play in the Jacobean court, the Quarto’s stronger links to its contemporary politics seem to me as an axiom in the last few decades, so identifying a politically more active clown in the first text does not seem to me to be too innovative\textsuperscript{346}. One can add, especially knowing about the transgressing functions of clowns with which they can destroy the fourth wall in theatre that these actual political comments of a clown are not really surprising, especially not for the Jacobean audience. While for Hornback the Fool may seem to act less in this double-tone in the Folio, he destroys the wall and pulls his audience into plateia in the later version as well. For example, he breaks the “dramatic illusion” in both editions at the end of the first act, when he threatens the girls in the audience with the loss of their virginity: “She that’s a Maid now, and laught’s at my departure, Shall not be a maid long, unless things be cut shorter” (1.5.44-45).

\textsuperscript{345} Ibid.
Not only does he speak to the audience in the Folio’s third act in terms of its own, Jacobean times (brewers, priests, heretics, cutpurses, bawds)—as noticed by Snyder—but his prophetic speech plays on verses which existed in the audience’s present as well, and the quotation of Merlin (who will live only after him: 3.2.94) also puts the centuries between Lear’s and Jacobean England between parentheses. The Fool in every version—like Edgar, who can also be taken as representing the “unemployment problems” of Jacobean society—clearly bridges the gap between the play’s fictional world and contemporary English reality.

Moreover, the Fool seems an essentially carnivalesque clown-figure. His language is rich in Biblical travesties and inverted medieval parables, splendid baroque surrealist expressions, sudden leaps of imagination, condensations and epitomes, brutal, vulgar and scatological comparisons with rhymes that are like limericks and he speaks in doggerel. He seems like an assertive character: Empson, while not denying the Fool’s affection toward Lear and Cordelia (his only protectors) rightly emphasizes how the character does not seem to be as “high-minded” and/or self-sacrificing as many try to see him. His sympathies work more according to carnivalesque logic: to pull down the grandly remote “sublime” to the physical and near, the bottom, the “lower body” so to speak. There were many attempts to find his “tragic nature”, his sentimental emotions or ethical relatedness to Lear’s world but none of them proved to connect. There is a good example on how criticism tries to “humanize” this carnivalesque clown—an unpunishable homo sacer—if we take a closer look at the scene where Lear threatens the Fool with whipping him. Empson mentions how Lear after greeting him as “my pretty knave” brings up the subject of whipping, which is referred to six times in a short period and even Empson thinks that at least two of them are real threats, not jokes.

I believe this widespread interpretation to be a harmful misunderstanding. The fourth scene and the direct context of these words are humorous moments of festivity. The threats are neither ever actually implemented nor are they taken seriously: what organically belongs

to the ritual carnivalesque side of violence is also, simultaneously echoed and reflected on
with renewed impudence and naughtiness. The aggression seems like mock-aggression and
is rewarded not with fear but laughter: laughing at the clown and his imagined beating
without any real damage.

But the most serious question comes already from the definition of the Fool in the
“system of folly” and despite some honest intentions to take up this topic, there is much left
to consider. Despite the predominant approach considering him a master of his art, some
critics like Hotson\textsuperscript{351} are persistent on the Fool being an innocent or “natural fool” with some
real mental disorder. Empson also notes how the fool is only able to understand madness
because he is mad himself\textsuperscript{352}. He bases this mostly on the short speech in the second act.

\begin{quote}Cry to it, nuncle, as the cockney did to the eels when she put ‘em I’ th’paste alive. She
knapped ‘em o’th’coxcombs with a stick and cried, “Down, wantons, down!” ’Twas
her brother that in pure kindness to his horse buttered his hay. (2.4.117-120)\end{quote}

The hardly decipherable sentences truly present an alogical condition. Furthermore,
even Edgar names him an innocent later (3.6.7). But in the majority of his lines he seems
sane, even “wise enough” to fully understand the situation of the other characters in the
play. Scholars, without deeper insight into the history of fools directly connect him with an
easily accessible “wise fool”, William Sommer, the court fool of Henry VIII especially because
his stories are also included in Armin’s work, the \textit{Foole upon Foole}\textsuperscript{353}. If the rigorous
classification (just questioned through the meaning of “folly”) may be approved in advance,
Will Sommer, as court fool, could be a perfect origin of Lear’s Fool, who is also a court fool.

But, as I argued before, the transition between different kinds of clowns never actually was
troublesome. Armin had many clowns in his book, “wise fools”, who may have contributed
to the jester in Lear’s court. Even so, nothing actually changes: William Sommer and Armin’s
other “wise-fools” themselves are very problematic: actual historical figures who are hard to
group into the set who are “really” fools (fools “being” Fools), or the ones who are only
“playing the Fool” exclusively.

\begin{footnotes}
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We know that Keats was famously interested in the Fool and his function as well: Keats wished to explain him as a figure who lightens up the play; I am using R. S. White’s book, *Keats as a Reader of Shakespeare*. Through the great Romantic poet’s comment on the Fool and his “levity” which gives a finishing touch to the pathos and makes the unfathomable somehow endurable, he, with Hazlitt, underlines the major stress-releasing “valve-function” of the carnival. While Coleridge takes a liking in the Fool as an “inspired idiot”, Keats was perhaps the first to compare him through his “wisdom of folly” to Lear himself. The generations of critics before Hotson, Lippincott and Wiles thus tried to solve the problem of this “wisdom of folly” for a better understanding of the figure and *Lear*’s “folly” in general. Welsford also took up the problem from Hazlitt’s viewpoint when she noted how Shakespeare makes the fullest possible use of the accepted convention that it is the Fool who speaks the truth, and that specifically “by inspired intuition”. According to her, the mere appearance of the familiar Fool figure would at once indicate to the audience “where the ‘punctum indifferens’, the impartial critic, the mouthpiece of real sanity, was to be found”.

As always, subsequent classification proved to be an impossible attempt but sometimes this twofold nature of folly truly seems to play an important role. The wisdom of the Fool, or the “wisdom of folly” (or “intuitive folly”) seems very Socratic in a way: it does not appear as “additional” wisdom but as “the knowing of how nobody knows more”. In a certain sense, everybody is a “kind” of fool in *King Lear* but this Fool is the only fool who knows that he—as everybody else—is a fool. Lear calls Tom O’Bedlam the “noble philosopher”, the “same learned Theban”, the “Athenian” in the play (3.4.160, 3.4.145, 3.4.168), that is to say, Lear himself misjudges the “folly” of his companions, because the Fool is who should be called on

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355 *Idem*, pp. 181-182


these names. But when Lear takes up folly and “goes mad” he — contrary to the frequently expressed opinion — does not only take up Tom O’Bedlam’s madness but also the “knowing folly” of the Fool; Lear’s folly is close to Hamlet’s “borrowed” personae, his “roles”:

O matter and impertinency mixed,  
Reason in madness. (4.6.168-169)

This remark by Edgar is taken up by Kott and Willeford to emphasize the ambivalence of the “wisdom of folly”.\(^{358}\) The first dilemma is that to make the Fool appear — either because of his particular position, authority, condition or status — as a distinguished figure we need an opposition between the fools and non-fools. But this phenomenological opposition is almost immediately contradicted by the Fool’s philosophy about the “folly of the world”: that is to say, folly is omnipotent. It is worth to quote Willeford’s much more detailed description of the problem:

Any fool we see is demarcated from what we assume to be a nonfoolish background; otherwise he would be like the philosophers’ black cat at midnight. We see this fool here only by disregarding that fool or those fools there, including the fools that we also are. Our blindness to them means that our perception of this fool is an illusion. By seeing this fool as one, and thus penetrating the illusion that he is not a fool, we come no closer to the reality of what he is than we do by not seeing him as one in the first place, and we are no further from our own folly. [There is a second idea in a sense at odds with this first one] that a fool recognizably participates in a typical form and that our recognition of him as a fool is immediate and total. The notion that there are fools everywhere is a way of describing our awareness that anyone might at any moment make a fool of himself: a power lurks in us and may manifest itself in a foolish way of looking at others or of being seen by them. This possibility is a threat and promise of folly as a show. In that show a fool is seen as a fool.\(^{359}\)

The problems are actually numerous: what is the temporal premise of folly? What is the relation between “becoming” a fool and the “predestined” folly of men? What is the relation between the “professional” clown in a show and the clown not knowing that he is a clown in his actual situation? What is the relation between an individual fool and the omnipotent folly

\(^{358}\) “A fool who has recognized himself for a fool, who has accepted the fact that he is only a jester in the service of the prince, ceases to be a clown. But the clown’s philosophy is based on the assumption that everyone is a fool; and the greatest fool is he who does not know he is a fool: the prince himself. That is why the clown has to make fools of others; otherwise he would not be a dawn. The clown is subject to alienations because he is a clown, but at the same time he cannot accept the alienation; he rejects it when he becomes aware of it.” Jan Kott, “King Lear or Endgame.” In: *Shakespeare, our contemporary*. (translated by Boleslaw Taborski) New York: Doubleday, 1964. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group reprint, EPUB, 2015

of the world? “Nothing” would an honest critic say from his cultural position in the 21st century because his intention is to delimit different sets. But the Fool would say “nothing comes out of nothing” and would confuse these sets even more enthusiastically, deconstructing these borders and transgressing them. As a clown par excellence, he is not simply “wise” or “imbecile”, he can cross the borders of extremity easily back and forth. Furthermore, as a psychopomp he also lures the others: into being mad and into being aware of the situation; not in the way Edmund is cunningly aware of “what is going on”; the Fool is on the “fool side” of awareness, which seems like sanity but is—since it is foolish nonsense—not communicable:

May not an ass know when the cart draws the horse? (1.4.204)  
[...]  
LEAR: [...] Nothing can be made out of nothing.  
FOOL: (to Kent) Prithee, tell him so much the rent of his land comes to. He will not believe a fool. (1.4.122-123)

The fool’s behavior is carnivalesque while he is mocking Lear or everybody else. He, as par excellence clown is only wise because he knows how the world entered the carnivalesque misrule and tries to persuade everybody into the carnival. He does not show Lear his folly to turn the events back, to “do something good”, because he perfectly knows how the foolish side of truth he is trying to get everybody into becomes impotent to the development of the plot (with the only exception of Edgar, as it will be noted). Lear himself does not seem as someone who would learn from others beside his own failure, despite already “knowing” about his own mistake in the first act. The Fool’s mockery does not have an “ethical purpose”, he only wants to spread his folly as wide as he can. And what he gives away is the “wisdom of folly” paired with inertia and not some strange “intuition” that “helps” anybody. I would like to emphasize: it is not specifically wisdom that is inherited, but the gift of transgressing the borders, the playground of truth and madness, which two, in the carnival—without any chances of influence on the actual world—become identical, creating “one layer”. If King Lear were an easy-going carnivalesque play (even to the extent Twelfth Night is, for instance), this layer would particularly involve not so much the plot but the audience of the play, which means that, as all carnivalesque plays of folly, it should result in laughter because of the references to whipping, the sentences addressing the error of Lear, and also the seemingly gratuitous mad-speeches (2.4.117-120). The basic aim of these devices is that they should be funny, provoking laughter. Snyder, who also suspected how in
Lear our first impression each time is one of derailment, still found it possible to find, on close analysis, way-ward meanings in the Fool's snatches of rhyme and his tales of cockneys and eels. Songs and jokes do not answer protests and curses; they simply exist beside them unreconciled. This could be very much the situation but only if King Lear were a straight case of the carnivalesque play, to begin with.

Criticism, in general, cleverly points out the Fool's real nature when it is emphasized how he prepares and even trains the other fools of the play. The “professional” truly helps them a lot with their crossing into his world of folly. But this transgressing also means that he must deconstruct “folly” as a set of normative intentions because this “folly” is “the folly” of the carnival. This works out sometimes and, at other times, it does not. But many problems, like the problem of “being” or “playing”, which clearly presents itself related to e.g. Edgar are not relevant in the case of the Fool, who seems to come from a pure carnivalesque substance. And he also seems to return there without any interest for the development of the play, when he just wanders off the stage in the middle of the tragedy, saying only, “And I’ll go to bed at noon” (3.6.84).

Kent/Caius, the Brawler “Knave” of Carnival

Kent as Caius is held for the “carnival bully” of the play, and he is also a highly carnivalesque, disguised clown figure. His disguise does not only “mean” the picking up of another personality who is not threatened by death penalty: if so, it would be an imperfect disguise, which actually does not come together with a new and complete persona (opposed to Edgar’s personae). For the most part, he as Caius (called by that name only once in the play) is still Kent “himself”. His change of clothes is a Bakhtinian carnivalesque “transdressing”, not completely altering his personality but enlarging the comic side of his character and transforming him into a caricature of himself. According to Iswolsky’s introduction to the English translation of Bakhtin’s book on Rabelais, the main attribute of the medieval clown was the transfer of every high ceremonial gesture or ritual to the

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362 Leo Kirschbaum, “Banquo and Edgar: Character or Function?” Essays in Criticism. 7/1. (January 1957) p. 10
material sphere; such was the clown's role during tournaments, or, what seems to be the case here: the knight's initiation. These ceremonies and rituals took on a comic aspect as clowns and fools mimicked serious rituals such “as the tribute rendered to the victors at tournaments, the transfer of feudal rights, or the initiation of a knight”. This is exactly how Kent turns into Caius: he, after being a loyal knight of his king, becomes a carnivalesque knight by taking a carnivalesque version of the Knight’s Oath of Fealty:

I do profess to be no less than I seem—to serve him truly that will put me in trust, to love him that is honest, to converse with him that is wise and says little, to fear judgment, to fight when I cannot choose, and to eat no fish. (1.4.13-17)

He becomes a carnivalesque “naive fool” mocked by the Fool in nearly all his comments on him. The Fool also gives him and Lear a coxcomb: he “hires” them (1.4.87) and what logically follows teaches them as his apprentices through a “complete training program”:

FOOL: Sirrah, I’ll teach thee a speech.
LEAR: Do.
FOOL: Mark it, Nuncle. (1.4.105-107)
LEAR: No, lad, teach me. (1.4.127)

Kent/Caius already speaks in the fourth scene of the first act in the way of clowns, through riddles and enigmatic answers to the king’s questions, as we have seen. Even more, he is the hot-tempered carnivalesque combatant, who takes on the representatives of “Lenten authority” even physically (in his fights with Oswald), and, doing so, he is serving Lear’s carnivalesque “authority of nothing”. Kent/Caius also literally goes up against Lent, when he defends the carnival carousel of Lear’s company and “eats no fish”. The have-nots noisy feast in Goneril’s court is the clear realization of the carnival, which confronts the skinny “rejection” of Lent (cast King Lear as a Toby Belch and Oswald as Malvolio) where Kent/Caius stands as the “knight” or “champion of carnival”. He is a “knave” in this carnivalesque sense. In the—supposedly—comic fights with Oswald, as also interpreted by Snyder, his bluntness is his own; but the flights of virtuoso abuse “I’ll carbonado your

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365 Also addresses him as a fool again: King Lear (2.4.83)
shanks”, “Thou whoreson zed!” “three-suited, hundred-pound, filthy, worsted-stocking knave”—these belong to his clownish persona.  

In this complex system of clown-relations, from the point of Lear (at least), he takes up the coxcomb to achieve the privilege of impunity. Scogin, who supposed to be the court fool of Edward IV according to the famous, many times reprinted jestbook, was banished from England by the king as Kent was by Lear: “I charge thee upon pain of thy death, to go out of my realm, and to tread upon none of my ground here in England”.

[...] turn thy hated back  
Upon our kingdom. If on the tenth day following  
Thy banished trunk be found in our dominions,  
The moment is thy death. Away! (1.1.174-176)

One needs to be a clown for being able to withstand the banishment, a homo sacer for never being “really punished”. The clown’s disguise shields him from the death penalty. Scogin has returned to England and also to the court of his king.

When Scogin was banished out of France, he filled his shoes full of French earth, and came into England, and went into the king’s court, and as soone as he came to the court, the king said to him, I did charge thee that thou shouldest never tread upon my ground of England; it is true, said Scogin, and no more I do not, What traytor, said the king, whose ground is that thou standest on now? Scogin said I stand upon the French kings ground, and that you shall see, and first he put off the one shoe, and it was full of earth: then said Scogin, this earth I brought out of France.

After this jest, Scogin was said to be spared because the fool, as homo sacer means no harm and therefore he is not punished by harm. Kent as Caius—that is, mostly as himself—can return to his king and follow him despite his banishment and the penalty of death.

From the point of “the Lenten villains” his carnivalesque immunity seems of course rather bothersome. Kent/Caius is literary the one Goneril’s Whiteface-comments are

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366 Susan Snyder, *The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare’s Tragedies: Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello, and King Lear*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. p. 149. This also shows his inability to change entirely into a carnivalesque August. See how he, as a committed homo sacer is actually punished, and put—not to death but—in the stocks. That is, because he could not entirely leave his non-carnivalesque personality behind him.

367 His posthumously written fool biography, the *Jests of Scoggin* was first published in 1566, though the earliest surviving complete copy is from 1626. The book is a perfect example of how these sources seem more like collections of jests of other fools and plagiarized stories of earlier jestbooks. Southworth is not convinced that the Scogin from the book actually lived: John Southworth, *Fools and Jesters at the English Court*. London: Sutton Publishing, 1998. p. 92. Again a clown freely transgressing the borders of fictional art and actual life.


369 *Scogin’s Jests: Full of witty Mirth, and pleasant Shifts; done by him in France and other places*. (gathered by Andrew Board) London: W. Thackeray, 1680. pp. 36-37
directed to (1.4.181-194; 1.4.218-233). The best example seems to be as follows: “You strike my people, and your disordered rabble Make servants of their betters”.

From our position in the 21th century, these words seem not totally unjust (yet). Order and peace becomes only “clearly” demonized in the topsy-turvy reality of carnival, where everyone immediately knew who was on the “right side”. Our feelings become puzzled because we, at first, take the often voiced “knavery” in an ethical sense, foreign to the reality of carnival.

Welsford herself notes her puzzlement when opposed to the “double cast” of the positive “naive fools” and the negative “witty knaves” (for a long time believed to be drawing its black and white characterization from the morality tradition):

Which of these parties sees the truth, or rather, to speak more accurately, which point of view does Shakespeare mean us to adopt as we experience his tragedy? Or is this an instance of his notorious impartiality? Is he giving us a tragic illustration of moral relativity? Do Goneril and Cordelia separate good from evil, wisdom from folly, with very different results, only because they have different but equally valid frames of reference for their measurements?370

As also noticed in many other plays of Shakespeare, the playwright seems to give more intellectual ability to his “sinners” than to his “saints”. Welsford mentions Edmund who, for instance, “is so shrewd and witty that he almost wins our sympathy for his unabashed cruelty.” In a way, then, wisdom —in the sense of modern, Machiavellian, individual “self-realization, as it is frequently considered—can by appealing and folly—naive “goodness” as simply stupidity—can be annoying, even repulsive.

EDMUND: A credulous father, and a brother noble—
Whose nature is so far from doing harms
That he suspects none, on whose foolish honesty
My practices ride easy. (1.2.166-169)

What present criticism suspects here is not an opposition of the “wise evil” and the “naive good” but a nearly equal measure of validity: not two endings of a moral scale but more different interpretations of “right decision-making” in history. This also very clearly presents itself in the argument of Goneril and Albany, where the latter is called a “moral fool” because of his hesitation to follow the “wise evils” (4.2.25-63). Yet, what we see is that the word “knave” is used by nearly everybody on nearly everybody (the “wise bad” do not

refer to themselves with it) and the word “fool” is used really by everybody, but only to refer to the “naive good”. The Fool’s invention—directed to Kent/Caius—, how he finds the way to make a “fool” of the “wise evils” as well does not help our normative intent, either.

When a wise man gives thee better counsel, give me mine again. I would have none but knaves follow it since a fool gives it.
That sir which serves and seeks for gain,
And follows but for form,
Will pack when it begins to rain
And leave thee in the storm.
But I will tarry. The fool will stay.
And let the wise man fly.
The knave turns fool that runs away;
The fool, no knave, perdie. (2.4.71-81)

It is even more confusing how through the words’ inner games with meaning can correlate “knave” and “fool”. Ethical considerations still do not seem to matter in this game at all, while only in a world of cold rationality can “fool” only be “bad” (“my poor fool is hanged”: 5.3.305) and also “good” is several times addressed to “knave” in the dialogues of the “good people”. Kent/Caius himself becomes a “knave”, when Lear addresses him in the fourth scene (“my friendly knave, I thank thee”: 1.4.85). The words, sometimes filled with emotions and saturated with morality, are not taken seriously at other times. They seem sometime to have no weight at all. I think the fluent changes and clever measuring gives actually the diversity of the play.

Also, it is easy to find this ethical flexibility in “folly”. Already Christianity developed two different “folly” traditions: one understanding “folly” as positive “emptiness”, a mind swept clear for receiving Christ. This positive tradition bases itself on St. Paul’s first letter to


372 Lear asking “Where’s my knave, my fool?” (1.4.42, the Fool written with lowercase “f” in the Quarto), Gloucester telling about Edmund “this knave came something saucily into the world before he was sent for” (1.1.19-21), or other instances in Lear’s lines (1.4.85, and 1.4.88). The word “knave” is not always meant to directly “hurt” somebody in these lines.

the Corinthians\(^{374}\) and is represented e.g. by St. Francis of Assisi, “God’s Clown”. The other—closer to the ancient \textit{pharmakós} customs of “the expulsion of the bad”—understands “folly” as sin. This “sin-like folly” is what Thomas Adams gives a sermon on in his \textit{Mystical bedlam} and what Erasmus tries to undemonize—in a carnivalesque manner—in his \textit{The Praise of Folly}. The difference is already described clearly by St. Thomas Aquinas\(^{375}\). Thus, the position of folly never actually became fixed until the Renaissance.\(^{376}\)

Still, it is important to note that this paradox position of “folly” means no moral or ethical neutrality at all. “Folly” always takes a position; only folly is able to transgress the borders and mirror itself on the “other side”. It can be seen as the transgressive mobility of the August. When seen from the perspective of the “Official” or the “Rule”, transgression is “bad”, but from the clownish position of carnival or “Misrule”, it is “good”. Mostly in \textit{Lear}, “folly”, in the eye of the “wise evils” who represent Rule, is “bad”, loud and meaningless. In the eye of the carnivalesque company of Lear, “folly” becomes equal with “goodness”, first celebration and thereafter—as madness—passion-like suffering for the “loved ones”.

In the majority of the scenes ethical considerations always lose when they confront carnivalesque logic. The mock trial-scene is a good example\(^{377}\). While judiciary trials should be based on ethical and legal grounds, the famous carnivalesque mock-trials of the Renaissance seem to prove the opposite\(^{378}\). However casually it begins with the summoning of the “justicers”, the well-organized process is immediately demolished with Lear’s first charge presented: “[…] ’tis Goneril—I here take my oath before this honorable assembly—

\(^{374}\) 1Co 1:17-27


\(^{376}\) This is what basically Foucault’s \textit{The History Madness} is about.

\(^{377}\) I doubt the frequent reasoning that holds Shakespeare responsible for the dropping of the scene in the folio (which also was cut out by Nahum Tate) which seems to have no convincing evidence. I think that this short well-to-play (kind of “theatre in theatre”) carnivalesque scene was an integral part of \textit{King Lear} for Shakespeare as well.

\(^{378}\) A good example is Nicholas Joubert “Angoulevent’s” (the \textit{Prince of Fools’}) trial in France between 1604 and 1608. It is worth to shortly cite his brilliant apologia on the appeal hearing (presented by the renowned doctor of Law, Julien Peleus and dated—of course—to Mardi Gras in 1606): “In this man all the qualities exist, which render him worthy of his royal dignity, because he was born and raised in the country of monumental asses, and did not learn anything else but cynical philosophy. So he can be freely considered as the scholar Doctor of the lowliest desires and ideals. His head is empty, a hollowed-out pumpkin, in the place of the common sense only wind whistles like in a tube of cane; in his raged mind there is no intact spring or wheel, his temper is changeable like the Moon; summa summarum: he is so stupid that he could be appointed as the god of the Stoics. Therefore is he unable to meet the duties imposed on him.” Maurice Lever, \textit{Korona és csőrgősipka. Az udvari bolondok története}. (translated by Kamocsay Ildikó) Budapest: Európa, 1989. p. 246
kicked the poor King her father.” (3.6.46-48) And “we are back in the world of domestic bickering, with a shrewish housewife Goneril taking out some bad temper on her useless old father.” In the carnivalesque world the ethical point of view is not taken seriously. Only a serious ethical impetus, “ideology” is able to make it serious again which also decarnivalizes the image of the play.

The officialization of the image and its related single-tonedness. From the ambivalent sphere, the image is transferred into the purely serious plane, becomes unambiguous, the black and the white, the positive and the negative, are set apart and contrasted. This is the process in which new boundaries between the meanings, phenomena, and things of the world solidify, in which an element of stability enters the world (the stabilization of a new hierarchy), the process of perpetuation (canonization); this is the process of seriousening the world (its images, thoughts about it, valuations of it), of inserting into it elements of threat, of intimidation, of fear.

For Caius, as a carnivalesque being, anything is possible. After becoming a “fool” he becomes a “friendly knave” for Lear and an “ancient knave”, a “beastly knave” for Cornwall (2.2.119; 2.2.62).

After his visit in the land of carnival he tries to return into the world of “Rule”, but here is the real surprise: Lear is not able to recognize him anymore. By his return hindered by Lear’s grief Kent’s agony becomes the agony of Caius, a carnivalesque being. This reading is based on the assumption that he arrives into the last scene of the play already dying, as Edgar also observes, before he knows about Cordelia’s and Lear’s fate.

[...] which in recounting
His grief grew puissant and the strings of life
Began to crack. Twice then the trumpets sounded,
And there I left him ‘tranced. (5.3.216-219)

These words already prepare his entry coming shortly thereafter, where his first words explain the reason for his arrival:

I am come
To bid my king and master aye good night. (5.3.235-236)

381 Here “aye” means according to the Norton Edition: ‘forever’ or ‘always’.
Knowing that he is not aware of Lear’s upcoming death, there seem to be three options for the reader. We can handle this sentence as Kent/Caius’s “fortunetelling” about Lear’s death which seems apt because the other clowns (especially the Fool) occasionally also have the skill of foresight, even if Kent/Caius has been rather the opposite kind of character\(^{382}\). Or, we can just take the remark to be the announcement of somebody’s impending death and consider it to be an error of Shakespeare’s dramaturgy. This way, the fate of Kent/Caius takes a surprising turn that seems miles away from the story of Scogin. While he never became another persona to such a depth as Edgar has, he still becomes unable to realize his great comeback in the end.

**Tom O’Bedlam/Edgar**

Edmund, his evil half-blood brother introduces Edgar when he enters the stage in the following way:

> Pat, he comes, like the catastrophe of the old comedy. My cue is villainous melancholy, with a sigh like Tom of Bedlam. Oh, these eclipses do portend these divisions! Fa, sol, la, mi. (1.2.125-128)

Edmund here in a few words gives something like a teaser of Edgar’s later personification. Zimbardo, in his deconstructionist interpretation of *King Lear* speculates about how the “catastrophe of the old comedy” might be “a devil-fool who comes to drag the proud King off to Hell-Mouth as the devil-fool does in the mystery plays.”\(^{383}\) This remark is exciting because it already sees Edgar’s persona as the monster “pushing Gloucester into suicide” and how he also describes himself thereafter from his next persona: “his eyes were two full moons. He had a thousand noses, horns whelked and waved like the enraged sea. It was some fiend” (4.6.71-74).

The “devil-fool” and Vice character from the mystery plays and the moralities is actually the feature of Edmund who, with his fake-letters and destructions of the fourth wall (also in the quoted lines introducing Edgar) directs and complicates the plot as an evil trickster-antagonist. So in the end, Edmund’s words about Edgar being “the old catastrophe” describe Edgar as a monster impersonating Edmund’s true role, while Edmund takes—for a

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\(^{382}\) His violent temper actually changes the states of affairs for the worse when he confronts Oswald and opposes Cornwall (particularly not in a carnivalesque way) in 2.2.

moment—Edgar’s “Tom O’Bedlam”-figure and gives brazen lies to Edgar (as Edgar will to his beloved father in the second half of the play). Both brothers mutually try out the other sibling’s “costume”.

The comment on “the one of Bedlam” already appears in the Quarto version without “Tom”. Edmund, when taking up the figure of the Bedlam madman destroys, as mentioned before, the fourth wall, and reflects on his status of an actor, and even on the contemporary problem of the inmates of the Bethlem Royal Hospital, one of the oldest institute for madman in Europe. The mad vagrants and beggars made “Bedlam” and also “Tom O’Bedlam” well-used terms in the contemporary English world, but as mental illness itself was not clearly distinguished from other types of “folly”, Edgar’s adopted name also means more, as there are many signs of Tom O’Bedlam’s relation to the carnival as well. He names his own persona “Poor Turlygod” in the short scene of the second act (2.3.20). This term, while meaning also mad beggars, can originate from the Medieval French turlupins, the sect of “naked beggars”. Sources scarcely mention them, but they seem to have been active in the second half of the 14th century, and a group is likely to have been around in the second half of the 15th century as well. There is a debate about them having no real impact on the actual history of religions in France. Still, the term itself became common in the carnivalesque theatres of France in the beginning of the 17th century for sure (this is also shortly mentioned by Bakhtin). The French comic tradition of the turlupins created by Henri Lagrand, a theatrical clown character in the Hotel de Burgogne became very popular just a few years after Shakespeare’s Lear. One feels tempted to speculate about a direct connection between these turlupins and the English “Turlygods”, but it still should be shown how the probably common origin could emerge into highly carnivalesque forms in the Early Modern. Tom’s name itself can also connect us to the family of clowns because it was a name frequently given to jesters. There was an “innocent” jester named “Tom Fole” for

384 It is an interesting question who the inmates were in Bethlem and how “mental illness” was actually defined that time, but I will need another dissertation to try out my answers. What we know for sure: also beggars who only “played fool” and people who never were close to the hospital, even people “behaving normally” were frequently named Tom O’Bedlam. “Medical” or “positive” categorization is useless once again.
385 This is the conjunction of William Warburton, the editor of Shakespeare’s Works in 1747. See: King Lear’s used critical edition p. 43 n20
example in John Howard’s court; Howard was the Duke of Norfolk at time of Edward IV. So “Tom” supposed to be Scogin’s contemporary.387

As Snyder points out, Poor Tom’s disguise is “more in the comic tradition than Kent’s” because it also functions as a positive source of a new insight: it “possesses” him in some way, while he elaborates on the persona far beyond than it is required.388 And his attitude, his “word-spinning”, the power of his buffoonery makes him very much like a clown in the play389. Edgar’s way of speaking is clearly carnivalesque when he confronts Lear’s deluge of complaints with a genuine fertility song: “Pillicock sat on Pillicock hill; Alow, alow, loo, loo” (3.4.73-74).

And his sentences are tricky, playful, carnivalesque and exquisitely humorous in “the domain of the lower body”. This sometimes does not seem to have anything to do with his real personality.

A servingman, proud in heart and mind, that curled my hair, wore gloves in my cap, served the lust of my mistress’ heart and did the act of darkness with her, swore as many oaths as I spake words and broke them in the sweet face of heaven—one that slept in the contriving of lust and waked to do it. Wine loved I deeply, dice dearly, and in woman outparamoured the Turk. (3.4.80-86)

If the clown’s job was to “labour to out-jest Lear’s heart-struck injuries” (3.1.16-17)390 several scholars tend to think that it is Edgar who brings this to success. This also depends on how we interpret “folly” here in general.

Because, in the cited sentence of the gentleman391, the word “folly” never actually appears but still, “out-jesting” seems to easily connect the very different dimensions of “folly”. If healing humour, the “jesting” as “joking” is seen as the key meaning here, the considerations of Enright and Empson contain some useful insights. Empson, in his Shakespeare and the Students392 points out how paradoxical the Fool’s joking is. The Fool

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389 A clown-role important enough to be emphasized on the title page of the quarto in 1608? “M. William Shakespeare: His True Chronicle Historic of the life and death of King Lear and his three Daughters. With the unfortunate life of Edgar, sonne and heire to the Earle of Gloster, and his sullen and assumed humor of Tom of Bedlam.”
390 As mentioned by the gentleman.
391 Ibid.
first jokes Lear into the awareness of his folly and then jokes away his pain caused by that awareness. This could be a very handy function of the Fool as clown, but I have to agree with some subsequent critics who highlight the problems of these: not one of them actually happens. Lear is not enlightened by the Fool’s joking, only about his own experiences and never seems to be “cheered up” when he hears the Fool’s words. Empson thinks that the Fool’s way of handling language is analogous to Lear’s howling in the middle of the storm when he “strives in his little world of man to out scorn the to-and-fro conflicting wind and rain”. Lear’s endeavor to “talk down” the tempestuous storm is how the Fool tries to “talk down” the tempestuous Lear and, in return, the King also becomes even more the clown himself\textsuperscript{393}. Of course this cannot heal Lear’s heart-struck injuries in itself. The Fool’s task is to redirect Lear’s gaze from the opened up sky back to himself, to look at himself and see how he becomes a clown through his pointless self-pity. Quite obviously, this intent also remains unsuccessful.

Lear after the scenes on the heath becomes infected with another kind of folly and if there is anybody to be “blamed for” anything, it seems more Tom O’Bedlam than the Fool\textsuperscript{394}. But is this “folly” of Lear—derived from Poor Tom—actually healing Lear? We have seen how the Fool seems unable to help the transgression of Lear “to the other side” and there seem to be obvious signs for Lear more wanting to remain in the company of Tom, when he calls him a “philosopher” whom he wants to speak with. There are two requirements for this concept. First, if we wish to address Lear’s madness as a station of his “healing”, we are probably addicted to the plays interpretation as “Lear’s repentance” in a kind of “purgatory”, a suffering which makes sense and can be justified because it leads to “redemption”. Madness as an advanced level of the healing process (coping with pain through the mind’s short shock-therapy caused by itself) can seem somewhat too “modern” and “analytical” at first, but however strange it may be, Shakespeare’s characters seem pretty up-to-date with the concept.


\textsuperscript{394} There is also another type of madness Lear actually wanted to possess (him), the angry madness of the avenger: “If it be you that stir these daughters’ hearts against their father, fool me not so much to bear it tamely. Touch me with noble anger.” King Lear (2.4.270-273) What Lear want is the destructing power of the storm to strike down his daughters, but soon he rather becomes concerned with the poor fellows suffer in the severe weather. Spite the high body count there is actually not one character in the whole play who can act as an “insane avenger”.

108
The king is mad. How stiff is my vile sense,
That I stand up and have ingenious feeling
Of my huge sorrows! Better I were distract,
So should my thoughts be severed from my griefs,
And woes by wrong imaginations lose
The knowledge of themselves. (4.6.272-277)

But as always when the “redemption-solution” is announced, the ending of the play averts interpretation again. It is important to point out that these lines are said by Gloucester. He mourns himself already before his death because he is not mad and he thus thinks himself to be unable to withstand his huge sorrows and this seems to be proven by his subsequent death just a few scenes later. He is weak to accept the truth about Edgar. So Lear’s madness—as Gloucester feels—could help him to survive the upcoming shocks. But we know the play: it will not help.

What is more, close reading actually can also easily deconstruct the concept of Edgar’s “healing madness” having a direct impact on Lear. During their meeting all the questions and problems Lear lists are directed to the closed inner dimension of the same person whom he directed before: himself.

Nothing could have subdued nature
To such a lowness but his unkind daughters.
Is it the fashion that discarded fathers
Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?
Judicious punishment! (3.4.67-71)

He just keeps repeating his own grievances without any real sign of an ongoing recovery. Instead of Edgar being the healer of Lear, I would like to argue that, at this point of the play, he is Lear’s *alter ego* in the sub-plot.

Schlegel was the one who first called attention to the “double plot” in *King Lear*. Drawing comparisons between Lear and Gloucester is a commonplace in *Lear*-criticism, becoming almost “axiomatic” in the 20th century: how they are at once very similar through their misjudgment of their children, and how their evil offsprings betray them, while the kind-hearted ones try to save them. How they are both old and also die in a similar manner. Lear’s “clear-sighted madness” runs in a parallel fashion with Gloucester’s “clear-sighted

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395 I think Lear never becomes in fact “more clear-sighted” by his madness to begin with. He understands the betrayal already and also the mistake about Cordelia in the first (!) act when he addresses Goneril: “Detested kite, thou liest! [...] O most small fault, How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show, Which like an engine, wrenched my frame of nature From the fixed place, drew from heart all love, And added to the gall. O Lear, Lear, Lear! Beat at this gate that let thy folly in And thy dear judgment out.” *King Lear* (1.4.245; 249-255)
blindness” as well. The similarity was stretched until A.C. Bradley’s pointed out that the sub-plot is in fact disadvantageous for the play because it only weakens the structure by the repetition of the main plot. But this comparison actually misses and underestimates the role of Edgar, which is duly highlighted by the title of the quarto version as well. While Edgar corresponds to the figure of Cordelia, and we can also compare him to the Fool, he also shares similarities with Lear himself as the other essentially homo sacer figure on the heath. Also, their connection is much more important, as Edgar is the godson of Lear (2.1.92).

If Lear wants to follow his godson into the apparent emptiness of the homo sacer, he is mistaken about the direction Edgar is going to, as Edgar himself is the one continuously changing clown of the entire play. The issues of these transdressings which seem to operate separately from the plot puzzled critics. For example, it is hard to explain why he stays in disguise before his father and lies to him for so long. But there is an actual order of his climbing backwards on the ladder of hierarchy. After Edgar’s dispossession by Edmund and his father, his first transdressing from Tom O’Bedlam to a peasant happens on the way to the “cliff of Dover” where he not only enters in peasant garments, but also confuses Gloucester with his improved speech (4.6.6-10). This is scene 6 in act 4. Last time we saw this grotesque pair, they just set off, after saying goodbye to the Old man at the end of the first scene in act 4. Before their departure, Gloucester gives Edgar a purse with money in advance:

Here, take this purse, thou whom the heavens’ plagues
Have humbled to all strokes. That I am wretched
Makes thee the happier. (4.2.66-68)

Edgar’s next transdressing happens after his father’s clown-play as mock-suicide. From the peasant before (described retrospectively as a monster), he transforms into a “more fortunate” peasant whose even meaner speech indicates a much greater difference than before, so he seems to be a new persona. What happens before Gloucester’s “clown-somersault of death”?

Here, friend, 's another purse: in it a jewel
Well worth a poor man's taking. Fairies and gods
Prosper it with thee. (4.6.29-31)

Edgar's transgressions seem all having direct connections with his growth of wealth and property and he is transgressing a lot. When he picks up his West Country accent and fights Oswald to death he also gets his prize with the revealing letters he confiscates.

OSWALD: Slave, thou hast slain me. Villain, take my purse.
If ever thou wilt thrive, bury my body.
And give the letters which thou find'st about me
To Edmund, Earl of Gloucester. (4.6.241-244)

Edgar, before his last great transgression covers himself into the armor of a knight. There is no sign of him acquiring more wealth since the previous scene. However, there is no need for him to prove his own nobleness because Edmund—the only one besides the Fool, who from the beginning understood the difference between appearance and real value, and the easiness of the transgression of social borders—accepts his challenge. After he defeats his evil half-brother, he can take back his “original persona” again, so “the wheel is come full circle” (5.3.175). And Edgar’s tour highlights exactly how “clothes make the man”. He, through his frequent comments and “asides”—never really altering the core of his personality, and constantly angry with his brother, worries about his father and consciously plays roles, becomes able to alter his personae simultaneously with his linear material growth. This is not the total change of “a whole identity” but is more than simply taking up different roles on a stage one is being paid for. “Folly” becomes a matter of property. Before he receives the first donation, he has nothing and while he has nothing, he also is nothing. The thing itself, according to Lear.

LEAR: Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha? Here's three on's are sophisticated, thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! Come, Unbutton here! (3.4.96-102)

397 Also he starts his new persona with just received “The bounty and the benison of heaven” (4.6.220)
398 He later also decides not paying a proper burial for Oswald (2.6.266-268.) so can take his money in place of his own lost wealth.
399 Naturally, the gap between this and his personae before is somewhat “fabulous” and not perfectly follows dramaturgical reality. Where could he find a whole armour in such a short time? But still: it is the carnivalesque condition that can make this easily acceptable as well.
But Lear misses the concept of “nothing”. This also shows itself in Edgar’s comment to Gloucester where he actually says the honest truth: “You’re much deceived. In nothing am I changed But in my garments” (4.6.9-10). Edgar believes in things changing for the better. Why should he not? His later transdressings apparently help him to make the dream of reconciliation come true. He awaits the laughing part, the reaggregation of the carnival.

To be worst,
The lowest and most dejected thing of fortune,
Stands still in esperance, lives not in fear.
The lamentable change is from the best;
The worst returns to laughter. Welcome, then,
Thou unsubstantial air that I embrace:
The wretch that thou hast blown unto the worst
Owes nothing to thy blasts. (4.1.3-9)

And then his blinded father enters the stage and Edgar for the first time seems to be contradicted by the play.

**Lear as the clown or fool par excellence**

Not one of Shakespeare’s tragic figures was—at least directly—called a “fool” as Lear and it is widely accepted how easy it is to “recognize Lear as a figure of Carnival misrule”, who is also said to be nothing like Tom O’Bedlam. As Bakhtin describes this, related to his “verbal topographic images and gestures”:

[The] topography of the cosmic (and in part the bodily) heights is dominant in the words and gestures of Othello, Desdemona, Cassio, while the topography of the bodily nether regions is dominant in Iago, Emilia, and, of course, the clowns. But when Othello is seized by the “madness” of jealousy (the traditional passing of the sun-hero through the eclipse phase, the phase of temporary death-madness), when the image of Desdemona in his imagination moves from the high cosmic plane of heavenly purity, paradise, and angel, into the plane of the bodily nether regions—the whore (“lying” and “lying”), his speech (and his gestures) is flooded with images of the bodily nether regions and at times approximates Iago’s speech. We also observe this in the case of Lear in his “madness” stage, where he makes his transition to the role of the fool-king.

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Bakhtin’s notes state how the “complex problem of the crown and the ruler” is revealed here in a deeper, wiser and more complex fashion than in *Macbeth*, and how here everything is permeated with the ambivalent folk wisdom of the carnival. Madness as a motif especially shows itself in Lear’s straw crown and straw scepter. Both Empson and Enid Welsford emphasize Lear’s transformation into this strange kind of clown in his most frequently mentioned mad scene (4.6):

> “Thou wouldst make a good fool”, said the Fool to his master at the beginning of his misfortunes, and he spoke as a prophet. In his amazing encounter with the blind Gloucester, the mad Lear has something of the wit, the penetration, the quick repartee of the court-jester. From the realistic point of view it is no doubt a dramatic flaw that Shakespeare does not account more clearly for the fate of the real man in motley; but his disappearance was a poetic necessity, for the King having lost everything, including his wits, has now himself become the Fool.

When Lear moves “out of the world of real events, and into that of a mock king” his “fantastic costume of flowers is an ironic figurative equivalent for the trappings of kingship he had insisted upon”. As Sandra Billington’s study tells us, these are the superfluities of a mock king. Lear is like a “mad king of summer” at whose court Gloucester can find forgiveness, but—as she explains—he is also a “fool king in the winter of his fortunes”. He becomes a *homo sylvarum*, the mock king of the Midsummer pageants, “a Jack-a-Green, at once a hero and a victim of popular ceremony”. He, during his exit from the trial scene actually issues a Cotswoldlike challenge for his title to the courtiers.

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LEAR: Then there’s life in ’t. Come, an if you get it;  
You shall get it by running. Sa’, sa’, sa’, sa’! (4.6.194-197)

Folly as madness and the carnivalesque festivity becomes visually quite obviously connected to this celebrated scene of Lear so no more evidence on the topic seems to be necessary. But how comes this “folly as madness”? It is a controversial fact that the “straws” that Lear’s clown-crown is woven from are mainly known medicinal herbs. So how actually can we connect the carnivalesque clown here with the mentally damaged madman? How is—as Welsford puts it—the great reversal of the Saturnalia transferred from the action of the tragedy into the mind of the tragic hero?\textsuperscript{412} What type of “fool” can he become?

O Fool, I shall go mad. (2.4.281)

Lear thinks about himself as “the natural fool of fortune” (4.6.185). These words have received a library of interpretations, putting especially the word “fortune” (as providence) in focus. Here Lear seems to connect nature, foolishness and fortune, also evoking the medieval conception of the circularity of time as fortune, thus connecting the sentence to the wheel-motif, to Lear’s “wheel of fire”.\textsuperscript{413} But how should we interpret “natural” in the context of “fool” and “fortune”? This looks highly paradoxical. The play already makes “nature”, as frequently proclaimed, a highly ambivalent word. Nearly all characters express their views about nature and those views rarely connect with each other and none of them seems to stand out as the key to the world of the play\textsuperscript{414}.

“Fool” on the other hand—as my whole study tries to show—can become even more problematic. Enid Welsford was one of the first of those who, in 1935 emphasized how the people of the Early Modern knew about the difference of the “natural fools” having “real mental issues” and the “artificial fools” playing folly as profession, for some interest, as art. While the difficulty of the separation of the known “fictional fools” and the fools that really existed heavily complicates the utilization of this difference, the differentiation clearly existed. In Shakespeare criticism it was David Wiles who tried to structure the difference and

\textsuperscript{413} After Rolf Soellner’s essay there is not much more to guess about the Wheel of Fortune motif in Lear: “King Lear and the Magic Wheel.” \textit{Shakespeare Quarterly}. 35/3. (Autumn, 1984), pp. 274-289. The carnivalesque circularity of time seems to run parallel with the iconographic tradition of the Wheel of Fortune, at least until the end of the play.
make use of it, emphasizing the “positive” historicist turn of focus on the particular. In present criticism Hornback for example\footnote{He actually tries to explain the whole difference between the quarto Fool and the folio Fool from this preconception in his \textit{The English Clown Tradition from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare}. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, Studies in Renaissance Literature 26., 2009. This could be a very interesting viewpoint but the whole effort actually proves the opposite. If one of the Fools would be an “honest idiot” and the other a “playing artist” this hardly could have stayed a secret from scholars until now and if it still did, their indistinguishability could say a lot more than their hardly found differences.}, without any serious reflection on the sources of \textit{Lear}, distinguishes between “natural folly” and “artificial folly” as an axiomatic fact. Yet with this preliminary limitation, the whole history of the “foolness” in the Early Modern period becomes a confusing and incomprehensible mass full of inner contradictions and the interpretation of \textit{King Lear} becomes especially obscure. From this modern perspective, based on the “temporal validity of a mental condition”, Lear seems like a “normal” person, who “goes mad” because of his pain and this process (whether it is taken to be a story about the recovery, or a story of a simple mental breakdown) becomes an almost 20th century clinical case-study, where the carnivalesque elements become mere decorations, loosely hanging on the protagonist. However, madness is certainly connected to folly and the Fool himself works a lot to confuse the “temporal conditions”.

\begin{quote}
LEAR: Dost thou call me fool, boy?
FOOL: All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with. (1.4.32-34)
\end{quote}

Also other Shakespeare plays play with this categorization and ridicule the preconditions made, as e.g. Touchstone is also introduced as a “natural fool” but he often plays the role of a sharp, witty courtier. “Nature” and “fortune” become the “protagonists” of dialogues:

\begin{quote}
CELLA: When Nature hath made a fair creature, may she not by Fortune fall into the fire? Though Nature hath given us wit to flout at Fortune, hath not Fortune sent in this fool to cut off the argument?
ROSALIND: Indeed, there is Fortune too hard for Nature, when Fortune makes Nature’s natural the cutter-off of Nature’s wit.
CELLA: Peradventure this is not Fortune’s work neither, but Nature’s, who perceiveth our natural wits too dull to reason of such goddesses, and hath sent this natural for our whetstone: for always the dullness of the fool is the whetstone of the wits.\footnote{\textit{As You Like It} (1.2.35-44)}
\end{quote}

Empson, researching the complexities of “folly” found that the earliest affectionate use for a dependent as a “natural fool” was in 1530 and in 1540 and it was first applied to a
“mere imbecile”\textsuperscript{417}. He describes how the sense of “imbecile” was probably becoming prominent in the English word because of a new legal procedure under Henry VIII (“de idiota querenda”). By this procedure, according to Empson, one could petition the court of wards for custody of an idiot (and control of his property) as being his feudal superior or as having interest in the case. So “idiots and fools natural” was apparently the official English phrase and the phrase “begging for a fool” was a shortening. Empson writes that the “natural fool” continued to be the more formal term, but the shortening gave fool the new sense alone. \textsuperscript{418}

So, in Empson’s exploration the “natural fool” seems to be a “legal term” because fools could become “properties” of nobles.\textsuperscript{419} As a legal or social definition they are differentiated from everybody else (persons) not only through the rights of “having” anything but as being “something” like all other “movables”. And there is a huge difference between the possibilities of the carnivalesque transgression of legal and social borders and between the transgression of our constructed borders of “playing” and “being” or the “conditions of nature”. This also shows itself in other instances in \textit{King Lear} and the whole route of another underprivileged figure, the bastard Edmund. When he steps on the stage in the first act he says:

\begin{quote}
Thou, nature, art my goddess; To thy law
My services are bound. Wherefore should I
Stand in the plague of custom and permit
The curiosity of nations to deprive me?
For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines
Lag of a brother? Why “bastard”? Wherefore “base”? (1.2.1-6)

Fine word, “legitimate”!
Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed
And my invention thrive, Edmund the base
Shall to th’legitimate. I grow, I prosper. (1.2.18-21)
\end{quote}

Edmund’s “nature” is opposed to what society “takes for natural” but basically decided for itself: the legal and social inferiority of bastards. His transgression onto the top of the hierarchy—even if reversed—is actually a parallel transgression to Lear’s who falls to the same level as his Fool. Legal and social differences mean nothing for Edmund and his

\textsuperscript{417} Empson used \textit{The New English Dictionary} (N.E.D) later: \textit{Oxford English Dictionary}. There of course can be also earlier cases that did not left textual traces in our sources.


\textsuperscript{419} Enid Welsford, quite obviously, also discusses the issue: Enid Welsford, \textit{The Fool. His Social and Literary History}. Gloucester, MA: Faber and Faber, 1935. pp. 160-162
opening up of these borderlines actually results in a carnivalesque world where anybody can fall through those. As Gloucester tells him:

and of my land  
Loyal and natural boy, I’ll work the means  
To make thee capable. (2.1.84-86)

If we wish to set up Edmund’s “nature” in relation to Lear’s “folly”, then we get to the Fool’s above mentioned comment on how Lear (as everybody) already is born with his natural folly which only becomes obvious (perhaps even determining) now that he has lost everything else. Lear’s downfall into folly is directly proportional to his giving up his material wealth and social roles.

FOOL: Prithee, nuncle, tell me whether a madman be a gentleman or a yeoman.  
LEAR: A king, a king!  
FOOL: No, he’s a yeoman that has a gentleman to his son; for he’s a mad yeoman that sees his son a gentleman before him. (3.6.9-14)

Lear’s world is a carnivalesque world where fools easily fall through social borders and these falls are actually the falls of their coins out of their pockets. But they only become par excellence fools and clowns when they lose everything and become things.420 Kent as Caius, Edgar as Tom O’Bedlam become fools when they lose everything and become nobodies as well. Having nothing becomes equal with being nothing and being a fool at the same time. Lear’s humour about how he is unblamable for “coining”421 because he is the “the king himself” is complemented by the remark: “nature’s above art in that respect.” But nature here means nothing, as Lear does, without his kingdom and wealth, making him an “artificial” king, a “nought”, a “zero”, a “cypher”, a mere “circle” without anything in the middle, a “skeleton of emptiness”. And he, who became a “natural fool” by “fortune” while seeming obviously different from his companions (where Edgar and Kent, in their disguise, are “artificial fools”) is, at the same time, perfectly equal to them in front of the law and in society. He is not compos mentis, not one who can be judged.

420 The true legal problem of “natural fools” is actually interesting but not directly connected to King Lear even though about getting possession of lands. To “beg for a fool” meant to ask the sovereign for a natural that “really is born with a disease incurable” and with him or her receive also his or hers land. (That did not work with people who lost their wits by chance.) This praxis also shows how “naturals” were understood not as persons but as “legal titles” coming with lands. See: Leslie Hotson’s Shakespeare’s Motley. New York: Oxford University Press, 1952. pp. 97-99
421 This carnivalesque line also means ‘sexual intercourse’.
The homo sacer’s “quality of existence” before the law is “nothing”. Homo sacer is hardly comprehensible as a “being” from the perspective of the λόγος; his banishment is clearly shown by the “outstretched tongue” towards them, which re-exiles them, again and again, from human society. But this exile also counts as an advantage at times because it ensures the exceptionality from law. This is the exceptionality of modern compas mentis “criminals”, medieval court fools and pagan holy fools and this is exactly how Lear and his companions themselves become homo sacers as well: their “roguish madness allows itself to anything” (3.7.103-104). Lear is a homo sacer clown in all respect. The loosing of his material assets is directly connected with losing his wits. “Knowledge and reason” become actually identical with the “marks of sovereignty” (1.4.213-214) and with letting go one of them the other also follows, so Lear can become only “Lear’s shadow” (1.4.212). Still, in his folly he is not reduced to the essentially naked humanity, the “unaccommodated man” (3.4.100), “the thing itself” (3.4.99-100). But he wishes to reach this “Absolutness”, taking Edgar as his ideal, through unbuttoning and unrobing (3.4.102) himself. This unbuttoning means the total stripping of all earthly rank and dignity, role and identity, reason and humanity. He becomes a “border-creature” sacred and damned stuck between worlds as representations of “nothing”. His nothingness is also manifested in his influence on the plot which becomes nullified actually after his first deed in the first act. He becomes a passive, unconcerned figure as if he were not even there.

FOOL: Thou wast a pretty fellow when thou hadst no need to care for her frowning. Now thou art an O without a figure. I am better than thou art now. I am a fool, thou art nothing. (1.4.173-175)

There are many examples Giorgo Agamben and others collect for homo sacers. They are frequently free to be killed by anybody because their sacred human body is already sacrificed: they have no life from the point of society. Lear himself is not even worth killing in the first and biggest part of the play (as his death in the end does not, indeed, shock anyone after the much more shocking death of Cordelia). He is like the ancient soldier, the devotus who, through a sacrifice ritual, gave his “sacred body” to a sculpture, the colossus, before he departed into war. Agamben’s wonderful example about these citizens or warriors

423 Remarkably also at the end of his life: King Lear (5.3.309)
consecrated to the gods (mentioned by Livy in his Ab Urbe Condita) is a key element of describing the concept of homo sacer. If the “donor” survived the war he was going into, his breathing “body” was only a body of an undead, a larva, and he could only reenter society through another ritual which helped him to demand his “sacred body” back from the colossus and that included the destroying of the sculpture—in place of the sacrifice of himself.424

The body of the homo sacer by being able to be killed but not to be sacrificed is itself a promise for submitting itself to the power of death [...] the remaining, bare life is concerned, which cannot be reduced further and which awaits a death that cannot be redeemed by any ritual or sacrifice anymore.425

Lear’s homo sacer body is like the larva body of the devotus, and his colossus has been destroyed when he renounced his kingdom.

To shake all cares and business from our age,  
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we  
Unburdened crawl toward death. (1.1.37-39)

As already Kantorowicz noted, Shakespeare had every chance to get acquainted with the thoughts of Edmund Plowden, the well-known legal scholar who lived in the 16th century426.

As Plowden wrote:

For the King has in him two Bodies, viz., a Body natural, and a Body politic. His Body natural (if it be considered in itself) is a Body mortal, subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident, to the Imbecility of Infancy or old Age, and to the like Defects that happen to the natural Bodies of other People. But his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People, and the Management of the public weal, and this Body is utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities, which the Body natural is subject to, and for this Cause, what the King does in his Body politic, cannot be invalidated or frustrated by any Disability in his natural Body.427

425 See Giorgio Agamben, “Az uralkodó teste.” [The body of the sovereign] (translated by Neumann Anna) 2000, (May 2005) p. 8-9 (This short part was translated to English by myself)
426 He also noted how Shakespeare’s actual knowledge about Plowden’s work was eventually not so important because of the concept’s implicitness. Ernst H. Kantorowicz, The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. pp. 24-26
Lear’s folly only becomes a “valid” *homo sacer* body after he disposes of his kingdom, he
gives up his form as body politic. He then, for the first time in the play, dies: his “body
politic” dies through the corrupted division of the realm. His initial deed which starts his—
and others’—downfall is the only thing he actually does in the whole play, and it happens in
the very first act. As Andrew Gurr sharply notices, crowns and coronets along with earl’s
bonnets have an absolutely central function in King Lear. The play opens with Lear coming in
with his crown and three smaller coronets. Two of them he hand to the dukes, husbands to
Goneril and Regan. After Cordelia “fails” on his test and becomes banished from the
kingdom, he gives the third coronet, “an unbreakable ring of gold”, to the two dukes and
orders them to split it and this clearly shows how impossible it is to divide a kingdom.
Soon Lear’s crown is changed for the coronet of flowers, because Lear is made a mock-
king, a *clown* by not comprehending his own situation. His first big error, the odd division of the
powers of kingship is followed by his intention to keep the title of kingship. And it literary
feels like he had “given all”.

KING LEAR: What, have his daughters brought him to this pass?
Couldst thou save nothing? Didst thou give them all?
FOOL: Nay, he reserved a blanket, else we had been all shamed. (3.4. 60-63)

Lear’s title which he hoped to hold on to also fades away in this carnivalesque
interregnum, which Jan Kott calls “Grand Mechanism” in *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*.
And there is no new king, no hope for the orderly transfer of the king’s “body politic”. The
mock king bears no relevance in the story where his own “treacherous” Whiteface daughters
do not think that he is worthy of death. While in the third act there is a reference to them
craving for Lear’s death (3.4.151), they actually do not care about their father’s living or
dying at all, because he already seems worth “nothing”.

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428 I also share the view of Empson, that “the effect of false renunciation is that Lear has made a fool of himself
on the most cosmic and appaling scale possible; he has got on the wrong side of this one. I do not think one
need extract any more theology from the gods.” William Empson, *Structure of Complex Words*. Totowa:
Rowman and Littlefield, 1979. p. 155
430 Some scholars wisely noticed this before: R. B. Heilman, *This Great Stage. Image and Structure in King Lear*.
Kent himself accepts the political propositions of division and abdication but he breaks out when Lear demands
to keep his title of king.
431 See also *King Lear* (1.4.91-100)
Many, like Empson, failed to understand the importance of the term “nothing” in *King Lear* which actually repeatedly marks the most important, *homo sacer* function of folly in the play from its very beginning. No wonder it is heard more than thirty times after Cordelia states it as a motto for the whole plot (1.1.85-88). After that Lear himself makes Cordelia the *nothing* he himself will soon become:

> If aught within that little-seeming substance,  
> Or all of it, with our displeasure pieced  
> *And nothing* more, may fitly like your grace... (1.1.196-198)

The sensual difference between giving wisely and giving all is perfectly described by the Fool. Yet, “nothing” here takes up a new position as well.

**FOOL:** Mark it, uncle:  
Have more than thou showest,  
Speak less than thou knowest,  
Lend less than thou owest,  
Ride more than thou goest,  
Learn more than thou trowest,  
Set less than thou throwest;  
Leave thy drink and thy whore,  
And keep in-a-door,  
And thou shalt have more  
Than two tens to a score.  
**KENT:** This is *nothing*, fool.  
**FOOL:** Then ’tis like the breath of an unfee’d lawyer; you gave me *nothing* for’t. Can you make no use of *nothing*, nuncle?  
**KING LEAR:** Why, no, boy; *nothing* can be made out of *nothing*.  
**FOOL:** Prithee, tell him, so much the rent of his land comes to: he will not believe a fool. (1.4.107-123)

“Nothing” here shows itself from another aspect and becomes less the *homo sacer* essence of “being nothing” and more what Cordelia means as “nothing”; this is shown by the interaction of the word, without any irony. This “nothing” is more, it is a “rich nothing” a “little something” that at first sight “shows nothing”, like Cordelia’s love for her father. This is the “something that is left”, the “residue” after seemingly “everything is given”\(^{432}\). The Fool is wise enough to give this “nothing” to Caius and Lear, but they are not yet able to understand the difference between the two “nothings”. It is the opposite of what Edgar as a *clown* turns into, the “thing itself”, the “Absoluteness of nothingness”. But in his first “transdressing soliloquy” (2.3), Poor Tom ceases to be “something yet”, while Edgar appears

\(^{432}\) As the Fool’s listing also presented.
to be “nothing”. I cite the whole passage to draw attention to the use of the *homo sacer* element:

I heard myself proclaimed,
And by the happy hollow of a tree
Escaped the hunt. No port is free, no place,
That guard, and most unusual vigilance
Does not attend my taking. While I may ‘scape
I will preserve myself, and am bethought
To take the basest and most poorest shape
That ever penury, in contempt of man
Brought near to beast. My face I’ll grime with filth,
Blanket my loins, elf all my hair in knots,
And with presented nakedness out-face
The winds and persecutions of the sky.
The country gives me proof and precedent
Of Bedlam beggars, who, with roaring voices
Strike in their numb’d and mortified bare arms,
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary;
And with this horrible object, from low farms,
Poor pelting villages, sheep-cotes, and mills,
Sometime with lunatic bans, sometime with prayers,
Enforce their charity. “Poor Turlygod! Poor Tom!”
That’s *something* yet. Edgar I *nothing* am.

The truth about “nothing” in Lear is a commonplace: you are no nothing until you have something. Edgar is the perfect example how this works. While the carnivalesque functioning of “folly” is distributed into the liminal figures of the play, Edgar’s transdressings apparently help to make the dream of reconciliation come true, that is, the promise of the new, reborn carnivalesque unity is kept alive. However dismembered the folly, and with it, the world of the carnival becomes, *reaggregation* (the closing cord of Gennep’s *rites of passages*) seems to be just around the corner. For the most part laughter still seems to be the best response that could be given to the adventures of the *King Lear*’s liminal outcasts. There are no grounds, until this moment, for shuddering. Edgar’s transdressing show “the way back”, he himself awaits the laughing part, the *reaggregation* of the carnival. Total reaggregation is not totally excluded for either of them until the very end of the play.

The Hoax of the “promised end”

It should not be forgotten what was said about the richness of *King Lear* in comic motifs and links to carnivalesque customs and traditions which can make the play occasionally
funny. These aspects help to keep up our hope while watching the play, as Snyder also calls our attention to this.\footnote{Susan Snyder, The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare’s Tragedies: Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello, and King Lear. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. p. 158-159} But will the “promised end” verify our hopes for the carnival? There are so many hints to the cycle of fortune (the whole carnivalesque sense depends on this logic of the circular notion of time, as we have seen) that the ending seems to be inevitable. Edgar’s image of the wheel, also sharply noticed by Snyder, is also evoked by Kent while he is in the stocks:

Good King, that must approve the common saw,  
Thou out of heaven’s benediction com’st  
To the warm sun.  
Approach, thou beacon to this underglobe,  
That by thy comfortable beams I may  
Peruse this letter. Nothing almost sees miracles  
But misery. I know ‘tis from Cordelia,  
Who hath most fortunately been informed  
Of my obscurèd course and shall find time  
From this enormous state, seeking to give  
Losses their remedies. All weary and o’erwatched,  
Take vantage, heavy eyes, not to behold  
This shameful lodging. Fortune, good night.  
\textit{Smile; once more turn thy wheel.} (2.2.152-165)

It is even more remarkable that the Fool himself describes the second wheel the “great one that goes up the hill” when another is going down, and only one scene later (2.4.70-71). Lear, in the middle of his misery, feels himself tortured in the “wheel of fire” (4.7.47); Cordelia’s presence seems to somehow scrape through his barbed wire fence of madness and implant the hope for a “purified return”. Edgar’s return as the happy “catastrophe in the old comedy” (1.2.125-126) promised before seems to be underscored by nearly every step he takes, back to the top of the social hierarchy and the carnivalesque ending is announced by Edmund himself when he says that the “wheel is come full circle” (5.3.175). Edgar is himself a mock-king that is going to be a real one, a perfect carnival \textit{clown}, “like the Fool card in the Tarot pack, has turned what seemed to be a linear progression into a wheel”\footnote{R. A. Zimbardo, “The King and The Fool: “King Lear” as Self-Deconstructing Text.” Criticism. 32/1. (Winter, 1990), p. 19}. He—as it is sometimes claimed seems like a dramatic device, an instrument, or a function: he shows the openness of all borders towards reason and position, and even death itself.
seems to be transgressed by him. His father, Gloucester also becomes part of that
demonstration of the carnival, especially on the “cliff of Dover”. His mock-suicide should be
ridiculous, the carnivalesque celebration of life and the triumph over death. According to
Pikli, it is but a huge practical joke where physical comedy triumphs. His bitter pathos is
mocked through this clownish leap, which brings no actual, physical harm to him at all. How
come he still dies just a few scenes later followed by most of Lear’s clowns?

The sudden darkness at the end of the play with its shocking, uncalled-for turn—
described by Frank Kermode as the Aristotelian “daring peripeteia”—seems to be the main
reason for the marginalization of King Lear. Should we take the dark ending as the “usual
Shakespearean inconsistency”? From the point of the play’s carnivalesque qualities, this is by
no means an unfounded question. The receding of the carnivalesque appears with the
sudden disappearance of the Fool: it is not the suddenness of disappearance that is puzzling
but the slow process of our realization that the Fool will never come back. Still, there is a
sufficient number of carnivalesque gaming (e.g. Gloucester’s clown leap, or Lear’s mock trial)
and fooling around to delay our awareness. Gloucester’s death is the first “obnoxious” turn
already in the last act of the play. We are told how Gloucester’s “flawed heart burst
smilingly” (5.3.197-199) and it actually does not reach us fully unprepared. While it seems
really strange how after his “mock-death” “death as annihilation” could reach him (the two
just belong to different worlds), it is announced that Gloucester’s weak heart—unable to
divert pain through madness—is on the verge of arrest. This also works as a positive signal
for Lear, who seems to have “gone through his recovery in folly”. Thus, while causing
obvious discomforts, Gloucester’s death still has its function—as Edgar’s clown
transgressions did—to lead us to a happy ending. But how about the other fools and clowns
that die?

My explanation, based on both the Quarto and the Folio versions, was that Kent is only
“following his master to death” because Lear was a little bit faster than him. His words about
going after Lear beautifully echo his loyalty without any further need for even radical steps
like suicide. So we should also be aware of the upcoming death of Kent/Caius. I address him

436 Bradley, Coleridge and Hazlitt all question the immeasurable pain of the catastrophe which seems avoidable
to the end.
437 As I wrote a few pages ago about King Lear (4.6.272-277) in Healing through “folly”
Kent/Caius because until the very end he has a double *persona*: being unable to make Lear accept his true identity becomes even more tragic when he is awaiting his own death. This way another, and a more stringent border than the life-death border will separate them: the border of a death *without afterlife*, without the hope of being reunited, because death means now that one will be “dead as earth”.

Thereafter comes the death of Cordelia, one of “the nadirs” of the history of drama. The death of Cordelia and Lear’s death as a consequence of it are—as Empson puts it referring to Johnson and Bradley—different from any other deaths in Shakespeare’s tragedies because they seem “willful”.

Nothing but death is possible for Macbeth and Othello, and at any rate nothing else is expected for Hamlet; Timon goes roaring up to a death so desired and obvious that no cause for it need be assigned; but with Lear and Cordelia the whole movement of “necessity” is finished and we last saw him planning a life of mystical gaiety. The death is like a last trip-up as the clown leaves the stage; its shock and senselessness (of course I do not deny that it is essential to the effect) are far as Chehov from normal tragedy.438

It is, especially considering the continuously infused comic elements, which this ending confronts with an incongruous turn “affront to all our preconceptions about fiction” and the “breaking of the rules”439. Even more, it is like a comedy with some strange tragic temptations ending in something even more “tragic” then tragedy. With the “poor fool” and Lear, all fools of the tragedy come to a bitter end. All but Edgar, the biggest cheat of literary history. As Poor Tom his last words answering Gloucester seem to explain the fate of the elders in *Lear*:

> Men must endure  
> Their going hence even as their coming hither.  
> Ripeness is all. Come on. (5.2.9-11)

These words directly precede the last scene, where Cordelia dies confronting these words with his dead body itself: there is no reasoning for Cordelia’s “ripeness” to death and that is a fact. I do not think there is an alternative receptive attitude than feeling her death cruel and unfair.

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Empson is one of the scholars that does not know how “any critic tried to call this a reconciliation with nature”\textsuperscript{440}, but there actually is a little, inconspicuous part that has to be investigated still.

\begin{quote}
Lend me a looking-glass;
If that her breath will mist or stain the stone,
Why then she lives. (5.3.261-263)
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
This feather stirs. She lives. If it be so,
It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows
That ever I have felt. (5.3. 265-267)
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Cordelia, Cordelia, stay a little. Ha?
What is’t thou sayst?—Her voice was ever soft,
Gentle and low […] (5.3. 271-273)
\end{quote}

The Folio version even adds the following words, just before Lear himself dying as well:

\begin{quote}
O, O, O, O.
Do you see this? Look on her! Look, her lips!
Look there, look there! (5.3.310-312)
\end{quote}

Many scholars in their desperate search for the justification of suffering and a positive turn for reconciliation (e.g. as the “redemption” of Lear) found a little hope in these lines. They explained how Lear thinks for some moments that Cordelia is alive and dies in the belief that Cordelia survives him. However, these lines are framed by other lines that over and over reinforce death:

\begin{quote}
She’s gone forever.
I know when one is dead and when one lives.
She’s dead as earth. (5.3.259-261)
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
A plague upon you, murderers, traitors all.
I might have saved her; now she’s gone for ever. (5.3.269-270)
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
No, no! No life?
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
And thou no breath at all? Oh, thou’lt come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never! (5.3.305-308)
\end{quote}

We had a sub-plot with a sub-protagonist (not Gloucester but Edgar) who—in his linear, Robert of Cisyle-like voyage back to the top and the carnivalesque reaggregation of the world—had seen the one he loved, his father in the inverse of this situation. Gloucester’s

clown-leap, his laughable mock-suicide mocks death in a carnivalesque manner: the clown is not really hurt, his efforts to die, death itself becomes mocked and ridiculed. Gloucester (as Edgar, too) lives before this sudden moment of death, and he also lives thereafter: death becomes just a passing moment of the victorious life. The sub-plot here becomes a hoax of the main-plot which ends in the reverse of this comic (even if “grotesque”, grotesque in a Bakhtinian way) stunt. Cordelia’s “mock-life” in the scene is more bitter then his death because it means the victory of death as annihilation. Life becomes a mocked and ridiculed moment in death which rules the whole ending of the play as Cordelia’s death mocks the mock-death of Gloucester as a “reversed clown-play” in the carnival. And the Folio’s last words here, instead of being comforting, must be understood as unmitigated brutality. The other characters are right to ask the same questions we do.

KENT: Is this the promised end?
EDGAR: Or image of that horror?
ALBANY: Fall and cease. (5.3.263-264)

These words sounding so mystical just mean what they say. Is this the promised ending of the story we were all waiting for? Without the hope for reconciliation? Without the celebrated triumph of vitality? Without laughter? Or is Cordelia still living and we are played only tricks with (as in the case of Gloucester’s leap) and is this only an image of that horror we see? The play is much clearer than we try to understand it: only “fall and cease” remain, and these mute carnivalesque laughter: the wheel breaks.

Cordelia’s death is a death, where “the Fool’s death” becomes mixed up with the death of the “beloved one.” Lear with his dead daughter in his arms says:

And my poor fool is hanged. (5.3.305)

What if Cordelia’s death becomes entangled with the Fool’s death on purpose? In other words, what if Cordelia’s death is somehow “contained” in the Fool’s strange, never qualified disappearance? What if the experience of death becomes even harsher if it is

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441 This seems to be connected to the discussion about the possibility of Shakespeare having an actor with a double role in King Lear, playing both Cordelia and the Fool (a common argument since Alois Brandl’s Shaksper and Wilfred Perrett’s The Story of King Lear). Fortunately, while this discussion has its pros and cons, because no possible outcome could really weaken my assumption here, I do not have to make a decision. If anything, the staged death of an actor playing the clown and the loved one at the same time could only strengthen the effect. See for example Stephen Booth’s Speculations on Doubling in his King Lear, Macbeth, Indefinition, and Tragedy. Christchurch: Cybereditions, 2001.
juxtaposed with the death of the clown, this carnivalesque vitality-spirit and immortal hope for reconciliation? What if these words are just the “entzauberung der Welt” through the act of decarnivalization?

Lear thought until now that he gave all, but only in the end is his “nothingness” hitting the very bottom (a “bottom” that is not ambivalent and carnivalesque). It is possible to conceptualize Lear on many levels of morality and amorality, motivations, affirmations and the operation of experience and aging, but the play basically builds itself on a punch line: the overcrossing of all “morals of the story”. First, everything moral becomes over crossed by the carnival and thereafter the carnival itself is crossed out. Without reconciliation, the carnivalesque ritual becomes interrupted and this is what can be called decarnivalization. And the decarnivalization of the dramatic moment here seems to be a very conscious move on Shakespeare’s part; the story of Lear ends with his true nakedness in death and his last “unbuttoning” to the “thing itself” is not as a homo sacer any longer, a concept of political theology, but as the rotten corpse of nothingness, from which no traveler returns. Only then can he die, but, in fact, what can death take away, if there already is nothing?

The single-toned (non-carnivalesque) tearing to pieces, not the ritual (or the semi-ritual, without rebirth and renewal) sacrifice. 442

This shocking turn is actually not an unenjoyable or insoluble one now 443 but it is the forgotten carnivalesque clown-play that can explain it’s functioning in the Early Modern theatre. But the ambivalence muting laughter is not entirely the problem of the genre. Some of Shakespeare’s comedies decarnivalize the world as well.

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443 Nowadays we have many examples in popular fiction where this type of peripeteia is fully exploited, see for example Game of Thrones television series and its episode, The Rains of Castamere (aka the “Red Wedding”) and the worldwide enthusiasm that surrounded it.

The discussion about the different individualities of Shakespeare’s clowns has been dominated—and confused—by the debate concerning the comic actors of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men. As Bart van Es has recently summed this debate up, the central question is when exactly Robert Armin joined Shakespeare’s company. Some scholars claim that there was a significant rupture in the life of the Company when William Kemp left the Chamberlain’s Men and—it seems—Armin took his place, while others argue that they also performed together for some time.\(^4\) Not even the date of the change is clear and the desire to reconstruct the events degraded—plays—and not for the first time—into hard-to-read, mere “historical sources”, especially concerning their “clown-projects”. While this tradition is frequently attributed entirely to David Whiles and his book, *Shakespeare’s clown*,\(^4\) there are solid antecedents to his argument. Enid Welsford wrote about Armin’s possible “professional” impact on Shakespeare-plays, like that of *Lear* on *Twelfth Night*. I in 1935 she already brought up how Armin—based on his book, *The Nest of Ninnies*—seemed to be “interested in the lower branch of his profession” and could probably have authorial contributions to the plays.\(^4\) The differentiation already introduced an accentuated “social difference” between Kemp’s “lower level rustic” and Armin’s “witty professional” clown characters. Hotson in 1952 was a dedicated representative of this “big change in clowns” with the somewhat altered opinion based on the difference between the various attires they wore (Kemp’s clowns in “rustic clown costumes” and Armin’s fools in “idiot motleys”). “Let those that play your clown speak no more than is set down for them”—Hamlet warns the “players” (3.2.36). Hotson tries to explain those words as the rejection of the “Kemp-type” of clown.\(^4\) Richard Helgerson built on this when he invented the term Shakespeare’s “loss of

\(^{4}\) As van Es writes, Kemp was about to depart overseas as we know from his book, the *Nine Days Wonder*, in April 1600, while Armin’s publications show that he was still the member of the Curtain. If the general opinion is right (I am not totally convinced) about him being the only one who could possibly play the role of Touchstone, he was introduced no later than on the 4th August of 1600, when *As You Like It* appears in the Stationers’ Register. So the handover probably occurred between these dates. Bart van Es, *Shakespeare in Company*. Oxford University Press, 2013. p. 164. See also the sources of van Es: Martin Butler, “Armin, Robert (1563-1615).” In: *Oxford DNB, William Shakespeare: A textual Companion*. (edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor) Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987. pp. 121-2

\(^{4\text{a}}\) I provided already some refutation of his arguments in my chapter about the Medium of Carnival.


the common touch”⁴⁴⁸: the playwright’s getting wealthier and having more contact with high society—also reflected in his company moving to the Globe (1599) resulted in the abandonment of folk comedies and Kemp’s lower class clown characters, in favor of the “upper-class intellectuals” of Armin. Helgerson was heavily criticized, but still, the concept of the “sharp change” involving the clown characters—based on the change between the actors’ personalities—still defines our thinking. The opposition between the advanced satirical “diminutive fool” and the “bulky clown” from before cuts Shakespeare’s oeuvre in two halves⁴⁴⁹.

Several challenges offer themselves against this critical tradition, already on the level of historical assumptions. We do not know about any difficulties of staging the old plays (with their “Kemp-type clown characters”) after the arrival of Armin, and there are also characters closer to the “Armin-type” that may have been introduced by Kemp himself, like Falstaff for example. We also know that dominant actor individuals frequently affect the roles they play, but—compared to our ideas about clowns—we still do not presume that an actor wholly shapes the figure of e.g. “the king” or “the knight” for a whole period of theatre-making. Most of the plays contain two or even more “types” together and build up a decisively comic effect through their carnivalesque confrontations⁴⁵⁰. It is revealing how the actual close-analysis of the plays can actually refute the idea of the change between of the two clown-types (Kemp-type and Armin-type) that may become an intellectual straight-jacket. Alex Davis, for example, when facing the “clown-multiplicity” of Twelfth Night points out how “social ambiguity finds it counterpoint in the third class of comic character, the aristocratic

⁴⁴⁹ Bart van Es, Shakespeare in Company. Oxford University Press, 2013. p. 163. A good example of the fragile argument: “When Kemp offers to bestow ‘a leash of my cast bells to have crowned you with coxcombs’ his gesture effectively encapsulates this contrast: the clownish bells of his merry morris stood in profound opposition to the fool’s motley and jester’s cap.” Bart van Es, Shakespeare in Company. Oxford University Press, 2013. p. 166-167. This and the like points are hardly convincing as most coxcomb-depictions also show bells on the jesters’ hat. Actually, the question of how Armin for example could play Autolycus, one clearly “Kemp-type” clown, surprisingly comes up in Shakespeare in Company. About this and on the diary of Simon Forman, the source of this information (Booke of Plaies, Bodleian, MS Ashmole 208, fol. 202, printed in Chambers, William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems) see also Wiles’s dilemma in Shakespeare's clown. Actor and text in the Elizabethan playhouse. Cambridge University Press, 2005. p. 157. Same paradox arises concerning Hamlet’s gravediggers, as we will see.
⁴⁵⁰ Besides the three play I work on there is the couple from Midsummer’s Night Dream: Bottom and Puck, Touchstone and Jacques from As You Like It, Trinculo and Stephano from The Tempest (and also Ariel and Caliban in fact), just to name a few.
clown: nobleman whose association with popular culture somehow renders their status indeterminate. This insight does try to break with the prevailing Kemp-Armin model, but only gets to introduce a third “type”. Already Hotson’s Shakespeare’s Motley tries to specify, to confine, to narrow down—at least from appearance—“the Shakesperean fool”. But in the Appendix of the Shakespeare’s Motley all the other different fools are described as well; he—confronting his own basic assumptions—describes the actual impossibility of any narrow sense:

Just because the Elizabethan gentry of both sexes showed a rich variety of colour in their costumes, the vain and pretentious betrayed their folly by overdoing a good thing. They put on to many tints, or chose ill-assorted contrasts. In the matter of colour and dress, the dividing between 'fine' and 'ridiculous' was at least as disputed as it is today.

There is no “costume” that without doubt “identifies” someone as a clown. It is the other way round: the “foolish clothing”, the “costume of Misrule” is as manifold as “normal clothing”, the “clothes of Rule” are. Newer and newer (but always actual) aspects come to the surface if one contrasts clothes with clothes. The exaggerations of the juxtapositions can, in themselves, become a clown-motley in a way. In fact, this is how plays, like Twelfth Night could actually work, where simply every character included is a clown.

Recognizing Twelfth Night as a Carnivalesque Play

As most of Shakespeare’s misunderstood carnivalesque plays, Twelfth Night was not often staged before the 20th century and also several times deprived of its direct carnivalesque elements. It was especially the Restoration that did not like it and also rewrote it (like King Lear was “made fit”, too). Sir William Davenant’s adaptation of the Night


453 Clowning was often cut out, even Feste’s atmosphere-creating songs from e.g. Bell’s version, which premiered in 1774. Only in 1895 through the work of William Poel and his semi-professional troupe (the Elizabethan Stage Society) was the more-ore-less “original” play revived, as we know this from Bernard Shaw’s account. Twelfth Night or What You Will. (edited by Roger Warren and Stanley Wells) Oxford: Clarendon Press, The Oxford Shakespeare, 1994. p. 3
was staged in 1661 and repeatedly criticized by Samuel Pepys. His comment from 1663 when it was performed twelve days after Christmas (on twelfth night) disturbingly complicates the quest for actual and direct connections with the carnivalesque folk tradition:

After dinner to the Duke’s House, and there saw ‘Twelfth Night’ acted well, though it be but a silly play, and not relating at all to the name of the day.

Romantic interpretations indicated basic interest in the problems of “romantic love”; productions looked for the love-theme not only in the main plot but in the subplot, too. The critical interest, in search for honest, idealized “love” in this play, entirely forgot the role of “the brimstone in the liver” which—as it has since been revealed—at least counterbalances the “fire in the heart” (3.2.16). Fabian’s deceiving comment (on Olivia’s attention given to Sir Andrew) interprets “love” as a naughty desire, material self-interest, narcissism and persiflage, at least these are those feelings which nourish love. Accordingly, liver, meaning “the throne of passions” in Early Modern English, as the key part of the body is mentioned quite frequently in Twelfth Night. It is the internal organ that Malvolio firstly is trapped through, as Fabian points out “This wins him, liver and all” (2.5.80), just as how the Duke (arguing quite counterproductively) tells us how the love of the man (being not better, but “stronger” then woman’s love) comes from the liver and is thus simply more excessive and more gluttonous (this does not seem to me as a laudation of men). Through liver all the unfulfilled “meaningless” passions of men are interconnected with each other. But romantic love is even absent from the more “romantic” parts: Olivia actually never gets to know Sebastian, whom she even marries, just recently after his entering her garden in Illyria. Their love could hardly arise from the mutual recognition of their soulmateness; it rather comes from the liver’s appetite aroused by their appearance. While Viola’s true love could make an exception, this love never becomes realized; their coming together with the Duke also stays suspended and she never actually gets back her “woman dress” in the end. The

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455 The Diary of Samuel Pepys. (edited by Braybrooke, Richard Griffin, Baron) London – New York: Frederick Warne and Co., 1879. Saturday 6 January 1663 (Twelfth day). I would like to emphasize, how it was still played at Twelfth Night.
456 Annotation to Twelfth Night (1.2.37) in The New Cambridge Edition.
457 And between them Sir Andrew is the most weak one who even lacks the true power of this “low” organ: “if he were opened, and you find so much blood in his liver as will clog the foot of a flea, I’ll eat the rest of the anatomy.” Twelfth Night (3.2.48-49)
liver and its metabolism rules the world of Illyria where only the mocking of anything idealistic can remain. As this should be: this is the self-mocking reality of the carnival world.

As we saw, Enid Welsford and Mikhail Bakhtin (with all the related works of scholars) came up with visions about the folk-traditions of folly and the carnivalesque reality, so if one looks for “romantic love”, one can, it seems, only lose. Welsford herself considered how, in Twelfth Night, “Shakespeare transmutes into poetry the quintessence of the Saturnalia”\textsuperscript{458}.

Since then, the carnivalesque characteristics of the play have been considered in several ways. As it clearly stands—in comic plays it is the “present”\textsuperscript{459} that we address through laughing—, the dialogues are full of contemporary references to Early Modern Britain from “The Elephant”\textsuperscript{460} inn to “The Great Bed of Ware” (3.2.37). Already Barber made the play’s festive attributes clear in his Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy: Shakespeare’s whole handling of romantic story, farce, and practical joke makes a composition which moves in the manner of his earlier festive comedies, through release to clarification.\textsuperscript{461}

He also mentions how in Illyria “madness is a key word”\textsuperscript{462}. After more than four centuries the connection of the “marvelous comedy” to the festive world was taken as a matter of course again and again, and Twelfth Night was addressed as a play that “preserves the general atmosphere of this period of misrule, characterized by the spicy ambiguity of its intrigues of love and festivity”\textsuperscript{463}. In fact, even the “dark side” of the carnivalesque play is taken into consideration by sharp-eyed readers of the play, like Thad Jenkins Logan\textsuperscript{464} or Karin S. Coddon. Coddon based her interpretation on Feste’s role, identifying him as the chief representative of the festive world. She drafted some of the most significant elements of the historical context of the “decarnivalization of the world” that I address in my study.\textsuperscript{465}

\textsuperscript{459} Which it is written in.
\textsuperscript{460} Two times in the third scene of the third act and also in the third scene of the fourth act.
\textsuperscript{464} Thad Jenkins Logan, “Twelfth Night: The Limits of Festivity.” Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900. 22/2., Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama (Spring, 1982), pp. 223-238
The play’s particular self-definition as carnivalesque does in no way end with its title. The topsy-turvy world of Illyria is a world where “nothing that is so is so” (4.1.6.). Sir Andrew, when he agrees to stay in Olivia’s household and even spend more money on their spree of clowns, also justifies his decision by saying how he delights “in masques and revels sometimes altogether” (1.3.93). But especially the title, “twelfth night” points to the known festivity of wintertime and it was probably first performed before the Court at Whitehall Palace on the twelfth day of Christmas in 1601 as well. Furthermore, it was also staged on Easter Monday in 1618, and at Candlemas in 1623; the play was very clearly intended for carnival performances. Despite this fact many scholars still doubt the play’s inner carnivalesque characteristics and its relation to actual Twelfth Night customs. Their argument is at least considerable, as the title is not “Twelfth Night” but “Twelfth Night; or, What You Will”.

Twelfth night or what you will?

The well spread assumption about the title coming from the Saturnalian customs that were practiced on the twelfth day of Christmas seems partly to follow from the carnivalesque changing of Viola’s clothes, title, sex and identity. While this obviously is a justifiable way of reasoning, it does not seem to say too much: even King Lear could be titled as “Twelfth Night” in this sense. There was some attempt to connect the festival with Sir Toby Belch’s song in the second act, about the “O’ the twelfth day of December—” which they wanted to match with Christmas’s twelfth day. The two dates are actually not related in any way (the 12th of December and the 6th of January) so this only could be true if we took the phrase much more associatively (if “December” here means the carnival itself), but even if there is a connection, there is not much more to it. I am convinced that the play is not even interpretable without the festive customs of Twelfth Day. It is not that Viola’s transdressing “connects” the play with the actual carnivalesque tradition, but it is immensely unreasonable without it; the puzzling question of why the castaway noblewoman puts on a

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466 At least this is the opinion of Leslie Hotson, but there is a considerable scholarly argument about this play being Twelfth Night.
468 There is a possibility that the original ballade about “tenth day of December” was altered by Shakespeare to give birth to this identification. See the annotation in The New Cambridge Edition by Elizabeth Story Donno, to line (2.3.73).
new identity at all is only answerable through the anti-utilitarian logic of the carnival. Transdressing simply “happens” in the carnival and only when “the carnival is on”, within the strict frames of Misrule-time. Cesario’s introduction is in no way strange or unusual, at least “within that time”. The audience on the Twelfth Day has “other” expectations than the audience at any other time: the wealthy should dress into the clothes of the poor, women should change into (the clothes of) men, men should become various animals, and the fool should be crowned king. Still, one can say that nearly every carnivalesque tradition includes these transdressings, so in Twelfth Night it is particularly hard to tell “which” Early Modern British carnival tradition is actually dominating.

As several critics have mentioned before, the play’s Illyria is actually a “nightly” festive world and it is the Winter Lord of Misrule who rules in the night. This nicely shows itself in the wordplay of Sir Toby Belch, the “knight of the night” in the third scene of the second act (2.3.1-7), where the night becomes the festive “translation” of the day that has to be “worked through” with booze and repast. Still, there are also remarks on how it is the beginning of the summer season, and there are some lines that indicate the “midsummer madness” in the play.

FESTE: Many a good hanging prevents a bad marriage, and, for turning away, let summer bear it out. (1.5.17)

OLIVIA: Why, this is very midsummer madness. (3.4.50)

I strongly believe that the play has an enormous amount of carnivalesque qualities and I am also convinced that it was given the title “Twelfth Night” because it was—coherently—first performed on the twelfth day of Christmas. But it is actually more universal in its carnivalesque qualities, so it cannot be narrowed down to this single day of festivity: as a carnivalesque play, it is “Twelfth Night, Or What You Will”. A play written fitting for “any festive event” through its abounding carnivalesque folly: this is “carnival itself”.

A good example can be highlighted in the sword-fight scene with a “maid Marian”, a young man dressed in woman clothes. Maid Marian was probably the popular figure in May Day Morris dances, a man playing a woman in woman clothes. This is what is actually taking

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place at the end of the third act on the stage, with “Cesario” in the spotlight (who is a man playing a woman in the clothes of a man). But also another woman, a wise trickster in the group of the clowns is addressed Marian, and she even has a name close to Marian, not to mention how she is also a maid (or at least treated as one). In the second act Sir Toby Belch calls Maria:

Marian, I say, a stoup of wine! (2.3.11-12)

While in the May Day tradition the Fool and Maid Marian dance the traditional Morris dance there is a Tommy (Toby?) and a Bessy (Belch?) dancing with their swords in the Sword dance in the Northern carnivals of Britain, some of them also wearing jingle bells, at least as we know from our later sources from the 18th century, mentioned by Clement A. Miles. In The Journal of the British Archaeological Association he also gives an account of the morris customs in Derby County in the middle of the 19th century:

The morris dancers who go about from village to village about the twelfth day, have their fool, their maid Marian (here generally a man dressed in a woman’s clothes, and called the fool’s wife), and sometimes the hobby-horse; they are dressed up pin ribbands and tinsel, but the bells are usually discarded. On Plough Monday, the “Plough-bullocks” are still occasionally seen [...] [These] young man yoke themselves to a plough, which they draw about, preceded by a band of music, from house to house, collecting money. They are accompanied by the Fool and Bessy; the fool being dressed in the skin of a calf, with the tail hanging down behind, and Bessy generally a young man in female attire, covered in a profusion of ribbands and other meretricious finery.

While we obviously have to be careful with our impressions and cannot neglect the time difference between Shakespeare’s age and the 18-19th century fool customs, the basic elements: the ongoing wandering between the (un)hospitable noble courts, the merry group of clowns; a fool, a man in woman clothes, the dancing (mock-)fights with swords seem more than familiar. The Hutton-school of historians is right that there is no historical evidence for an obvious continuity and it even might be a mere illusion to see the two different traditions intermingled here, but the parallels are telling: it is very likely that there are at least some of these carnival customs that are actually played with.

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472 Very much like the mummers, “guisers” or “geese-dancers” in King Lear in the chapter before.
Essentially, the carnivalesque traditions from other nations can be compared to the festive world of Illyria as well. Like the Twelfth Night celebrations of the French Abbeys of Misrule, where they elected the King of Fools, staged burlesque ceremonials (as the mock-confession or exorcism of Malvolio in the fourth act) characterized by loud, cacophonous music (hard to bear for anybody “outside” their carnivalesque community) about the evils of alcohol, the battle between sexes and the triumph of folly. According to Bartholomew Sastrow’s account, the twelfth night festivities in the German Empire were also quite similar, with groups of festive fools and with a Fool-king leader. Also in German “carnival plays”, the same carnivalesque topics come up. The short poem of the fool from Der Luneten Mantel shows actually the lessons which Malvolio should have learned:

Who seeks for too much honour he seldom comes to good.
Let each man ponder in toughtful mood.
How to keep the Honour which is his own;
If we stick to our fool’s profession alone.
And touch the mantle never again;
Why then we may well in honour remain.

Mock Battles between Augusts and Whitefaces

In A Midsummer Night’s Dream, as Bristol sharply observed, the clown character, Bottom is ready to play any part of the comic interlude of the Mechanicals, without any regard of the color of the beard, title, sex or even species: “in playing the scene, Bottom mimics tyrant and lover, man and woman, lion and nightingale”. This ability to transgress any borders of the limited identity is the transgressional skill of the clown or fool par excellence, but this does not only mean that the “mobile” character is always a clown but also that in a play any person can be a clown. The clown is the ‘x’ in mathematics, the free argument-place, or the joker in any card game: this is the first lesson. The second is, that—and especially in the tradition of comedy—we can not recognize at the beginning of the play how many clowns there actually are. The kings, queens or princes we see may be masks worn by the jokers of

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the deck (of cards); as in *Twelfth Night*, where the whole deck (the “social hierarchy” of Illyria) consists of them. When Sebastian asks the question in the fourth act: “Are all the people mad?” (4.1.23), the sea captain—as Anne Barton observed—appealed to by Viola for information about the country in which she has so unexpectedly arrived, might just as well have answered to both of the siblings what the Cheshire Cat says to Alice; “They’re all mad here.”⁴⁷⁷ That, of course, does not mean that they are all the same. As it has several times been emphasized, “madness” and “sadness” commonly accompany each other in the play. While the Duke’s love-melancholy and Olivia’s exaggerated mourning were frequently separated and analyzed as different states of the mind, the two go hand-in-hand:

I am as mad as he
If sad and merry madness equal be. (3.4.14-15)

“Sadness” always builds itself up through its confrontation to “madness” and *confrontation* is the key term here. It is not the individual nature of the characters that matters in this play of *clowns* but their confrontations: the action and especially the *interaction* realized in verbal and nonverbal mock-battles and mock-rituals in: this is, what I called carnivalesque *clown-play*.

As introduced in the chapters before, the *clown-play* symbolizes Life’s recurrent triumph over Death, laughter giving birth to life, mockery of the Rule keeping the human world at bay. Furthermore, with this repeating motion of transgression, the *clown* always needs opposition, he must always go up against something. The Eternal Rebel needs the “Supercilious Guardian of order” he can mock and which he can trick. The narrative pattern of the mystery plays shows Death knocking the Fool down to the ground with the latter repeatedly standing up unharmed. In the circus semiotics of Paul Bouissac we read this as the clown-opposition of the August and the Whiteface clown, as noted before. Federico Fellini, who worshipped clowns, modeled his whole world on this opposition. Here is Fellini:

The Whiteface clowns become Mothers, Fathers, the Maestro, the Artist, the Good Guy—really, they do what they are supposed to do. So the August, who would fall victim to the fascination of these perfect roles if they weren’t so rigorously self-satisfied, rebels and sparks an ongoing battle.⁴⁷⁸

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The Whiteface embodies the maintaining of the cultural norms, the consciousness of power, proper behavior, rationality, beautiful voice, elegance and knowledge: he is the Champion of Rule. The August clown means anarchy and chaos, the denial of cultural norms, the absence of power, the impropriety, irrationality, inarticulateness, sloppiness and ignorance, he is actually the Champion of Misrule. To quote Fellini again: “He is the Child, he shits himself; he rebels against perfection, gets drunk, wallows on the ground.”479 Their opposition is always symbolical and can be “loaded” in many ways: the opposition between the knight of Lent and the knight of the Carnival480 is a Whiteface-August opposition, but so is—the entirely different—opposition of the carnival and the caricature of the “official feast” (where of course the latter is the Whiteface).

As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed.481

The Whiteface can wear any uniform and apparel of ideology, he will be attacked by the paint buckets of the Augusts, who deny—but definitely not on the ground of another ideology—all uniforms and symbolic marks of any “social order”. This throwing of paint buckets never becomes “serious”, it always stays a harmless mock-battle of clowns which

479 Idem, p. 172
480 There is a problem with the Whiteface-August clown-play as seen on the marketplace of the Early Modern festivals which is also observed and mentioned by Bristol: “For plebeian culture, the importance of the opposition of Carnival and Lent is precisely the battle, the continual and recurrent strife and reciprocal interchange between two traditional personae. There is, however, a liturgically and spiritually ‘correct’ understanding of the relationship between these two figures, based on clear differentiation of their respective natures and on the necessary and inevitable victory of Lent. In its simplest form, this differentiation is between sinful and foolish absorption in the pleasures of the flesh, as represented by Carnival, and penitential renunciation of those pleasures in favor of the needs of the spirit, as represented by Lent. In this framework, Carnival is a preliminary and subordinate function of the penitential requirements of Shrovetide season immediately preceding Lent itself.” Michael Bristol, Carnival and Theater. Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England. London – New York: Routledge, 1989. p. 73. Plainly, in the popular opposition of the Lenten Whiteface and the Carnival August always the Whiteface should win. And this is certainly true from the point of the Christian Churches because they only can “interpret” the mock-battle as the Platonic (dualist) battle of “spirit” (or the “mind”) and the “body” which always has to be “won” by the superior former. The true carnivalesque mock-battle (as the Whiteface August confrontations show) can be actually won by both, because it works in another concept of time. The Christian “eternal victory of the spirit” is probably not truly comprehended on the marketplace, which celebrates the “eternal return” where no triumph is definitive, at most until the next upcoming feast. The “ending” never is in the focus of the circular notion of time. Only the ever-recurring reconciliation is significant. See also: R. Chris Hassel, Jr, Renaissance Drama and the English Church Year. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979. pp. 6-17.
should be thanked with laughter. Anything else, as “how many” of either the Whitefaces or the Augusts there are in the play, or “what they look like”—as far as we can distinguish them—is irrelevant; only the functioning is important. Therefore, in the following sections I will concentrate on the clown-plays that define the course of events in *Twelfth Night*.

**The First Rejection of Fe(a)st(e)**

In the fifth scene Feste—whose name already refers to feast and feasting, the carnivalesque approach to the world and who also actively seems one of the organizers of the Misrule in Illyria—finds himself deprived of the feastful hospitality in the noble court of Olivia. Feste’s rejection is the first, fairly direct rejection of the carnival by the lentish, seemingly serious Whitefaces of the play. Already many forward references are concentrated here that are closely linked especially to the meeting of the Augusts in the second scene of the third act. The ground issue—effecting the whole play—seems to be the “sad madness”, the stubborn hostility against carnival of a Whitefaced lady, Olivia and her mourning grief. That restrain and limitation seems to cause the nonfulfillment of desire in Illyria before the arrival of the twins. Olivia with her inconsolable grief for her brother lives in the past. Her mourning period symbolizes Lent, which needs to be followed by the unearthly release of the carnival. Her whole household has to become a group of tricksters, fools and buffoons to turn her world upside down. But she, as a Whiteface—as Malvolio—is not entirely loyal to her own claimed feelings of sorrow, as she turns into an “adolescent fan” bewitched by the neat Cesario the first time she sees him. So Olivia herself is a clown, as Feste—through his wisdom of folly—readily clarifies (and at the same time death also becomes mocked here in a carnivalesque way).

*FESTE:* Good madonna, why mourn’st thou?
*OLIVIA:* Good fool, for my brother’s death.
*FESTE:* I think his soul is in hell, madonna.
*OLIVIA:* I know his soul is in heaven, fool.
*FESTE:* The more fool, madonna, to mourn for your brother’s soul being in heaven.
          Take away the fool, gentlemen. (1.5.54-59)

482 If there is anyone who doubts that Shakespeare’s female figures can become clowns she has to check the syntax of Rosalind’s lines in *As You Like It* (3.3.288-326). I would like to thank Matt Hunter for this observation. These lines of course especially show how easy it is for a “transdressed woman” (Rosalind as Ganymede) to acquire this questionable function.
Olivia’s fool(ish)ness is also retrospectively made clear when Feste, just before the entering of Sir Toby, recalls her as a kind of “mother folly”, who tries to “teach folly” to her firstborn heir.

Thou hast spoke for us, madonna, as if thy eldest son should be a fool: whose skull Jove cram with brains, for—here he comes—one of thy kin has a most weak pia mater. (1.5.93-95)

Feste in Twelfth Night is one of the most popular clowns in the history of theatre and literature. Enid Welsford herself starts the description of The Professional Buffoon with him at the beginning of her book483. Through his language, at least at the beginning, again Death is defeated quite literary by the language of the clown, as the medium of carnival. Also—besides the, in his/her gender untraceable Cesario/Viola—he is the one who is able to move between the courthouses of Olivia and the Duke; by separating them, he can connect the two locations. In his own words: “Foolery, sir, does walk around the orb like the sun, it shines everywhere” (3.1.32-33). His transgressing capacities obviously help him to mediate between the households, but also his cleverness is often cited which supplements his folly, as Viola observes: “This fellow is wise enough to play the fool” (3.1.50).

Feste’s cleverness or wisdom—as also the wisdom of Lear’s Fool484—is not a singular quality of an individual, it is not the position of a “self-conscious professional in a world full of amateurs”; or not exactly in our sense of “professionalism”485. The “wisdom of folly”, as the clown’s awareness of the folly of the carnivalized world, is a kind of acting knowledge which itself transforms the world into carnival. It is the “knowing” of his own folly that gives Feste his particular role between all the other fools, who “do not know” about their folly.

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484 He also has a similar entry into the storyline as Lear’s Fool had: they are both “late” and already been waited for. This also can mirror the festive audience in the Early Modern Age, who were eager to see the true king of the festive performance: the clown of fool par excellence.
485 Bristol, it seems to me, does not avoid this trap: “Though the fool nominally understands less than other man and woman, Feste, like all fools, is in a situation of enhanced understanding because he has experience of the ‘other side.’” This reasoning easily entangles itself in the Kott-Willeford dilemma as we have seen not to mention how limited it proves to be (only meaningful in a heavily classified social-mental hierarchy). Modern capitalist “professionality” has nothing to do with “the wisdom folly”. Michael Bristol, Carnival and Theater. Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England. London – New York: Routledge, 1989. p. 141
Wit, and’t be thy will, put me into good fooling! Those wits, that think they have thee, do very oft prove fools, and I that am sure I lack thee may pass for a wise man. For what says Quinapalus? ‘Better a witty fool, than a foolish wit.’ (1.5.26-30)

Feste is not really shrewd, a cunning one⁴⁸⁶ who “knows everything”. He is an August who is much better in knowing how everything that “should be known” is actually worthless because everything is infected with carnivalesque folly. The “wisdom of folly” activates whenever a Whiteface shows itself—with his or her insincere determination of seriousness. So after playing the clown with Olivia, he turns to the other, even more vehement Whiteface, Malvolio (1.5.27-80).

Feste’s seemingly unintelligible comments directly conquer his opponents for folly. When he notes how the hood makes not the monk (cucullus non facit monachum) (1.5.45-46) it actually means: it is not me that is a fool (by wearing motley), but you are (who obviously do not wear one). He can continue and note how he does “wear not motley in his brain”—also obviously aimed at the “fooling” of the Whitefaces—, and takes advantage of his homo sacer status, which is an active function frequently put to test (also by fooling Orsino some scenes later). The game that Feste plays, the fooling of the wise through emphasizing their fool words and acts with the ongoing reference to the fool’s wise wits makes everybody part of the carnival’s great equality. And in this world of equality everyone is a “fool” and a “knave”, full of “sins” but only in its carnivalesque sense, stripped from its ideologically dictated moral meanings.

OLIVIA: Go to, y’re a dry fool: I’ll no more of you; besides, you grow dishonest.
FESTE: Two faults, madonna, that drink and good counsel will amend: for give the dry fool drink, then is the fool not dry; bid the dishonest man mend himself; if he mend, he is no longer dishonest; if he cannot, let the botcher mend him. Anything that’s mended is but patched: virtue that transgresses is but patched with sin, and sin that amends is but patched with virtue. (1.5.33-40)

The patches on the clothes of men seem as the colorful patches of the (Mediterranean) theatrical fools: folly and sin work in a parallel fashion in this reasoning. Like the color of the zebra, which we can not decide to be made from black stripes on the white animal or the white stripes on the black ungulate. The carnival denies to make differentiation between black and white, good or bad, wise and fool, because its “truth” questions limitations. Feste could be a fool sometimes seeming “wise” but he is still a fool, as Malvolio will be, when

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⁴⁸⁶ While many state that he also knows about Viola’s true identity behind the mask of Cesario, I honestly doubt that and see no lines that could satisfyingly prove it.
he—whatever the cause may be—will seem more a fool than any other “Illyrian”. Or even worse, for “folly that he wisely shows is fit; but wise men, folly-fall'n, quite taint their wit.” (3.1.57-58)

Malvolio is “fooled” masterfully by Feste: “Sir Toby will be sworn that I am no fox, but he will not pass his word for two pence that you are no fool.” (1.5.64-65) And Malvolio’s answer—if we still hold that contemporary comments are the features of clowns—immediately justifies this by mentioning a well-known fool in Early Modern England, Stone (1.5.68-69). Still, there is more to this short anecdote: at the beginning of their mock-war Malvolio (not surprisingly a Whiteface) accuses Feste here of “dry whitefaceness”

I marvel your ladyship takes delight in such a barren rascal. I saw him put down the other day with an ordinary fool that has no more brain than a stone. Look you now, he’s out of his guard already. Unless you laugh and minister occasion to him, he is gagged. I protest I take these wise men that crow so at these set kind of fools no better than the fools’ zanies. (1.5.67-72)

Malvolio speaks about an actual clown-play here, where—as it will happen to him—Feste (an obvious August) is being ridiculed by an August exceeding him even as “an ordinary fool”. This shows how in Illyria—as in Bakhtin’s carnival—everyone is an August to somebody and also a Whiteface to somebody else.

Eventually, Feste’s fool leadership becomes repeatedly questioned. Sometimes, and especially in the next big mock-battle, the greatest encounter of a Lenten Whiteface and the Augusts of carnival, he seems more like an observer. He, of course, joins the plot against Malvolio but actually does not control the harsh clown-play anymore. The “zanies”, just mentioned by the steward, represent another type of subdivision between the clowns, frequently also a Whiteface-August division itself.

The contradictory sides of the clown image often separate and incarnate themselves into two distinct but complementary characters. They belong essentially together, and where there is one, there is also the other. In the popular Roman comedy we find the two “Zanni,” Arlechino and Brighella. Arlechino is lanky and mobile, quick in thinking and action, full of cunning and scheming, not very brave, but resourceful in all dangerous moments; he definitely has no feeling for honor or dignity; usually he gets away without punishment. In the language of the psychologist he is leptosome or ectomorph. His counterpart is the fat and ugly Brighella, slow, dull, and voluptuous, an enormous eater, obscene in gesture and word, an endomorph, who always gets a terrific beating — but he can stand it. Both “Zanni” are servants, but

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487 See also Donno’s annotation to the lines.
this does not really define them because their service is most incidental and not at all reliable. It just gives them plenty of opportunity for performing their irresponsible pranks. 488

In his lines here the sharp-tongued Malvolio probably never meant to compare his mistress to Feste but the other two “noblemen” who really enjoy Feste’s humour and looks and behave exactly as the “clown-servants” should, as it is pointed out by Zucker above: the cowardly Sir Andrews and the glutton Sir Toby Belch. They are the “zani” Malvolio probably talks about. At the same time, however, Sir Toby Belch, the gull, the mischievous servant, also looks like the knight of carnival on the painting of Brueghel in opposition with the sickly thin and haggard Malvolio, as this is also emphasized in Carnival and Theater 489. Their first clash happens in the following act.

An Attempt to Mute the Carnival

This is the scene with the most obvious carnivalesque mock-combat, where the Augusts of the carnival become confronted by the most serious Whiteface of the play: Malvolio. The fights between the company of Sir Toby Belch and Malvolio are about the eternal elements of carnival: the evils of alcohol, the battle between sexes, and the triumph of folly.

SIR TOBY: Approach, Sir Andrew. Not to be abed after midnight is to be up betimes, and diluculo surgere, thou know’s—
SIR ANDREW: Nay, by my troth, I know not; but I know to be up late is to be up late.
SIR TOBY: A false conclusion: I hate it as an unfilled can. To be up after midnight and to go to bed then is early; so that to go to bed after midnight is to go to bed betimes.
(2.3.1-7)

The suspension of the tautologies: “late is late” and “early is early” sets Misrule on the throne, and also directly carnivalizes time. Because, while the tautology symbolically means that death (as night) is death and life (as day) is life, this not only shows their sequentiality but also blurs their boundaries. And in this tarnishing, where—while actually sleeping is rejected—late night becomes early morning, daytime, the time of being awake, Life becomes victorious with Death becoming only a small detail of the former. That is how carnivalesque waking symbolically defeats Death and also goes up against the early getting

ups of the ordinary working days. In this carnivalesque space-time, there are three “knaves” feasting with a fourth one, Maria(n). Feste’s lines instantly define them as a group of fools: “How now, my hearts? Did you never see the picture of ‘We Three’?” (2.3.14-15) and this carnivalization actually shows beautifully how carnivalesque folly spreads anyway. The same joke repeated by the famous oil painting subscribed as We Three Loggerheads, which also was made in Shakespeare’s time.

Maria’s future groom, but also the socially unclassifiable Sir Toby Belch is a good-tempered, paunchy and boozy satyr of the Saturnalian tradition. He, at times, seems to be the figure of Carnival himself, the fat man, pot-bellied, ruddy, cheerful, often hung about with eatables (sausages, fowl, rabbits), seated on a barrel, or accompanied (as at Venice in 1572) by a cauldron of macaroni. His role is undoubtedly very important, Terence Hawkes for example even considers him as the real Lord of Misrule in the play. His “folly” functions as carnivalesque folly as well, but has a materialization of a very distinguishable kind which often seems to be forgotten (and that indeed puzzles interpretation also). As it stands, Sir Toby’s most carnivalesque feature is how he is permanently and heavily drunk.

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490 In Twelfth Night (2.3.57-60) we see how they see themselves as knaves: carnivalesque fools or clowns, or even more: Augusts.

491 In the annotation of the New Shakespeare Arthur Quiller-Couts and John Dover Wilson wrote (according to Elizabeth Story Donno) that the lines mean a “sign-board representing two fools or two asses and inscribed ‘We three’, the Spectator making the third.” This evocation always reminds how the carnival only has “participants” instead of “actors” and “audience” which should also have its impact on Shakespeare’s spectators.


OLIVIA: What’s a drunken man like, fool?
FESTE: Like a drowned man, a fool, and a madman: one draught above heat makes him a fool, the second mads him, and a third drowns him.
OLIVIA: Go thou and seek the crowner, and let him sit o’my coz. For he’s in the third degree of drink, he’s drowned: go look after him.
FESTE: He is but mad yet, madonna, and the fool shall look to the madman. (1.5.107-114)

The gang of carnivalesque mischiefs is easy to extend. Sir Andrew is the “foolish knight”
494, who (after Feste) is directly referred to as a carnival clown when Fabian reports his arrival as “more Matter” coming “for a May morning” (3.4.120). He is not only called a carnival fool, but a “beef-witted” “natural” (1.3.24). He, as Feste (and Viola) also can play music495 being a laughingstock as a “carpet knight” who probably got his knighthood for domestic matters and not for military merits, and, what is more, he probably also paid for it.
Nashe writes496 about these “carpet knights”: how they were “the basest cowards under heaven, covering an apes (sic!) hart with a lion’s case, and making false alarums when they mean nothing but a May-game” and this is a remarkable characterization of Sir Andrew Aguecheek. His main clownesque attribute is his closely infinite cowardice. His and Sir Toby’s main attributes are well known in Illyria:

MARIA: [...] besides that he’s a fool, he’s a great quarreler; and but that he hath the gift of a coward to allay the gust he hath in quarreling, ‘tis thought among the prudent he would quickly have the gift of a grave.
SIR TOBY: By this hand, they are scoundrels and substractors that say so of him. Who are they?
MARIA: They that add, moreover, he’s drunk nightly in your company.
SIR TOBY: With drinking healths to my niece! I’ll drink to her as long as there is a passage in my throat and drink in Illyria; he’s a coward and a coistrel that will not drink to my niece till his brains turn o’th’toe like a parish top. What, wench! Castiliano vulgo: for here comes Sir Andrew Agueface. (1.3.24-35)

This is the triumvirate that disturbs Rule and the peaceful order of the night, the Rule that is protected by a rigid Whiteface, Malvolio, whose rigorous puritan character, often mentioned in the play by Maria, is well emphasized by criticism, when (s)he mentions how “Marry sir, sometimes he is kind of a Puritan” (2.3.119) and that “The devil a puritan that he is, or anything constantly, but a time-pleaser, an affectioned ass” (2.3.124-125). Malvolio’s puritan attitude was truly one of the extreme sides in early modern England, turning against

494 He also acknowledges himself as such: Twelfth Night (2.5.63-67)
495 “He plays o’th’viol-the-gamboys” Twelfth Night (1.3.21). Of course Sir Toby also states here that he speaks three different languages which he not really clarifies.
496 See the annotation for Twelfth Night (3.4.200-201).
the Catholic attitude as far as popular festivities were concerned. This Catholic attitude towards carnivalesque celebrations of ancient origin became dominantly permissive over the centuries. In Shakespeare’s age, puritans started to quarrel against those traditions and made the “holiday liberty” a widely discussed political issue. Reading this debate into the narrative of the play became axiomatic. Malvolio’s character, as a rigid ill-favored puritan is not even particularly unique. His attack on the carnivalesque Augusts is very similar to the one we could read in the first act of King Lear:

GONERIL: Not only, sir, this, your all-licensed Fool,
But other of your insolent retinue
Do hourly carp and quarrel, breaking forth
In rank and not-to-be-endured riots.

GONERIL: Here do you keep a hundred knights and squires,
Men so disordered, so debauched and bold
That this our court, infected with their manners,
Shows like a riotous inn; epicurism and lust
Make it more like a tavern or a brothel
Than a graced palace.

There is nothing new in referring to Philipp Stubbes and his *Anatomie of Abuses*, which was issued again and again from 1583 to 1595. The text was one of the most offensive attacks against all non-textual forms of the carnival: Lord of Misrule-traditions and its impacts on popular theatre. It is, meanwhile, also the best proof of how the customs were still an “actual” question. Stubbes’s text clearly draws attention to how the carnival still was a “living problem”, at least from the puritan point of view.

[In] my opinion, they are to no ende, except it be to draw Whores, Theeues, and Verlettes together, to maintaine Whoredome, bawdry, glutony, drunkennes, theft, murther, swearing and all kinde of mischiefe and abhominacion. For, these be the


498 *King Lear* (1.4.181-184) and (1.4.222-227)


500 There is a good summary on the puritan impact on Early Modern Britain’s festive life in François Laroque’s *Shakespeare’s Festive World. Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage*. Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 7
endes whereto these feastes, and Wakesses doe tend, as far as euer I could leame, & the best fruits that they bring foorth.\footnote{A Critical Edition of Philip Stubbes’s Anatomie of Abuses. (edited by Margaret Jane Kidnie) University of Birmingham Research Archive: e-theses repository, 1996. p. 250}

Salvation, in the protestant (and especially the Calvinist) manner becomes “a present” after a life spent entirely with “work”, and we can never be definitively sure in this “present” (regardless of how much we would “spend” on it). That is how—as Turner argues—rituality becomes replaced\footnote{Victor Turner, From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play. New York: PAJ Publications, 1982. pp. 37-38}:

In a sense, what was in cultural history previously the social “work of the Gods,” the calendrical, liturgical round, or, rather, its penances and ordeals, not its festive rewards, became “internalized” as the systematic, non-ludic “work” of the individual’s conscience.\footnote{Ibid. And with the attack on ritualism, not only religious worship is attacked but it also tries to reduce “ceremonial” (“secular” ritual) in other fields, like drama, which they stigmatized as mummery.}

Due to its specific historical opportunity in Britain thus Protestantism initiates an age of heavy legislation against carnivalesque events. And that is the position Malvolio also seems to take:

MALVOLIO: My masters, are you mad? Or what are you? Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night? Do ye make an alehouse of my lady’s house, that ye squeak out your coziers’ catches without any mitigation or remorse of voice? Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time in you? (2.3.75-79)

Sir Toby’s answer gets around Malvolio’s rhetorical questions but actually also answers them:

SIR TOBY: We did keep time, sir, in our catches. Sneck up! (2.3.80)

We “did keep time”, because it is carnival time. Malvolio’s repost is about revoking hospitality, the gesture that caused Lear to go mad:

MALVOLIO: Sir Toby, I must be round with you. My lady bade me tell you, that, though she harbors you as her kinsman, she’s nothing allied to your disorders. If you can separate yourself and your misdemeanors, you are welcome to the house; if not, and it would please you to take leave of her, she is very willing to bid you farewell. (2.3.81-85)
There is but a mitigating circumstance: it is not Malvolio who owns this potential “hard house” that revokes carnivalesque hospitality, but another Whiteface, “his lady”, Olivia. Malvolio, more than a faithful puritan, is an unpleasently manneristic hypocrite. As we see from his later turn to the “foolish side” of Illyria’s clown-community, he could probably easily sit among the drinkers and carouse together with them if that was what his lady requested. His puritanism, especially retrospectively, seems unreal, only the death-mask of his hypocrisy, a camouflage to his narcissism and the ground of his later betrayal of himself. He is not real ideology, but the caricature of ideology (or Rule), as seen from the viewpoint of the carnival: spurious, untruthful, intriguing, control-freak and completely limited. While acknowledging the importance of the debate behind Maria’s phrases about him being a puritan, I doubt the offensive religio-political message being the dominant message of Twelfth Night’s clown opposition. Malvolio, as a sheer hypocrite is not a genuine argument in a religious discussion. Via filtering Olivia’s Lenten attitude through himself, he sometimes seems more even Lenten than puritan. Still, as a fake representative of a strict principle, he makes a perfect Whiteface clown.

The clown-play in the scene has also a second round when the contemplating Malvolio is subject to aggressive verbal violence in the garden; he is not hurt, but “fooled black and blue” (2.5.8-9) with the words of his foes.

The Deaf Orsino

After so much “boldness” we can safely categorize Duke Orsino as a “sad clown” which is another name for the Whiteface in circus tradition. While Feste (in the far-fetched development-history of “Shakespeare’s wise fool”) was many times compared to Jaques in As You Like It, Malvolio was also considered to be similar to “the Melancholy man” (because of his ambivalent exit at the end of the play). Still, it is actually Orsino who may really be said to display similar features to Jaques. His melancholic begging for the clown’s songs in the fourth scene of the second act seems accurately identical with Jaques supplication of the same.

JAQUES: More, more, I prithee more.

504 Not as—after Lear—any further evidence might been needed that a duke can turn clown in the Early Modern popular theatre, but a close relative of him is found in Robert Greene’s Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay by the name of Ralph Simnel from around 1589.
AMIENS: It will make you melancholy, Monsieur Jaques.
JAQUES: I thank it. More, I prithee, more: I can suck melancholy out of a song as a weasel sucks eggs. More, I prithee more.
AMIENS: My voice is ragged: I know I cannot please you.
JAQUES: I do not desire you to please me, I do desire you to sing. Come, more, another stanza – Call you ’em ’stanzos’? So this melancholic Whiteface, whose most important flaw is self-pity which does not consider others, becomes the Whiteface who is played with by two Augusts soon after the attempt to mute the carnival. His melancholy is driven by a selfish form of voluntary autism that does not allow him to pay attention to his surroundings. He asks for a song he just heard and he draws several positive impressions from it.

O fellow, come, the song we had last night.
Mark it, Cesario, it is old and plain;
The spinsters and the knitters in the sun,
And the free maids that weave their thread with bones,
Do use to chant it; it is silly sooth,
And dallies with the innocence of love
Like the old age. (2.4.40-46)

The song is imbued with thy idyllic atmosphere of young, free maidens who supposedly sing this song about the “innocence of love” in the sunshine. He seems to remember something about the song as he composes the phrases: “bones” and “old age” also in his description but those words are only meant in another, much more pleasing sense as the song goes along. Orsino’s demand and the supply of Feste are in obvious contrast. Feste’s song that literary “reeks” of death and decay is more the mockery of Orsino’s melancholy than anything about the “innocence of love”. At most an intentionally chosen, unachievable love that the duke “decided” to feel: these can not be innocent.

Come away, come away, death,
And in sad cypress let me be laid.
Fie away, fie away, breath,
I am slain by a fair cruel maid;
My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,
O, prepare it.
My part of death no one so true
Did share it.
Not a flower, not a flower sweet,
On my black coffin let there be strown;
Not a friend, not a friend greet
My poor corpse, where my bones shall be thrown:

505 As You Like It (2.5.9-15)
A thousand thousand sighs to save,  
Lay me, O where  
Sad true lover never find my grave,  
To weep there. (2.4.49-64)

But why does a clown, the spirit of vitality, sing about death? There were some critical thoughts on how the song works as a *memento mori*, especially with Feste’s lines thereafter, mentioning how “pleasure will be payed, one time or another” (2.4.40-46). But after seeing Orsino’s “melancholic pleasure”, could death really work here as a payment? The Duke already lives in death, he embraces it as his lover as we have seen in his enthusiasm for the song and his fondness of a lady in black from head to toe. Feste’s comment here is not a “memento mori” but the opposite: the promise of the carnivalesque solution where “sadness” taken as pleasure changes for “happiness”, a payment to life.

Directly hereafter the Whiteface Duke is also made a fool by Feste, the August, although not so directly as Olivia was made a fool before. This can still be deduced from his lines:

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Now, the melancholy god protect thee; and the  
tailor make thy doublet of changeable taffeta, for  
thy mind is a very opal. I would have men of such  
constancy put to sea, that their business might be  
every thing and their intent every where; for that’s  
it that always makes a good voyage of nothing. Farewell. (2.4.70-74)
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Both the changeable *taffeta* and the color shifting *opal* signs Orsino’s moodiness and emotional unpredictability. To send the changeable fickle (and also: *nothing*) to the sea recalls the expulsion of the carnivalesque pharmakós. The *Ship of Fools* is set to sail into the Unknown, into Death, where it purifies all the folly sent with it and guarantees the rejuvenation of the community. The gemstone, *opal* itself may refer to the Saturnalia, where Ops, wife of Saturn was the festive goddess of fertility.

After Feste’s exit, Viola/Cesario is left with the Whiteface duke. [S]he, when going into [her/his] ambiguous talking [about himself/herself] goes into the fairly complex soliloquy that is also taken entirely for the expression of [her/his] puzzled gender identity, a self-identification.

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A blank, my lord. She never told her love,  
But let concealment, like a worm I’th’bud  
Feed on her damask cheek. She pined in thought,  
And with a green and yellow melancholy  
She sat like Patience on a monument,
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Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?
We men may say more, swear more, but indeed
Our shows are more than will: for still we prove
Much in our vows, but little in our love. (2.4.106-114)

While the importance of these lines related to gender identity can hardly be contested, it must be emphasized that these words occur in a drama and not in a philosophical piece of work, so the expressions should be considered as being bound to the actual plot of the play. Viola/Cesario is not the one meditating as Patience because she has a definite goal she wishes to reach. Women, unlike men may “say” less about love but that does not mean that their love is worth less than the love of men. Actually, she in this very minute is talking about love, of course in the puzzling “mad ambivalence” of a clown. In my reading, the soliloquy is meant to dismantle the importation of the differences between men and women and describes man and woman in love at one and the same time:

She pined in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sat like Patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief.

These lines are not only describing Viola but also, for example, the duke, who is sitting on his throne of melancholy and who is smiling at his grief. Not to mention Olivia, the lady dressed in black, jealously guarding the grief of her own. This is the “common ground” that Viola describes, where she can argue from about the question of “speaking and not speaking”, wherefrom men (like Orsino) and woman (Viola’s father’s daughter) are comparable, for the sake of the discussion. That’s how the initial difference: speaking about his or her love or not speaking about it gradually diminishes.

Viola, joining the group of Whitefaces in this argument, also means her words in the opposite sense, thereby joining Cesario in his carnivalesque folly. “Green and yellow melancholy” is thoroughly researched and found to be “the pallor color of the skin” presumably typical of melancholic lovers. But this could be just a simple reference to the fool’s costume. So a new meaning can be added to Viola’s words: we can take it as a hint at the carnivalesque atmosphere of the play. Melancholy and sadness cannot be taken “seriously”, because this is the “melancholy of a fool”: an exaggerated act that is supposed to be mocked at, made fun of. In fact, Viola’s lines can be taken as a caricature of Orsino’s

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506 Based on Ferrand’s Erotomania from 1623, see Donno’s annotation here.
melancholy and Olivia’s sadness, or even her own dejection. However, there are Augusts in the play as well.

**Augusts among Themselves**

Viola and Feste have a lot in common, first of all they are both musical clowns at least according to Viola’s statement about herself that she “can sing, and speak in many sorts of music” (1.2.57-58). When they enter the stage, Feste is instructed to enter while playing on “pipe and tabor”. These musical instruments, as this is widely known, were traditional stage properties of the clowns. The famous clown, Richard Tarlton was also pictured with these assets in a print from around the middle of the 17th century.

![Image of Richard Tarlton](image.jpg)

Armin, there should be no question, could easily play that clown-part while entering the stage. But not only the one holding on to the pipe and the tabor needs to be a clown when these instruments are played on. As we can see, the follower of Tarlton, the clown from Shakespeare’s company before Armin’s supposed arrival also has a picture that critics frequently display.
This picture shows William Kemp not as the one playing the pipe and the tabor but the one “accompanied” by the music, the one entering the stage while dancing to the sound of the pipe and the tabor. 507 And the Wiles-argument (on the differences between the “types” of Armin’s and Kemp’s clowns) does not cast any doubts here because they both were clearly identified as “clowns”. The one dancing the jig is also a clown. Viola/Cesario can easily enter the play while dancing to Feste’s music, because she herself is a clown for sure, and even an August one, who, for example, destroys the “fourth wall” of the stage multiple times by addressing the audience directly (e.g. 1.4.40-41) and fools around in a “clownesque” way with the Whitefaces of the play508.

Augusts between themselves seem to understand each other more easily, as we may also see this, for example, at the meeting of Maria and Feste in the fifth act of the first scene.

VIOLA: Art thou a churchman?
FESTE: No such matter, sir. I do live by the church; for I do live at my house, and my house doth stand by the church.
VIOLA: So thou mayst say the king lies by a beggar if a beggar dwell near him; or the church stands by thy tabor if thy tabor stand by the church.
FESTE: You have said, sir. To see this age! A sentence is but a cheveril glove to a good wit – how quickly the wrong side may be turned outward! (3.1.3-11)

Still, they need a clown-play here as well. By pointing to the flicking rotation of the Wheel of Fortune they keep swapping the roles of Whitefaces and Augusts between one another and make fun of everybody in the group. Everyone lives under the Misrule of the

507 The picture is from the frontispiece of Kemp’s book, Nine Days Wonder, from 1600.
508 In her “riddling battles” with Orsino as we have seen and also (2.4.116-118); with Olivia at (1.5.232-234), (3.1.123-126) and (3.1.142-145) or riddling together with the other Augusts e.g. from (5.1.130), where, as a punchline, Sebastian enters at the end.
carnival. The Misrule is present in the violations of social transgressions and in the sexual innuendos behind the literal meaning but they also keep touching one another’s “nothingness” as homo sacers (3.1.22-25). They soon realize how they actually play almost the same August roles next to their Whiteface ones (Olivia and Orsino) as Feste himself suggests: “I would be sorry, sir, but the fool should be as oft with your master as with my mistress: I think I saw your wisdom there.” (3.1.33-35) Viola’s actual love for Orsino does not make a difference here, as it is also argued about by Feste, when he also calls husbands (probably loving their wives) “the fools” of their wives some lines earlier. The harmless play between the two Augusts goes on until Sir Toby and Sir Andrew replace Feste for a short time, before the arrival of Olivia. Their understanding is mutual: Cesario is the only one with whom Sir Andrew can instantly speak French (a skill until this point thought to be non-existent) (3.1.61-62). And it goes on.

SIR TOBY: Will you encounter the house? My niece is desirous you should enter, if your trade be to her.
VIOLA: I am bound to your niece, sir; I mean, she is the list of my voyage.
SIR TOBY: Taste your legs, sir; put them to motion.
VIOLA: My legs do better understand me, sir, than I understand what you mean by bidding me taste my legs.
SIR TOBY: I mean, to go, sir, to enter.
VIOLA: I will answer you with gait and entrance [...] (3.1.64-71)

While it seems that Sir Toby and Viola do not understand each other perfectly well, they both actually speak in the same gibberish clownesque manner, a mannerist kind that seems to mock the courtier language of Malvolio. But Malvolio’s great derisions still have to come.

Malvolio, the Clown

Malvolio’s mocking is a kind of “community task” for the Augusts in the play. However, he must wait a little longer now. While Sir Toby and Sir Andrew have several times been mentioned, Maria’s figure has not been paid attention, although she is one of the most mischievous clowns in Twelfth Night. While female fools are not very common, this does not necessarily mean that there were not any. Jeanne, the queen of the French king Charles I had a woman fool, Artaude du Puy, who lived in the 14th century. Madame d’Or, a dwarf became fairly famous in service of Philip the Burgundy. She was introduced to Charles the Boldes bride on the day of their wedding in the 15th century. Also Margaret of York had a
female dwarf in her court under the name of Madame du Beaugrant.\textsuperscript{509} Other female fools, as the fool of Anna Bloeyn or Jane, the fool of Queen Mary can also be documented.\textsuperscript{510} The fact that many of these known woman fools were also short, even dwarfish may make us wonder about the ways in which Maria is addressed: she is a “fair shrew” (1.3.38), a “canary” (1.3.67-70)\textsuperscript{511}, a “piece of Eve’s flesh” (1.5.23), a “little villain” (2.5.11) and, some time later, a “wren” (3.2.52). I think it is safe to say that calling her a “giant” by Viola/Cesario (1.5.168) might be more mockery than the stating of the facts.

While there is not much of a controversy about her bodily dimensions, there is a lot of dispute about her social status which is hard to guess. Olivia calls her “gentlewoman” (1.5.135-136) so many consider her more a guest of Olivia’s court than a servant in her service. When Viola arrives for the first time, she can not even guess which of them the mistress of the house could be. However, all the other lines Olivia addresses to Maria are orders and commands; Maria is bossed around like Malvolio, or even more so. Toby introduces her as the chambermaid to Olivia (1.3.42) which many consider to be a mockery because he can marry her as a nobleman without any further ado at the end of the play. But after all it is precisely Sir Toby whose—and to whom—social status is not really significant. \textit{Twelfth Night}, as a carnivalesque play is nowhere close into the dilemmas of social transgressions as modern scholars tend to believe, because these transgressions are “normal” in “Misrule”. The only “abnormality” in Misrule is to seal these borders, which happens in the case of Malvolio in his great “private” scene.

Maria may be taken as pranking-mocking Vice, a female shaper of events. She also recalls the skills of court fools and jesters, who forged provocative letters that were guaranteed to create a series of comical misunderstandings, as this was one of their favorite forms of practical joking. Enid Welsford mentions many examples already from the 15th century, like Il Matello\textsuperscript{512} or Nanino\textsuperscript{513} in Italy, who caused many “harm” with this weapon of rough mockery. Sometimes actual wars were fought by it, as in the case of Brusquet and Marshal Strozzi\textsuperscript{514} in France not long before Shakespeare. The history of Britain was also full of fool

\textsuperscript{510} Idem, pp. 48, 50
\textsuperscript{511} In a double meaning also meant as a kind of wine.
\textsuperscript{512} Enid Welsford, \textit{The Fool. His Social and Literary History}. Gloucester, MA: Faber and Faber, 1935. p. 132
\textsuperscript{513} Idem, pp. 136-137
\textsuperscript{514} Idem, pp. 150-151
letters, like in the case of the tracts of Martin Marprelate. Just in Shakespeare’s time, Mathurine, the female jester in the court of the French kings “creates” an entire “genre” of her own, through the mathurinade, a burlesque mode of writing letters. And most of the mathurinades are not even written by her (only in her pseudonym). Maria’s prank was thus a widely “accepted” form of the fool’s trickery and Malvolio has directly walked into her trap when he puts the “yellow stockings” on.

What happens in the fourth scene of the third act is perfectly described by Barber, who notes how the “butts in the festive plays” consistently exhibit their unnaturalness—at least from the point of festivity—by being killjoys. They are frequently too preoccupied with persive satisfactions like pride or greed to “join the dance” and the carnivalesque reality of the world. The perfect example is Malvolio, who is a “Killjoy”, a “Wet Blanket”. As a Whiteface—in Fellini’s terms—he becomes a bogeyman, who embodies responsibility, or—in Freudian vocabulary—repression. After all, his name means, literally, “ill will”. He is a hypocrite and a poseur with a face used to sour mimics and probably very ugly when he tries to change that for something like a smile. Exposing him actually means a lot more than simple mockery, because his so-called “puritanism” actually is the symbol of the Whitefaces Lenten attitude excessively hostile to the carnivalesque aspects of life. His “playing of puritanism”, as Allison P. Hobgood points out, is more important than his “true puritanism”, because the feeling of “shame” can only have its very complex impact on him in this scene, after he feels that he lost (in fact, wittingly) his controlled “puritan acting” and “fell out of his role”. Malvolio as a Whiteface “acts out” society, mimics “the official” or Rule and necessarily “mimics” an actual ideology of this Rule until this scene. The August’s aim is always to unravel—through his trickery—that the Whiteface is also a clown, even if he hides behind the mask of ideology; that—in its carnivalesque sense—there is no Rule or ideology

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515 *Idem*, pp. 153-154
518 *Idem*, p. 6. „In this scene, the actor who plays the steward, paradoxically, acts Malvolio not performing. In this moment of prolonged daydreaming, Malvolio “performs” his innermost passions, and yet, in this fantastic rehearsal, the steward is anything but theatrical. Instead, Malvolio’s puritanical guard comes down, betraying the fact that he is not what—or who—he seems to be in act one.”
to begin with, that the world is simply “not serious”. That is why Malvolio becomes “fooled here” into being a “fool”.

Empson mentions, how the word “fool” actually changes its “strength”, particularly in Shakespeare’s age, based on an entry in N.E.D., exactly because of the impact of puritanism. He observes that the word has a much stronger sense in modern English than it had at any earlier period, how it got an implication of insulting contempt which does not in the same degree belong to any of its earlier synonyms, or to the derivative foolish\textsuperscript{519}.

The derogatory sense of the word, when stated in an argument, not only mirrors the ritual expulsion of a \textit{homo sacer} but indicates a historical opposition to the perception of the world as carnival. If a puritan calls somebody “a fool”, the whole notion of the carnivalesque (“festive”, “popular”, or “Catholico-pagan”) is belittled throughout this one offensive term. The \textit{fools and clowns par excellence} are then addressed in a non-harmless way. So getting a “puritan” (even a dishonest one) to make a “fool” of himself is the best done through convincing him to dress literary into the clothes of a \textit{fool} (that is, a \textit{clown par excellence}). This is the basis of the extraordinary humour of the bodily lower stratum here.

Malvolio’s cross-gartered yellow stockings have never been—quite oddly—seriously considered as accessories of a Fool-figure. The stockings are nowadays viewed in a psychoanalytic way, as signs of Malvolio’s impotence or feminity, any kind of lack in his masculinity\textsuperscript{520}. To see this as a derogative gender inversion is actually conflicting even the possibility of a carnivalesque interpretation. Because “the gender war” is a pure war of ideologies, a serious war fought by heroes of social interests. Malvolio’s fooling in Twelfth Night here is not act of a “serious” fight, not the satirical mocking of one or the other sex, but carnivalesque clownery, which entirely deprives the clown (Malvolio) of any sexual characteristics. The clown, as androgyn, is not sexual at all because he/she is totally outside of the official world of genders, without any interest to alter its formal and informal

hierarchies. The yellow stockings have probably much more to do with the carnivalesque tradition, without any direct sexual-political meaning, probably having a “meta-sexual” meaning at most.\footnote{Enid Welsford discusses a popular \textit{pois pilés} from France with the name: \textit{Le Jeu du Prince Des Sots, et Mère-Sotte}. This carnivalesque play was performed at Shrove Tuesday in 1512. The \textit{Mère-Sotte}, a leading figure in a fool society, frequently cloathed herself as a woman (a traditional feature of \textit{Mère-Sottes}). Here he also tried to impersonate “the Catholic Church”, which he was clearly mocking the Pope with. But at the end of the play she/he becomes busted exactly when the participants of the play literally “looked her/him under her/his skirt”. The well-known fool-stockings became then revealed. \textit{The Fool: His Social and Literary History}. Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1966. pp. 225-226}

The question of how a fool-, Fool- or clown-costume, a “motley” looked like is addressed in Douce’s \textit{Illustrations of Shakespeare} in 1807 and this is thoroughly reevaluated by Hotson in \textit{Shakespeare’s Motley} in 1952. Hotson’s basic argument is to narrow down the motley used by idiot fools (“natural” innocents) and allowed fools (or “licensed fools”, artificial “professionals”) together with the so-called “petticoat”, a sackcloth kind of dress with greenish-yellowish colors that goes down to the ankles of its wearer. He however—and not surprisingly—fails to do the corresponding categorization of fools that would be required for the job, so—as his critics, and also he himself in his Appendix concluded—the work was only “half-done”\footnote{Wiles also tries to fix his faults but—as discussed—he also missed the carnivalesque fuzziness of \textit{clown} figures and looses its grip on the subject while trying to get (through categorization) a hold on it. David Wiles, \textit{Shakespeare’s clown. Actor and text in the Elizabethan playhouse}. Cambridge University Press, 2005. pp. 182-191}. Still, many of his examples are useful for the investigation of Malvolio’s absurd clothing in the fourth scene of the third act. For example, we see how the fool can have “a long motley coat \textit{guarded with yellow}” in the Prologue of \textit{Henry VIII}. Jack Oates’s “motley [he is] wearing, [is] yellow or else greene”, as we can read in Armin’s \textit{Foole upon Foole}. The fabric of the “petticoat” jacket Hotson speaks about is also used for pants and breeches: “the household book of Lord North tells us that on April Fools’ Day, 1577, this peer made a seasonable purchase for his ‘Fool lackey’ of five and a half yards ‘of motley \textit{for hose and cote}’”\footnote{Leslie Hotson’s \textit{Shakespeare’s Motley}. New York: Oxford University Press, 1952. pp. 10-11}. In 1589 a pamphlet in the letter-warfare of Martin Marprelate suggested that Marprelate’s friends should “mourn for him in gownes and whoods of bright yellow”, like the fools they were\footnote{\textit{Idem}, p. 40}. Barnabe Rich and his \textit{Honestie of this Age} from 1614 is cited on the very same page: “follies shoulde e ever best suited in a \textit{yellow} Coate”, and also Stubbes himself in \textit{Anatomie of Abuses}, when he speaks about the fool “with his liveries of green,
yellow, or some other light wanton colour”\(^{525}\). Francis Douce also evokes an epigram from 1639 that speaks about the “foole’s yellow”. Thus the color yellow can safely be paired with “folly” in Shakespeare’s time.

But Hotson concentrates only on the “petticoat”, so the cross gartered stockings might be still symbolizing something else. Will Sommer, the great fool made his debut on Mary I coronation in a “gowne of blue satten, the ground yellow stripping with a slight gold, a jerkin furred, with sleeves of same, furred with conie.”\(^{526}\) Janet Arnold’s Queen Elizabeth’s Wardrobe found sources on Jack Grene, the Queen’s (Elizabeth I) fool, to whom “decorated stockings” were ordered in 1565\(^{527}\). Malvolio’s possible relationship to John Marston’s Malevole in Malcontent (written probably a year later than Twelfth Night) has already been emphasized several times. This figure, a mixture of a satiric courtier and a jester also uses “guarded” fool costumes\(^{528}\). In 1616 the play of Ben Jonson, The Masque of Christmas was introduced, which starts with the carnivalesque clown-figure of Christmas\(^{529}\). The first stage directions are the following:

Enter Christmas, with two or three of the Guard.
He is attir’d in round Hose, long Stockings, a close Doublet, a high crownd Hat with a Broach, a long thin beard, a Truncheon, little Ruffes, white Shoes, his Scarffes, and Garters tyed crosse, and his Drum beaten before him.\(^{530}\)

There are many forms the chaotic motley of the clowns can take up, but the character of this particular “Misrule clothing” certainly characterizes Malvolio’s dress in the scene. And we see this also in the work of Stubbes, a dedicated enemy of the carnival, a puritan scholar, who could find Malvolio’s sudden turn into this detrimental form of being particularly offensive. But this is politics: the subject of resentment for politicians and idealists is

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\(^{529}\) I already mentioned Chambers’s results about—for example—the figure of Christmas in the revelries being an identical Lord of Misrule type clown figure (Old Father Christmas) at the “Social-functional” fool categories.

frequently the subject of fun for the “people enjoying a show”. An epigram from 1600 nicely shows how “serious” the distinction of the fool’s motley might be.

When Tarlton clown’d it in a pleasant vaine
With conceites did good opinions gaine
Upon the stage, his merry humours shop.
Clowns knew the Clowne, by his great clownish slop.
But now th’are gull’d, for present fashion sayes,
Dicke Tarltons part, Gentlemens breeches plaies:
In every streete where any Gallant goes,
The swagg’ring Sloppe, is Tarltons clownish hose.531

As always, clown costume mainly depends on actual fashion: everything “too trendy” or “too old-fashioned”, anything “not matching” can be used as a good clown dress. As Bristol also mentions, “it is evident that festivity is the intensification and the fulfillment of everyday life and material culture”.532 There is no “alien” tradition that can define the “rules” of carnival because carnival is inseparable from “the present”, “the actual” which it constantly answers through reversal and derision. The topical allusion in the joke is what matters. And in the case of Malvolio, puritanism is real and tangible. But, in fact, Malvolio is not the only one made fun of because of his “fancy stockings”.

SIR TOBY: Wherefore are these things hid? wherefore have these gifts a curtain before ’em? are they like to take dust, like Mistress Mall’s picture? why dost thou not go to church in a galliard and come home in a coranto? My very walk should be a jig; I would not so much as make water but in a sink-a-pace. What dost thou mean? Is it a world to hide virtues in?
I did think, by the excellent constitution of thy leg, it was formed under the star of a galliard.
SIR ANDREW: Ay, ’tis strong, and it does indifferent well in a flame-coloured stock. Shall we set about some revels? (1.3.102-110)

Are these stockings of the same kind? Or is the showing off of male legs a clear cause for laughter? It surely does not simply recall some exterior fact from the recorded history of Early Modern England because it is brought up too often. Sir Andrew himself passed on the compliment to Feste at the table of their carnivalesque booze:

By my troth, the fool has an excellent breast. I had rather than forty shillings I had such a leg, and so sweet a breath to sing, as the fool has. (2.3.17-19)

Feste, who also does not wear a long motley jacket, but gaskins (which easily fall if for example “both points break“: 1.5.19-21). Do these attract attention to the clown’s nature with its literary “lower stratum”, or does it directly anticipate festive dance of some kind? Fair to say that stockings very much seem the kind of garments that “mark the fool” in Illyria.

In the end it is also clear how Malvolio becomes a tricky speaking clown and especially so for his main audience: Olivia. Most of his lines are from popular songs of the Elizabethan era (3.4.21-22; 3.4.28, maybe also 3.4.24, as Donno quotes Nashe) and with this he follows the behavior of the clowns from carnivalesque booze scenes. Furthermore, it is much more important “how” the phrases and quotes from the fake letter “seem” to Olivia. The organization of words is only new for the Whiteface on this stage, but everybody is “involved” in the trick: the Augusts of the play “know” what they mean. Folly here seems madness for lady Whiteface Olivia, because she can not see the meaning of it. But it is “fun” for all the Augusts, who understand it (as Malvolio also understands it, but while not knowing how this is “folly”, he is the one being made a “fool” of). And the “other” audience, the ones watching the play are thus also “involved to this understanding of carnival folly”. That is how the dynamics of the carnival work. And Malvolio himself becomes partly an August. While he thinks this shift is welcomed by lady Whiteface, he virtually becomes a traitor of the Whitefaces, and his betrayal is literary “smashed in the face” of Olivia with Malvolio claiming about himself: “not black in my mind, though yellow in my legs.” (3.4.24)

The Mock Ritual

As Malvolio at the end of Scene Four, Act Three becomes a perfect word-twisting August, soon Feste—for fun—puts on his gloomy and reprimanding Whiteface garments which he left somewhere in the garden of Olivia’s house. These dynamic transgressions invest both of them with special qualities in the play. As Logan stated, these two are the only one in the play who seem to have any work to do; for most of the characters leisure is a way of life. While this seems a little exaggerated, it shows how in the carnival’s world-order the ordinary people “rest” while only the clowns “work”. Quite obviously, Feste and Malvolio are the

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533 Thad Jenkins Logan, “Twelfth Night: The Limits of Festivity.” Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900. 22/2., Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama (Spring, 1982), p. 225
main clowns of the play; an August opposed to its Whiteface. They almost always take their parts in the mock-battles of the play with their main attraction: the inversion that is staged in the fourth act. In this scene Feste literally tries to take up the Whiteface attitude even if he is not “tall” and “lean” enough (4.2.5-7) to perfectly characterize the Lenten aspect of the world. This “dark house” Malvolio is closed up in is the opposite of the “hospital house” that is needed in carnival time, so Feste, who was not accepted with hospitality by Malvolio at the beginning of the play, can “pay” his archenemy back”. This treatment is neither exceptional for carnivalesque customs, neither exceptional for Shakespeare’s carnivalesque plays:

THESEUS: Go, Philostrate,
Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments,
Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth,
Turn melancholy forth to funerals.
The pale companion is not for our pomp.534

As Feste professes, he is “for all waters” (4.2.50): he can transform into anything.
Choosing the priest clearly means a carnivalesque decision, even if it is actually the female Vice, Maria, who supplies him with the beard and dresses him in a gown (which is obviously not needed if Malvolio truly sits in a pitch-black room):

Nay, I prithee put on this gown and this beard; make him believe thou are Sir Topas the curate. Do it quickly. (4.2.1-2)

Sir Topas’s mock ritual takes the particular form of a “mock-extreme unction.” This service, beginning with the confession of one’s sins, followed with the contrition thereafter and ending with the making of amends, was a proper penitential process, but as the Dominican Friar Girolamo Savonarola wrote, it also was like “a horrific game of chess in which the devil did all he could to trap the dying person into a checkmate just at the moment of death.”535 Feste’s desperate verbal abuse functions as an endeavor to have Malvolio recognize his sins and the devil working inside of him, at least according to the Catholic tradition, which in itself is offensive for “the devil puritan that he is”. The scene also seems like a mock procession with which the French fools accompanied Twelfth Night

celebrations, but it also recalls the mock-ceremonial traditions of the *risus paschalis*.\(^{536}\) Southworth recalls the former and describes how the *baculus*, or staff of office (that should normally belong to the canon of precentors who are responsible for the ordering of services) was handed over to a person chosen by the subdeacons, the “Fool Precentor” (normally a subdeacon or a co-opted actual fool). This tradition survived in England at least after the end of the 14th century and is directly identified with the so-called Lord of Misrule tradition: celebrations of the Twelve Days of Christmas.\(^{537}\) Also Sir Topas’s name, as Leslie Hotson noted, recalls the “Yellow Topaze”, which was believed to be effective against lunatics.\(^{538}\) This also contributes much to the interpretation of Chaucer’s mock-heroic tale of Sir Topas from around 1387, which, of course, also could have its influence on Shakespeare. Hotson found a perfect source for this in Cleandro Arnobio’s *Tesoro delle Gioie* from 1602:

> Bede, Arnoldus, and Aristotle all hold that the Topaz has great and manifold virtues, it is good against frenzym ire, melancholy, and such lunatic passions as be roused by demons. Albertus Magnus in its power against the lunatic passions. Camillus Leonardus declares that it drives out lust—scacci a la lussuria—and heals the frantic and the mad. The author of the Hortus Sanitatis testifies that it abates the heat of lust; and Dionysius Carthusianus, that the Topaz counteracts the lunatic passions, bridles the unchaste stirrings of the flesh, and relieves frenzy.\(^{539}\)

In Malvolio’s case it could be “lust” that is “needed to heal” but also melancholy, the endemic of Illyria’s Whitefaces’ can be easily meant to “heal” by our August-Priest.

Still, Malvolio seems to remain exactly the opposite of Feste all along. His argument basically parallels the “wisdom of folly” but the presage is altered. He claims that he is “not a fool”, that he is “in his witts” like anybody in Illyria (4.2.90-91). He even tells Feste, the fool, that he is “like him” (4.2.73-74; and also at 4.2.38, when he still plays Sir Topas), so not a fool at all. He is right: he is only “a fool” on the level all the others are in Illyria, but he is missing this basic position, which is “folly”. He, at this point, acknowledges how he is also “of their

\(^{536}\) It has likely been *risus paschalis* (Easter laughter) that welcomed the comic rituals and mock celebrations in the Early Modern Age. For how *risus paschalis* and the carnival could have been intermingled see my “God’s Clown.” *Studia Religiologica*. 47/3, 2014. pp. 153–161.


\(^{538}\) See Leslie Hotson’s *Shakespeare’s Motley*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1952. p. 120

\(^{539}\) It is Hotson’s translation. *Idem*, pp. 120-121
element” (which he was not at 3.4.105-106), but if the “wisdom of folly” makes Feste a “wise fool”, Malvolio in the other hand seems to be a “stupid fool”. And Feste answers: “maybe you are mad, and you only counterfeit normality”, which is not a confused sentence, but a right accusation actually. Malvolio, a clown, tries to act “normally”, as somebody superior (as Whitefaces normally tend to), and that is what is rewarded in the carnival with mockery and ridicule. Also the scene can perfectly show the “actuality” ruling carnivalesque Misrule, since it is the puritan rhetoric of the Whiteface that is turned back against him. He is the one reveling himself into pandemonium, who hobnobs with devils. As Marcus notes, “the Puritan and the Fool trade places and the holiday inversion is complete.”

The Daggers of lath

Feste’s song at the end of the scene still emphasizes the harmlessness of their play of folly.

I am gone, sir,
And anon, sir,
I’ll be with you again,
In a trice,
Like to the old Vice,
Your need to sustain;
Who, with dagger of lath
In his rage and his wrath,
Cries ‘Ah ha ‘ to the devil,
Like a mad lad,
‘Pare thy nails, dad?’
Adieu, goodman devil. (4.2.102-113)

He retrospectively marks the scene a clown-play, when he recalls the Vice-s “dagger of lath”. While many theatrical evils (especially in Shakespeare’s plays) were characterized by clownish features (e.g. the direct self-explanation to the audience, which destroys the fourth wall), clowns and “evil” antagonists do not “conventionally” overlap in the bigger picture of theatrical tradition, at least rarely in the forms of tragedy. The Vice only functions in one branch of the medieval theatre where true “harm” is never done to the protagonists of the play. It is not Vice’s ability to sing and joke with the spectators that make him truly clownesque, but his evil armory, which consists of a significant collection of blades and

spear—all made of wood. This is their attribute that shows their relation to the carnival, the weapon that shows how the harm done by them is not serious, only caused to bring forth a Death “pregnant with Life”. They can wear any kind of “attribute” (devilish names, fairy wings, or mythological costumes), they are still not “evil” in a monochrome way. They inhabit the ethically nondescript and socially indeterminate, because the moral world and society are non-carnivalesque and highly ideological and hierarchical. Their “dagger of lath” means verbal attacks (mockery), but sometimes—while it is obviously hard to discover “between the lines”—it is also used in a non-symbolic, physical sense, as we may also suspect that this is so when confronted with the customs of “sword dances” particularly.

Going physical—in either a harsh grotesque or amusing burlesque way—was pretty customary for clowns; there are sources, for example, on William Sommer’s practical “mock-fighting” skills from 1551\(^\text{541}\). The physical comedy of the carnival most definitely shows itself in Twelfth Night’s confrontation of Sir Andrew and Cesario/Viola, which soon comes after Feste’s song to Malvolio and which soon “widens” into a mock-war between Sir Andrew, Sir Toby and Sebastian (confused with Cesario/Viola). These battles also clearly show how Malvolio is hardly the only one who is deliberately made a victim of fraud. As the steward is mocked and gullied for his narcissism, Sir Andrew here is mocked and gullied for his cowardice, and also the main prankster, Sir Toby “gets his reward”: he himself becomes take a knock and “hurt” to some extent.

We experience how the “battle” begins in a harmless way, already in the third act, many scenes before Feste’s song, where the Augusts tease Sir Andrew by reading out his letter of challenge meant for Cesario/Viola (3.4.121-145). The “saucy” offensive letter full of insecurities and timid retreats, written in a manner to keep Sir Andrew “from the blow of the law” (3.4.130) may well be one of the most amusing parts of the play. His “legal threats”, being rather circumstantial, provoke much more laughter then fear for Viola’s life and are by no means inexplicable as its consequences will be, at least for a number of scholars. Does the funny and harmless threatening turn threateningly serious when Sebastian becomes involved, or is this only a shift between verbal and physical comedy?

When, after the comical confrontation of the two chicken-hearted warriors (a rather long and crude spoof by Sir Toby and Fabian: 3.4.185-263) Sir Andrew runs after Cesario/Viola, he

suddenly meets Sebastian (a much less cowardly man) with the same looks as his sister, at the beginning of the fourth act. Here is the part with the stage directions included:

SIR ANDREW: Now, sir, have I met you again? There’s for you!
Strikes SEBASTIAN
SEBASTIAN: Why, there’s for thee, and there, and there!
Beats SIR ANDREW
Are all the people mad?
SIR TOBY: Hold, sir, or I’ll throw your dagger o’er the house. (4.1.21-23)

According to Donno’s note, Sebastian’s words here (followed by Sir Toby’s on his “dagger”) indicate that he draws the weapon to beat Sir Andrew with its tilt. The intent to explain how this short exchange may have been performed on the stage is understandable because it is hard to imagine how a “dagger”, a short and sharp knife-like weapon, could be used for “beating”. While there are many instances of the “dagger” distanced from the “rapier” (especially because “dagger” is also associated with insidious murder, as in Macbeth) at other times they also seem confusable, like in Hamlet, were it has to be clarified that the two weapons are different from each other. While the difference should be still quite obvious, partly from the use of their combination in fencing, “dagger” here, in Toby’s (derogative) usage, could be also a detractive term for an actual sword, especially because a sword (a long rapier) is much easier to visualize in the particular scene. The rapier, basically meant for piercing and stabbing (as the dagger as well) did not have perfect cutting edges, so it could be perfectly useful for flapping, and especially so with its light swordseath still on, which is also important because stage directions show how Sebastian’s sword is only “drawn” a few lines later (4.1.33). In my imagination an exceedingly funny mock-battle materializes, were Sebastian, with the blunt page of his long, sheathed rapier, spans Sir Andrew, as if he was beating a naughty child. Sir Andrew returns to his empty legal treats and the whole confrontation can remain funny as long as Olivia arrives into the quarrel: the swords never truly seem to clash. And Olivia herself underlines how unserious the Augusts

542 She also notes how Kittredge cited Rom. 4.5.117-118 for this use of a dagger.
543 “HAMLET: What’s his weapon?
OSRIC: Rapier and dagger.
HAMLET: That’s two of his weapons. But well.” Hamlet (5.2.127-129)
544 It also might be an original carnivalesque pun mocking Sebastian’s penile qualities.
are (without meaning any harm), when she talks about their “many fruitless pranks” that Sebastian will probably even “smile at” (4.1.47-50).

The complex, puzzling problems only come in the “second round” of the battle, a battle which seems to resume outside the stage and becomes darker and darker.\(^{545}\) There are—again—two different approaches to the given text: we can either accept Sir Andrew’s addition to the stage directions or—starting from the assumption that Sir Andrew’s words are at least doubtful—search for alternative realities to his bloody and scary description about the consequences of their fight with Sebastian. The whole part of the text is needed here, as it stands in the New Cambridge Edition of Donno:

Enter SIR ANDREW [his head bleeding]\(^{546}\)

SIR ANDREW: For the love of God, a surgeon! Send one presently to Sir Toby.
OLIVIA: What’s the matter?
SIR ANDREW: H’as broke my head across, and has given Sir Toby a bloody coxcomb, too. For the love of God, your help! I had rather than forty pound I were at home.
OLIVIA: Who has done this, Sir Andrew?
SIR ANDREW: The count’s gentleman, one Cesario. We took him for a coward, but he’s the very devil incardinate.
ORSINO: My gentleman Cesario?
SIR ANDREW: ’Od’s lifelings, here he is! You broke my head for nothing, and that that I did, I was set on to do’t by Sir Toby.
VIOLA: Why do you speak to me? I never hurt you.
You drew your sword upon me without cause,
But I bespoke you fair, and hurt you not.

Enter SIR TOBY and CLOWN [FESTE]

SIR ANDREW: If a bloody coxcomb be a hurt, you have hurt me; I think you set nothing by a bloody coxcomb. Here comes Sir Toby halting – You shall hear more; but if he had not been in drink, he would have tickled you othergates than he did.
ORSINO: How now, gentleman? How is’t with you?
SIR TOBY: That’s all one. H’as hurt me, and there’s the end on’t. Sot, didst see Dick Surgeon, sot?
FESTE: O, he’s drunk, Sir Toby, an hour agone; his eyes were set at eight I’th’ morning.
SIR TOBY: Then he’s a rogue, and a passy-measures pavin. I hate a drunken rogue.
OLIVIA: Away with him! Who hath made this havoc with them?
SIR ANDREW: I’ll help you, Sir Toby, because we’ll be dressed together.
SIR TOBY: Will you help—An ass-head, and a coxcomb, and a knave, a thin-faced knave, a gull? (5.1.161-191)


\(^{546}\) This stage direction is not there in the Folio.
My interpretation starts off from my earlier assumption of Sir Andrew being a clown, moreover, of the weakling/cowardly kind. With Sir Toby, they make a pair of zanies, while Sir Andrew is an “Arlechino-type”, a leptosome or ectomorph. When he goes into details on the bloody events beyond the stage, he tells us that Sebastian (thought to be Cesario) “broke his head across”, which is unlikely in itself, but the “bloody coxcomb” told to be given Sir Toby is highly impossible even in our very modern ways of grotesque. Still, we hear the world, “coxcomb”, which also means that Sir Toby—for the first time—is himself “made a fool” (by the mistaken Sebastian) this time. After that Sir Andrew announces Sir Toby, the “fat and ugly Brighella”, a voluptuous man, an enormous eater, obscene in gesture and word, “an endomorph, who always gets a terrific beating—but he can stand it”. He is said to be “halting” but we wonder: why is a man given a wound on his head “halting” onto the stage? Sir Andrew’s very next sentence answers this question: “But if he had not been in drink, he would have tickled you othergates than he did.” Sir Toby is so drunk that he could only “tickle” Sebastian, who—supposedly—left him with heavy injuries in turn. At least, we can suspect that Sir Toby is the one who is beaten more, because he is slow and—as always—he is totally intoxicated, but also because Sir Andrew probably started running after the first slap in his face (this could be backed up by Sir Toby’s scolding, at least if the insults are directed to Andrew). He can stand there and describe the fight as a bloodbath, on the streets of Illyria, with only a little scratch on his forehead. He, comically overstating his wound, seems much more plausible than in the bloody mess he is actually speaking about. Sir Toby, on the other hand, is probably also totally stoned at the time. Many critics are puzzled by his comment on Dick Surgeon’s drunkenness: “Then he’s a rogue, and a passy-measures pavin. I hate a drunken rogue”, because he does not seem to have problems with alcohol consumption elsewhere. Yet, it is Sir Toby himself who Feste probably speaks about and thus Sir Toby can—ironically—reflect on his own drunkenness: “I hate a drunken rogue.”

Sebastian—who is probably the only sober participant of their mock-battle—also reports the fight and he starts with an apology: “I am sorry, madam, I have hurt your kinsman, But, had it been the brother of my blood, I must have done no less with wit and safety.”

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549 Nowadays I would mark the injury with a single adhesive plaster of the colorful kind, for little girls.
lines are normally taken as a pleading for forgiveness, with the excuse that he himself was in
danger. But perhaps this is not what he is actually saying. He tells Olivia that he would have
hurt his own brother to the same extent, too, which does not suggest real harm, and adds:
“with wit and safety”. This probably means that he held himself back, with wit, as much as
the safety of this coward and this drunken man required it. His basic intention was to stop
the drunken scoff of these two good-for-nothings as safely as possible: without hurting them
seriously, and also from harming themselves or anybody else. The fight here is a harmless
mock-fight that—from the reports that we heard—probably soon ended with Sebastian’s
“victory”. And his victory implies more a “teaching a lesson” given to drunk clowns, that is to
say, children, than a true sword-fight to death between men of virtue.

Feste’s Last Song

Twelfth Night has a “dying fall”, as mentioned by Orsino at the beginning of the play; the
note of death is surely there in the drama, not undeservedly known as Shakespeare’s most
melancholy of comedies. In spite of its various comical qualities and the primarily comical
structure of the play there is for example no older generation present in Illyria, as many
noticed. Death watches behind the curtains at the stage and sneaks around in the shadows
all along. When Orsino asks for a song which “dallies with the innocence of love” Feste sings
“come away, come away, death” to him. Most of Feste’s songs are full of laughter and love
and end in marriage (the best example is: 2.3.33-38). But his songs gradually introduce the
topic of mortality; they become more and more gloomy and cloudy as the play progresses.
As the guardian of cheerfulness and as a victorious August, Feste defeats his Whiteface,
Malvolio in their ancient battle of Life and Death. His song of victory provides the ending of
the play, which should howl the triumphant laughter of carnival.

With hey, ho, the wind and the rain, ...
For the rain it raineth every day.

Somewhat earlier in the carnival booze scene there are some very ambiguous lines which
Feste addresses to Sir Toby (and/or Malvolio?) (2.3.86-97). It would be interesting to know
what happens on the stage parallel to this singing, but to some phrases: “farewell”, “his days
are almost done”, “there you lie”, Sir Toby’s desperate response is: “I will never die” and the
sentence addressed to Malvolio, “Ye lie!” connects the scene to impending death. Sir Toby,
as probably the oldest character in the play is the second one (after Malvolio), whose death is frequently alluded to. It is not only death that comes here as a decarnivalizing element but the purely linear notion of time that continues to approach it. Furthermore, this is exactly what makes Feste’s last song so depressive, because it actually tells a story of a passing life that—and this seems to be the major topic—“loses carnival” on its way.

When that I was and-a little tiny boy, […]
A foolish thing was but a toy, […]

But when I came to man’s estate, […]
‘Gainst knaves and thieves men shut their gate, […]

But when I came, alas, to wive, […]
By swaggering could I never thrive, […]

But when I came unto my beds, […]
With tospots still ‘had drunken heads, […]

A great while ago the world begun,
With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,
But that’s all one, our play is done,
And we’ll strive to please you every day. (5.1.366-385 without most of the refrains)

Being drunk and misbehaving has its always recurring reality, like any time before, but also the strange notion of “passing” and death slips in, which is not carnivalesque at all. This song will be repeated in one of Shakespeare’s most overwhelming tragedy, King Lear, by the court fool, who vanishes in the middle of that drama, with “hey, ho, the wind and the rain […] for the rain it raineth every day.” Why is this mood-killing song at the end of the play?

The myth of the “too much harm”

Quoting Bakhtin (about Rabelais) very sharply shows what the main problem of the play—from the point of the carnival—is:

[In the carnival] hypocritical monks, morose slanderers, gloomy agelasts, are killed, rent, beaten, chased, abused, cursed, derided; they are representatives of the old world but also of that two-bodied world that gives birth in death. By cutting of and discarding the old dying body, the umbilical cord of the new youthful world is simultaneously broken […] The representatives of the old but generating world are
beaten and abused. Therefore, the punishment is transformed into festive laughter.\(^{550}\)

This is the description of the clown-play, how it should be. The clown opposition should give way to trickery and mockery, and carnivalesque laughter should follow. What causes, then, the insecurity of acceptance in this comedy? Especially for Malvolio, who promises revenge? Can we agree with him? Is Malvolio's conclusion acceptable or disturbing? If the former is true, then the treatment of Malvolio itself must be disturbing. And, indeed, Malvolio and his fraud on stage is always a major issue; this is the most well-known interpretation. In the frequently cited Shakespeare's Sense of an Ending in Twelfth Night Barton notes that the basic “holiday mood” in the play could explain “why Malvolio has found tender-hearted apologists in the study but very few sympathizers in the playhouse”\(^{551}\) (which obviously shows how the carnival might be more about performance than text), but there are many who are sensitive to the “staged harm” done to Malvolio as well. Some stagings in the 20th century even made him a protagonist of the play, a tragic hero who is unfairly humiliated.\(^{552}\) And also, in fact—while we are not sure about the reception being more approving or dismissive—the intensity of the harm done to him was already noticed in the Early Modern world. Charles I in his own copy of the second folio—as already Charles Knight drew attention to it—directly addresses the play to Malvolio. The contemporary recipient, John Manningham, after watching the play, also only notes the case of the steward\(^{553}\). But what is the real cause of the puzzlement?

It is frequently noted how Malvolio’s attempt to transgress the social hierarchy of the play remains unsuccessful, which seems to be especially unfair to others, whose transgressions are successful. This takes us back to a miscalculation already emphasized a


\(^{552}\) I find the positioning of Malvolio as a tragic hero a very radical overdoing. The basic disproof of the play is—as noted for example by David Wilbern—that Malvolio is pretty bawdy and eroticized himself. David Willbern, “Malvolio’s Fall.” Shakespeare Quarterly, 29/1. (Winter, 1978), pp. 85-90. His naughty desires that are frequently readable from his lines seem to suggest that he very much seems to “love” in a carnivalesque, sensual way: “from the liver”. He is not a tragic hero but a Whiteface, an inner negationist of the carnival.

few times: we can try to understand *Twelfth Night* as a carnivalesque play or build an interpretation on the social-hierarchical realities of the Early Modern, but we can not have both. The two concepts of society (the liminal Misrule and the social-hierarchical Rule) are mutually exclusive. The play cannot work as a competition for social transgression if—as the carnival dictates—from the very beginning of the play “almost all the characters in *Twelfth Night* exceed the boundaries of their social position in certain ways”\(^{554}\). Maid Maria is not winning this race through marrying the noble Sir Toby, because already through her ability to write in both upper and lower case hands, she plays both with the steward’s social positioning and also her own\(^{555}\). The interesting issue exclusively might be how somebody can not transgress the social border in Illyria. The same reasoning can also be falsely used for an explanation of the subplot: if Malvolio is only motivated by social transgression—and not real love—that can be the misdeed he is punished for. But this explanation is also unconvincing at least because it entirely forgets the play’s embeddedness into carnival.

Malvolio’s transgression is more than successful: besides Feste, he is the only one who can change entirely from Whiteface to August and also change back again, and that is the only “social-hierarchical” transgression that is appreciable in carnival, even if that simply means that, very literary, “he is made a fool”.

Marcus with some other scholars found a much better location in the text related to Malvolio’s “too much harm”. She thinks that the Augusts clearly fall overboard with the gulling and that is the only reason that the gull (Malvolio) becomes more and more sympathetic. She thinks that it is the “dark house” where the harm done piles up\(^{556}\).

Also, there are many references that symbolically “kill” Malvolio as Wilbern noticed, for example Maria says that she has “dogged Malvolio like his murderer” (3.2.60) or Malvolio complains to Feste how “they have laid me here in hideous darkness” (4.2.25), who was the singer of the lines “Come away, come away, death, / And in sad cypress let me be laid.” (2.4.49-50)

\(^{554}\) Allison P. Hobgood, “Twelfth Night’s “Notorious Abuse” of Malvolio: Shame, Humorality, and Early Modern Spectatorship.” *Shakespeare Bulletin.* 24/3., (Fall 2006) p. 8


Still, Marcus also adds that the gulling that is done to Malvolio was probably still acceptable at the beginning of 17th century and the audience probably did not feel it “overdone”. It also meets with the festive (carnivalesque) concept of the comic pharmakós victimized.\textsuperscript{557} To say that the exclusion of Malvolio as pharmakós (as “Death”) legitimates nearly any kind of harm, is feasible, especially from Bakhtin’s examples (from Rabelais at most). Through “making a fool” of somebody, this concept is also a coherent part of the play and is played out many times. Hotson has a wonderful line of argument about the tradition of “carrying out the fool in a cloakbag” which very clearly symbolizes this act of expulsion. This custom, which is also noted many times by Armin, is especially pertinent, because the cloakbag’s fabric material also seems to be identical with the material of the particular (but widespread) “fool motley” he is engaged with.\textsuperscript{558} Also the entire debate between Olivia and the “impudently mouthing” Feste in the first act recalls this tradition, when they, pointing to the other, order the servants to “take the fool away!” And the same is done by Feste again when he sends Orsino to the open sea for “a good voyage of nothing” (2.4.72-74). While many—basically all—of the clown-plays are meant to engage in this symbolic act of exclusion, also the ending part, reconciliation or reaggregation, the sign of “harmlessness” is performed to make the carnivalesque process a whole. Instead of searching for the locus, where the “harm is done”, the real question is: where it “becomes harm”, when it “becomes serious”.

The most disturbing feature of the play, Malvolio’s exit is not comparable to Jacques’ exit, who, according to Anne Barton, had walked out with dignity of the new society; but in effect, is flung\textsuperscript{559}. After revealing the Augusts’s mischief with the letter, the unfolding of Malvolio’s conclusion begins with Olivia’s promise of holding court, and justice to be done in a fairly favorable way. According to her, judgement will be handed over to Malvolio (5.1.330-334). Then Fabian comments,

\begin{verbatim}
FABIAN: [...] let no quarrel, nor no brawl to come
Taint the condition of this present hour,
Which I have wondered at. [...] 
How with a sportful malice it was followed
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{558} All this in Leslie Hotson, Shakespeare's Motley. New York: Oxford University Press, 1952. pp. 44-52
May rather pluck on laughter than revenge,
If that the injuries be justly weighed,
That have on both sides passed. (5.1.335-337; 344-347)

While this naturally sounds a little unfair from Fabian’s mouth, who is still not “paid back” by the plot in any ways, this actually is the carnivalesque way to deal with the matter. The buzzwords of the carnival, “harmlessness”, “laughter” are there, and the whole internal justice of Misrule is presented, where everyone becomes a homo sacer: not punishable but foolable. Olivia’s ongoing goodwill stays with the “poor fool” who has been “baffled” (5.1.348). Then Feste is coming forward

FESTE: Why, “some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrown upon them.” I was one, sir, in this interlude, one Sir Topas, sir, but that’s all one. “By the Lord, fool, I am not mad.”—But do you remember? “Madam, why laugh you at such a barren rascal; an you smile not, he’s gagged?” and thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges. (5.1.349-354)

While there is some puzzlement on Feste’s supposed gloatiness and maliciousness here, his words do not actually mean anything “personal”. The “revenge” he speaks about means the justice due to the circular notion of time and the recurrent turnings in the Wheel of Fortune. He simply shows how their (Malvolio’s and his) carnivalesque inversion works: everything can turn into a position where “nothing that is so is so” (4.1.6), and, thereafter, be turned back again. Time takes away and gives back as well, also “pleasure will be paid, one time or another” (2.4.68). The “revenge” Feste speaks about is not his revenge on Malvolio, but the carnivalesque truth of fortune and disaster “always returning”. That is not identical with the “revenge” Malvolio promises:

MALVOLIO: I’ll be revenged on the whole pack of you. (5.1.355)

The exclusion of the pharmakós in the case of the “notoriously abused” Malvolio is already done: the majority of the play (not only the subplot) was meant to tell that story. This is not the point where exclusion should be but where the carnivalesque essence should be added to the exclusion of before. This is the point where the third part of the ritual, reaggregation should happen, to transform the serious harms done before into the merry victory of Life. At the end of the Merry Wives of Windsor the fooled Falstaff seems to reconnect himself into the carnivalesque community, so everyone can go home, “and laugh
this sport o’er by a country fire; Sir John and all.”

Here, as also elsewhere, the will of the pharmakós is also needed; the one who is sacrificed, himself should choose to “return” so that Death may be mocked through the clown’s transgressing skills. In Twelfth Night, not only the exit of Malvolio is unwarranted—and especially so in a carnivalesque way—but also how he himself chooses not to return. Malvolio, in one line at the end of the play, has the opportunity to decide about the “future” of the carnivalesque in the play we have seen, and he, consciously and notoriously rejects carnival.

Ralph Berry and others discussed how spectatorial “unease” begins as early as the third act, when Malvolio appears on stage in his yellow stockings. He also suggested that there is no precise moment in the play where the audience realizes its own discomfort but only the play’s end, “the audience is now conscious that the affair is much less funny than it was.”

This actually seems to work finely but one question is obviously missing here: would this unease fill us if Malvolio had chosen to get reconciled to the others? That is the key issue, which I would like to answer with a very straight no. The “ruining of the ritual” is what matters to me, and this is why I suspect that our judgement that real harm has been done to Malvolio is mostly produced retrospectively, because the issue is “left in seriousness”.

Furthermore, as Willbern points out, Malvolio’s choice (of words) not only ruins the carnivalesque subplot but also the main plot of the play, because Cesario’s/Viola’s resumption of her true identity—in a strange turn—is made to depend upon the sea captain, who has kept her “maiden weeds” and who is still jailed by Malvolio (5.1.258-261). Malvolio is therefore essential to a final resolution of the plot and when he stalks out, swearing revenge, he also disrupts the plot. Malvolio, with his staying out of the carnivalesque closure disrupts the Misrule of the play and transforms it uncannily into seriousness. That is, how Twelfth Night or What You Will becomes, in the end, decarnivalized.

To make an image serious means to remove from it its ambivalence and ambiguousness, it unresolvedness, readiness to change its meaning, to turn itself inside-out, its mystifying carnival essence, it means to stop the turning of cartwheels, its tumbling, to separate front from rear (to stop it at a moment in which the face is

![Merry Wives of Windsor (5.5.229-230)](https://example.com/merry-wives-of-windsor-5.5.229-230)


![Willbern, David, “Malvolio’s Fall.” Shakespeare Quarterly. 29/1. (Winter, 1978), p. 89](https://example.com/willbern-malvolios-fall)
up front), to separate praise from invective, to chop away all the shoots and branches protruding from it.\textsuperscript{563}

After seeing the \textit{clown} fall after a big hit we always find our voice for laughing, because we know the \textit{clown} well enough: he will stand up from his fall again. Letting the \textit{clown} on the ground, showing the damage caused paradigmatically, seeing him totally isolated breaks the carnivalesque logic, and shows the inability of transgression, and indicates, in fact, the \textit{triumph} of Death. Malvolio’s departure retrospectively deprives the play of its clownish carnivalesque ease. His exit does not work as the ritualistic expulsion of Death because it leaves us without the last part of the ritual: the purified return.

5. *Hamlet* – “the rest is silence”

Essays and even monographs about *Hamlet* tend to begin with an honest testimony of how impossible it is to accept one another’s interpretation of *Hamlet*, and how massive Hamlet-literature this way has actually grown. Soon thereafter, the actual critic always apologizes for yet still adding another one to the endless line of interpretations. After Bakhtin’s excerpts on Shakespeare (from the *Additions and changes to Rabelais*) were translated in 2014, this trend on *Hamlet*’s uninterruptible reinterpretation has become at least to some extent, challenged. Because, unfortunately, Bakhtin, after locating *Hamlet* between the complex carnivalesque plays, and defining how plain psychology is entirely irrelevant for its explanation, simply repeats Sigmund Freud’s analytical interpretation about the reversed Oedipus-complex:

This is a dislocated, shifted “Oedipus Rex”: Creon (had he been brother to Laius) killed Oedipus’s father and married his mother; what should Oedipus, who knows that the potential, genuine, murderer by nature is he, do; another has murdered instead of him; the avenger here turns out to be a rival murderer.

Bakhtin’s lack of creativity here is partially discouraging and shows greatly how hard it is to find the carnivalesque in the most famous tragedy by Shakespeare. As it will be demonstrated below, several approaches to the festive elements and structures in *Hamlet* proved to be full of flaws. The basic ones have to be introduced because even the scanty presence of the carnivalesque may turn out to be the result of a conscious construction. Not all “corrupted rites” mean the lack of “ritualism”.

**Struggling with Hamlet’s Carnivalism?**

First of all, there are obvious differences between the texts of *Hamlet* concerning their carnivalesque content. Some of these are, for example, very clearly described by Natália Pikli

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in her recent study. Fortunately, these differences, do not seem to be too decisive for our present purposes. The first Quarto features the “capital calf”, the “jig-maker” and the forgotten “hobby-horse” (3.2.101; 3.2.118; 3.2.127-128), moreover, Ophelia, as Pikli observes, seems to be even more carnivalesque in her flirtation with Hamlet in the theatre scene:

OFELIA: Your iests are keene my lord.
HAMLET: It would cost you a groning to take them off.
OFELIA: Still better and worse.
HAMLET: So you must take your husband. (Q1 9.160-164)

“Poopies” (ll. 144-145) here could also be a simple printing error and actually mean the “puppets” in the other versions, but it could also mean the female genitalia (Pikli also refers to Thompson and Taylor in the third Arden edition) which both seem directly carnivalesque. Also Hamlet’s and Ophelia’s bawdy discussion in the first Quarto features the repetition of “Go to a nunnery” (7.162-194) eight times, which may mean “Go to a brothel” in its carnivalesque sense. This is somewhat opposed to the second Quarto and the Folio, where it appears only five times. The so-called “good” Quarto (Q2) also exhibits more vulgarities—as Pikli points out—than the more prestigious Folio. For example

in Hamlet’s earlier monologue in act 2, scene 2, the well-known Folio first-line being ‘O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!’ (2.2.544). Although it is a passionately coarse soliloquoy in all versions, featuring asses, John-a-dreams, scullions (kitchen servants) and drabs (whores), the change in the Q2 very first line is still shocking as Hamlet cries out: ‘Why, what a dunghill idiot slave am I’ (Q2 7.404).

Some textual elements, expressions thus clearly show the impact of carnival on the play. But the central issue, seldom asked by carnivalesque studies, is the “lack of the clown” in this tragedy. While there is no easily identifiable “Armin-type fool” in Hamlet, there is no clown among the actors of The Murder of Gonzago, either. Even Hamlet’s words spoken, while holding the famous skull, might be read as referring to the death of Richard Tarlton (or the departure of Kemp?), inasmuch we connect him with the figure of Yorick. The “lack of the

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567 Which is exactly why I also chose the third Arden edition based on the second Quarto and not the Folio.
clown” ironically puzzled new historicist readers much more than readers emphasizing festive traditions and rituality. By their view, very radically based on the heteronomy of art\textsuperscript{570}, the absence of a “court fool-like character” creates an inconsistency with the incorporation of Robert Armin into the company. Hotson seems very puzzled: he does not understand why Shakespeare “abandoned the ground gained” and retreated to the old Clown convention, with his “couple of grave-digging swains”, who are much less sophisticated than the Armin type of Fool, who has not been employed in the tragedy of Hamlet.\textsuperscript{571} This attitude, already in 1952 (when Hotson’s book was introduced), is responsible for an inexcusable mistake that still has its impact on our thinking about clowning in Hamlet. Firstly, it contains the stance that Shakespeare deliberately limits his own set of figures by changing one type of fool for the other, yet, as I have already mentioned and will further argue,\textsuperscript{572} we have no written evidence about the exact times of the comings and goings of comic characters in Shakespeare’s theatre. Hotson and his followers also introduce—in advance—a qualitative difference (a vague linear-developmental difference) between types of figures, and only then they examine the particular drama in question. No wonder that the play will not work under these strict and limited conditions—made up in advance—: no piece of art (especially the better ones) could function this way. If Shakespeare’s plays were only historical sources on a number of Early Modern men (the actors), how poor would dramatic art actually be?

But this is exactly the reason for several limited, makeshift solutions in Hamlet criticism on this “clown-question”. One of the greatest confusion is around Hamlet’s lines in the third act:

\[
\text{[...] and let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them. For there be of them that will themselves laugh to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too, though in the meantime some necessary question of the play be then to be considered. – That’s villainous and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it. (3.2.36-42)}
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If Hamlet’s words can only work as constituting historical sources, than he—especially while playing a playwright here—despises clowns. If Hamlet, as a playwright despises clowns

\textsuperscript{570} Still in the “Hegelian” sense of aesthetics: art as heteronomous art is what is intricately effected by its originating (mainly) socio-political surrounding and also reflects them instead of any immanent structure. That is opposed to art’s autonomy.

\textsuperscript{571} Leslie Hotson, Shakespeare’s Motley. New York: Oxford University Press, 1952. p. 92

\textsuperscript{572} Mostly in the chapter about Rustic clowns and/or Professional Fools.
then—according to the reasoning based on biographical heteronomy—Shakespeare himself despises clowns. If Robert Armin was one of Shakespeare greatest actors, then these words can only utter their joint opinion on the “low quality” rustics from the Kemp-tradition. Hotson, of course, easily finds sources that support this: Joseph Hall, a priest, who was under training in Emmanuel College in Cambridge (a definitive school of puritanism then) and also Sir Philip Sidney’s (another well-known protestant) exhortations around 1578, where he complains about theatre playwrights, who “many times (to make mirthe) they make a Clowne companion with a Kinge”\textsuperscript{573}. Sidney’s aesthetics were dominantly anti-carnivalesque as we know, but the identification with Shakespeare himself through Hamlet is like stating the same about Malvolio, another anti-carnivalesque Whiteface, without taking a look at the play he actually appears in. While there is a good explanation for Hamlet’s comments, still many Shakespeare scholars took up this opinion without questioning\textsuperscript{574}. Others think about it as some kind of “external” comment (destroying the fourth wall, reflecting “the actual” or “the present”), referring to the lack of clown actors among The Lord Chamberlain’s Men\textsuperscript{575}. They consider these lines as evidence for a period between the departure of Kemp and the arrival of Armin, so we are not only already starting from prior demands (based on the limits of Shakespeare’s “artificial” creativity) but also evaluate the results without feeling any guilt (of actually concealing the whole idea that we found).

We must note that the play itself does not speak about Kemp and Armin, because in Elsinore (in Weimann’s \textit{locus}) they are entirely irrelevant. In the first Quarto, Hamlet tells a bit more, and lists a few “examples of the sort of jokes that clowns add to their parts.”\textsuperscript{576}

\begin{verbatim}
And then you have some agen, that keepes one sute
Of jeasts, as a man is knowne by one sute of
Apparel, and Gentlemen quotes his jeasts downe
\end{verbatim}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item \textsuperscript{573} Leslie Hotson, \textit{Shakespeare’s Motley}. New York: Oxford University Press, 1952. pp. 86-87
\item \textsuperscript{576} Arden annotation to \textit{Hamlet} line (3.2.42). Some also consider that the lines were left out only incidentally in the second Quarto. Hamlet’s lines at (2.2.319-325) can also picture a clown-like figure he sees in the company and not only Polonius.
\end{thebibliography}
In their tables before they come to the play; as thus:
Cannot you stay till I eate my porrige? and, you owe me
A quarters wages; and, my coate wants a cullison;
And, your beere is sowre: and, blabbering with his lips,
And thus keeping in his cinkapace of jeasts,
Unlesse by chance, as the blinde man catcheth a hare.\textsuperscript{577}

While this part in the text obviously has a hopelessly confused grammar, it mostly seems to speak about gentlemen auditors who are fond of clowns and clown play and copy their jests “in their tables, before they come to the play”. As Alex Davis observes, this can be an ironical comment “about the staleness of the clown’s humour – so dead that it can be copied down before the play is viewed”\textsuperscript{578}. Or else, if said in a serious tone, it seems not primarily directed against clowns but one of their theatrical skills: improvisation. If we consider Hamlet as the speaker \textit{in the play}, then and there, we should consider what he says locally. Hamlet fears improvisation, the skill of the clowns to be a valve for the audience. He needs here “a laboratory experiment” to catch Claudius with his “Mousetrap”, to build up stress, until he blows his deed out as a confession.\textsuperscript{579} Letting stress be released through laughter could ruin the show, and, thus, Hamlet’s efforts. There is only one thing clear: it is highly unlikely that these lines demonstrate Shakespeare’s general dislike of clowns, neither do they give any excuse for skipping the search after clowns in the play.

\textbf{Claudius, “a Vice of kings”}

The first option, originating mainly from Maynard Mack’s stunning \textit{The World of Hamlet}, is based on a very interesting reading of a kind of carnivalism\textsuperscript{580}. This idea of carnival is virtually identical with Jan Kott’s “Grand Mechanism”, which was intended to describe the idea of \textit{historical time} in Shakespeare’s histories.\textsuperscript{581} Kott discusses how in history the tragedy “occurs” when time “becomes corrupted”; Shakespeare dramatizes these dark, always recurring intersections of history, as a kind of carnival. This notion of time, which—through the sacrifice of the tragic hero—always returns (in a pagan cycle) to its beginning without

\textsuperscript{578} This part is well demonstrated by Roland Mushat Frye in his \textit{The Renaissance Hamlet: Issues and Responses in 1600}. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984., pp. 132-133
\textsuperscript{580} Of course not yet the Bakhtinian carnivalesque, because that only became translated more than a century later. Mack’s essay was published already in 1952.
\textsuperscript{581} I already discussed the “Grand Mechanism” and its use of the carnival’s “dark functionality” in the section about the \textit{The Stepheining Lear}. 

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any actual change (as “development”) has many supporting traces in the play. Hamlet—O cursed spite—truly feels that he is born to set the time right that became out of joint (1.5.186-187) and in the end his “work” truly “turns back” time.

This turning back of time is done very concretely. We know how Hamlet (the old king of Denmark) “smote the sledded Polacks on the ice” (1.1.62) and thereafter slewed Fortinbras (the old king of Norway) in duel (so the young Fortinbras remained in Norway, but his uncle—the third who benefits—became the king). Thereafter old Hamlet died, and “in the center” of the disjoint time, Claudius (an uncle and the third who benefits) became the king in Denmark, who gave old Hamlet a glorious funeral (so he can come back in his decorative armor). This is how history “goes wrong”, and it, in fact, does not start with Claudius killing old Hamlet. There are many lines suggesting that old Hamlet himself was not entirely flawless in the shaping of the events and this is something the younger Hamlet obviously does not see. How uncertain the whole story was so far is mainly told by Horatio: we only know from “whispers” (1.1.79) how the “valiant Hamlet (for so this side of our known world esteemed him)” (1.1.83-84) triumphed over old Fortinbras, who “by a sealed compact well ratified by law and heraldry, did forfeit, with his life, all those his lands” (1.1.85-87). The level of detail here makes this part even more suspicious. Old Hamlet does not seem to be entirely innocent, “like a guilty thing upon a fearful summons” (1.1.147-148). He is “the King that was and is the question of these wars” (1.1.109-110). Suspicion about the dead king here mutually supports the existence of the ghost: it is not only that the immaterial spirit is frightening but it confirms the rumors and doubts precisely about himself. If old Hamlet is guilty, then the correct course of history was corrupted already at the beginning, and it is young Hamlet and young Fortinbras who should recondition history. History begins—again—with defeating the Poles, but it is Fortinbras now, who succeeds in battle (see 4.4). Thereafter comes a duel, which causes first (not mentioning Laertes) the death of the evil Claudius (the potential third with benefits), and thereafter the death of Hamlet himself. It is Fortinbras now (whose father—at least according to the information provided—was guiltless) who becomes the victorious king, and who gives the new Hamlet another glorious

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582 We should not forget, how he claims coming back from the purgatory, where he is pretty much under the harrow, as he is “for the day confined to fast in fires, till the foul crimes done in my days of nature are burnt and purged away.” Hamlet (1.5.11-13)
funeral, where he again (i.e. as his father), as warrior is mourned. So time becomes curved back to “the beginning of history”.

HAMLET: A murderer and a villain,
A slave that is not twentieth part the kith
Of your precedent lord, a vice of kings,
A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,
That from a shelf the precious diadem stole
And put it in his pocket,—
GERTRUDE: No more!
HAMLET: —a king of shreds and patches—
Enter GHOST

Save me and hover o’er me with your wings,
You heavenly guards!—What would your gracious figure? (3.4.94-102)

Hamlet’s fulmination here about Claudius very satirically meets the arrival of the ghost Hamlet “in his nightgowns”\(^{583}\). Still, despite all vague confusion of human damnation and identity, the speaker’s intention clearly highlights Claudius, the ruling king of Denmark here. While there are few in the play without any real or presumed misdeeds, he obviously is a “central evil” who rules the middle of corrupted history and that person is young Hamlet’s uncle, the “evil mock-king” and “Vice Lord of Misrule”. As Maynard Mack observes, Hyperion’s throne becomes occupied by a “vice of kings,” “a king of shreds and patches”, while Hyperion’s bed becomes occupied “by a satyr, a paddock, a bat, a gib, a bloat king with reechy kisses”\(^{584}\). It is Claudius, who rules the Misrule and he, who has to be overthrown to reach “the new beginning”. He, as evil clown (who can also destroy the fourth wall: 3.1.49-53), as a royal “homo sacer” has no true legitimacy, no “body politic” that allows him to rule them all, as also Hamlet’s superb puns reveal, he is nothing (as we have seen this word working in Lear):

ROSENCRANTZ: My lord, you must tell us where the body is, and go with us to the King.
HAMLET: The body is with the King, but the King is not with the body. The King is a thing.
GUILDENSTERN: A thing, my lord?

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\(^{583}\) See the additional notes in the Arden edition as well, about this confusion even more problematic in the first Quarto. What is still left without attention is, that there is also a third image of a king here, the picture of old Hamlet that his son praises for a long time (3.4.51-). Which of the three “kings” is the “king of shreds and patches”? And which could be the one with the “gracious figure”. I am not sure that necessarily the one in nightgowns.

HAMLET: Of nothing.

Still, while some scholars feel that Claudius’s mock kingdom is the major carnivalesque actuator of the play,\(^5\) this “carnivalesque” is not identical with the concept of carnival we defined in the previous chapters. While Lear has the potential for, and Twelfth Night obviously starts out with it, there is no “carnivalesque mood” in Hamlet. When the question is stated by Marcellus: “why such impress of shipwrights, whose sore task does not divide the Sunday from the week” (1.1.74-75), this directly shows how it is not the time of festivity. Time actually is entirely “lacking” carnival, it is more the “opposite” of how carnival should be. When young Fortinbras is feared to come to Denmark “for food and diet to some enterprise” he is presumed to be coming in a harmless, carnivalesque way, the lines (1.1.98-99) around are full with references to “food” and “the stomach”, as Holger Klein noticed, (according to an indefinite annotation by the Third Arden edition). They are not attacking the country, still, it is fear that defines their reception much more than festive hospitality, because Elsinore is no carnival, but a world tied up into seriousness.

The one who forcibly tries to explain Claudius through the terminology of the carnival is his hater, Hamlet. When he speaks about Claudius, as a carnivalesque mock king, Hamlet is doubtlessly against carnival. He, already at the beginning, is “the Olivia” of the play, who wants to sink himself into grief and fiercely rejects the carnivalesque “mirth in funeral” (1.2.12); who choses “mourning death” against “celebrating marriage”. He is a Whiteface coming directly from Wittenberg, so also “kind of a puritan” (Twelfth Night: 2.3.119).

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Soil our addition, and indeed it takes
From our achievements, though performed at height,
The pith and marrow of our attribute. (1.4.8-22; last six lines only in Q2)

This is how Hamlet sees the carnival tradition at the beginning of the play from a very puritan point of view, especially if it celebrates his hated archenemy. But what he feels is a large exaggeration: while the king truly seems to like drinking (as Johnson wittily observed\(^\text{586}\)) and is pretty happy about his marriage, he seems sometimes scrupulously careful for the balance “with a defeated joy, with an auspicious and a dropping eye” (1.2.10-11). His whole speech about the “correct amount” of mourning (1.2.87-106) is definitely not from the mocking, carnivalesque tradition. He is not an August deservedly opposed by the Whiteface: it is not a clown-play that we see, neither in acts and neither in the syntax of the words. Furthermore, this is only the case in the first act of the play, because after meeting the ghost, it is actually Hamlet who seems to put carnivalesque clowning into practice.

The “Antic Disposition”

Wiles and several other scholars, who tried to explain the lack of a “developed clown or fool character”, with less (or no) emphasis given to the carnival, found a partial solution to this lack in Hamlet’s antic disposition. While Hamlet obviously does not work as a clown at the beginning of the play, anybody can “turn” into a clown when carnival is given. Hamlet’s functioning as a carnivalesque Lord of Misrule (a clown par excellence) is hard to find evidence for, because, according to our Bakhtin-reading, that category should mean a “constant, accredited representative of the carnival spirit in everyday life out of carnival season”, and Hamlet, by contrast, becomes a clown; he is not the one who seduces, but the one who is seduced. His antic disposition already shows itself at the end of the first act, instantly after the ghost is gone. While he only declares his transformation in a more highlighting than concealing pair of parentheses “(as I perchance hereafter shall think meet to put an antic disposition on)” (1.5.169-170) his companions have already discovered his “wild and whirling words” (1.5.132)\(^\text{587}\). In Hamlet’s transformation also a reduced rate of

\(^{586}\) See the third Arden annotation (1.2.125-8).

\(^{587}\) See also the annotation of the Arden edition (1.5.110).
“transdressing” is carried out, described by Ophelia, who sees (or welcomes?) Hamlet’s disposition as “love madness”, through the inspiration of her father, Polonius.\(^{588}\)

\[
\text{[...] Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced;}
\text{No hat upon his head; his stockings fouled,}
\text{Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle;}
\text{Pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each other;}
\text{And with a look so piteous in purport}
\text{As if he had been loosed out of hell [...] (2.1.75-80)}
\]

This clothing of the antic disposition thus also involves a kind of “fouled stockings” and some trouble with the garters, like Malvolio’s clown clothes in *Twelfth Night*. Some kind of relation between these “fool dresses” (at least based on the comparison of the unfavorable manner of wearing clothes) can not entirely be ruled out, especially because the two plays were probably written shortly after each other in 1601.\(^{589}\) And the “transdressing” itself is somewhat parallel to Malvolio’s carnivalesque “transdressing” because they both change their Whiteface attitude to a “disturbed” August behavior. Hamlet, in his Lenten, bereavement-supporting mood exaggerates the time of his father’s death (and the incest of marrying the brother’s wife). First, it is “but two months dead – nay not so much, not two –” (1.2.138) that becomes “within a month” (1.2.145 and 1.2.153) and even “a little month” (1.2.147). Ophelia is the one drawing attention to the real dates in the third act that cover “twice two months” (3.2.121). Hamlet’s antic disposition, his more clownesque attitude is reflected nicely in how the “little month” becomes “two hours” (3.2.120). This can obviously also point to the play itself, which can be going on for like two hours, so this can also function as the destruction of the fourth wall.\(^{590}\) The transgressing skill that Hamlet already

\(^{588}\) We should not forget Polonius’s point. All he is repeating hereafter is Hamlet’s mad attraction to his daughter. He either truly feels sorry for forbidding his romance with Ophelia, or hopes the same forbidding act to finally hit the target, so it would ensure his families entry into the royal family of Denmark. His prohibitions are commonly over exaggerated. He also advises Ophelia to “tender herself more dearly” (1.3.1), to “set her entreatments at a higher rate” (1.3.121). Before the King he implies that “I have a daughter – have while she is mine –” (2.2.105), telling how he ordered her daughter to avoid Hamlet because “Lord Hamlet is a prince, out of thy star” – a rhetorical turn, an outheld carrot and a pretty obvious lie. That is why “love” in his explanation keeps to be the cause of Hamlet’s madness. Polonius, in my opinion, would like Ophelia to seduce Hamlet into marriage—in place of simply “giving in” to him. This is far from the frequently adopted father-figure who prohibits the love of the youth with conviction.


\(^{590}\) This is Klein’s observation, see the annotation in the third Arden edition. See the annotation to 3.2.120.1.
possesses here also shows, of course, a kind of clownesque quality. In the court of Denmark, he is the only one “looking out of the picture”\textsuperscript{591}.

David Wiles restricts the clown-role of Hamlet to the Mousetrap-scene.

Hamlet is signaling also that he has adopted the clown’s role, jesting and singing to introduce the play that is about to happen. He positions himself informally, lying at Ophelia’s feet, and studying Claudius’s face. Placed both verbally and visually halfway between play and audience, he is ‘as good as a chorus’. Mingled with puns and parody, his jests betray Tarlton’s penchant for jibes and Kemp’s for extempore alliteration. When the players end their play, Hamlet’s clown takes the stage and plays on […] Like the clown in the public theatres, Hamlet sings as soon as the play is over – and probably also dances to the physically expressive ‘Thus runs the world away’.\textsuperscript{592}

Nevertheless, Hamlet’s antic disposition abundantly precedes the scene and he clearly is clowning in a carnivalesque way already in the second act of the play, as Maynard Mack observes when stating how even “the madness of Hamlet is riddling”\textsuperscript{593}. He, acquiring the viewpoint of an August, calls the overzealous courtier, Polonius (how familiar this confrontation is after reading \textit{Twelfth Night}) a “fishmonger” (2.2.171) which obviously classifies him as a Lenten person\textsuperscript{594}. He speaks in the most basic utterance of carnival, about the “breading death”, sexuality and sexual potential (or the lack of it in an old person), all hidden in the words directed at Polonius (2.2.178-201) and also uses a pretty bawdy language for his discussion with Guildenstern and Rosencrantz on the “private sphere” of Lady Fortune (2.2.224-231). When he tells about Polonius that he is “for a jig or a tale of bawdry, or he sleeps” (2.2.438), he does not degrade “comedy” as a genre, but keeps up with the sarcastic mocking of the man himself, whom he just had entertained (in fact: fooled) some 200 lines before. Hamlet’s clowning continuous without interruption, as it is highlighted by most critics building on Hamlet’s clowning qualities. The bawdy chatter between Hamlet and Ophelia (about Ophelia’s lap) becomes here a dominantly humorous,

\textsuperscript{591} As Henry Paterson, the fool of Sir Thomas More looks out to the viewer, from the More family picture painted by Hans Holbein.


Also other critical editions clearly identify „fishmonger” here as a synonym for whoremonger.
carnivalesque episode of the play. This dialog is so direct and explicit with its richness of Dionysian ambiguity and lower stratum jokes that it should not need a detailed explanation here; I will leave it aside in order to get to more problematic matters.

The “theatre in the theatre” scenes are frequently playgrounds of the easily transgressing clowns as we can observe this in The Taming of the Shrew, when Christopher Sly is persuaded (perhaps before an aristocratic audience) that he is an aristocrat, watching a play, or in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, where the workers present a textbook example of a clownish play, while they stage Pyramus and Thisbe. They all are clowns who, through destroying the borders between different layers of fictions and realities engulf everybody in the reality of the carnival. It is Hamlet, who “has to” take up this profession here, and he also begins to act like a Lord of Misrule, “arranging for a light and lewd entertainment during festival time, like e.g. the twelve days of Christmas.” His role as the Lord of Misrule—as also Pikli puts it—“is reaffirmed by the way he comments continuously on what is going on on stage and off stage, finally presenting a song in easy and catchy meter, in style quite similar to Lear’s Fool’s chants.” Hamlet’s lines following “What, frighted with false fires...” truly seem to justify this assumption (Q1 9.174-178). And also later in the play, Hamlet has carnivalesque ridiculing at his hand.

HAMLET: Not where he eats, but where 'a is eaten. A certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet. We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service, two dishes but to one table. That’s the end.
KING: Alas, alas.
HAMLET: A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.
KING: What dost thou mean by this?
HAMLET: Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar. (4.3.19-30)

596 Idem. p. 130
597 If Hamlet acts as a Lord of Misrule, a traditional organizer of carnival events (that is necessarily a clown), he cannot be a playwright, so his instructions given about the clowns for the “Murder of Gonzago” are given in an entirely different interpretive environment. This is a perfect case where the omission of the carnivalesque side of the Early Modern theatre not only leads astray but also closes down the path and leaves no way back.
598 Pikli also adds, how the second Quarto also strengthens Hamlet’s Lord of Misrule position, because “at the end of the scene (before Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter), he rounds off the on-stage and off-stage performance with calling for music several times.”
The usual commentary to these lines is that Hamlet here already seems to be in the mood to think about the overcoming of the rotting decay of death as annihilation, and that he also makes a remark on the Diet of Worms and therefore the war between Catholicism and Protestantism. But these lines also seem to attack the King in a carnivalesque manner: while death and carnival both seem to bring equality to the social hierarchy, Hamlet here still uses a carnivalesque language of eating and drinking.

However, Hamlet’s clowning comes to a sudden halt: the antic disposition is left behind after (or even meanwhile) the fourth act and Hamlet again changes into something else. As explained in the previous chapter on King Lear, Hamlet’s clownish manner in these scenes—as always—should be connected to the carnivalesque folly-tradition, but here another tradition of “folly” is interwoven. Hamlet’s famous soliloquy immediately after the ghost leaving the stage (1.5.91), and somewhat before his companions noticing his madness (1.5.132), reads as follows:

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O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?
And shall I couple hell? O fie, hold, hold, my heart,
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee!
Ay, thou poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe. Remember thee!
Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
That youth and observation copied there,
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmix'd wit [160x302]h baser matter […]
[...] Now to my word:
It is ‘Adieu, adieu: remember me!’
I have sworn’t. (1.5.92-104, 110-112)
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These lines not only recall the dominantly Christian mood of the committed apostles of Christ, but directly evoke lines from the Bible. Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians, when he preaches against the so-called “false wisdom”:

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For the preaching of the Crosse is to them that perish, foolishnesse: but vnto vs which are saued, it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisedome of the wise, and wil bring to nothing the vnderstanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the Scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisedome of this world? For after that, in the wisedom of God, the world by wisedome knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishnesse of preaching, to saue them that beleue. For the Iewes require a signe, and the Greekes seeke after
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wisedome. But wee preach Christ crucified, vnto the lewes a stumbling block, and 
vnto the Greekes, foolishnesse [...]599

This foolishness of Christ is not directly connected at carnivalesque rituality. It is more a 
kind of positive emptiness, “blankness” that is able to receive the Teaching. This blankness is 
realized as an opposition of the “Wisdom” of the Greeks (λόγος). While this theologically 
also appears as a kind of lack, or null600, it is far from being carnivalesque (laughable). Also 
John Chrysostom explains these lines in one of his homilies:

Because what external wisdom was not able to find, it was the foolishness of Christ 
which was able to find it. This chased away the darkness covering the inhabited land, 
it was this that spread the light of knowledge. But when are we fools of Christ? If we 
soothe our unsuitably boiling thoughts, if we deprive and empty our minds of the 
external education, so that when it comes to the acceptance of what Christ gives to 
us, we can make our minds free and swept clean for the absorption of the divine 
Words.601

Making our minds free and swept clean here also refers to Mathew 12,44, where this 
emptiness of the mind actually means the banishment of a demonic possession. The “folly” 
that God loves—and that seems to be recalled here—thus means a lack of demonic 
possession (either the pagan Greek λόγος, or the realm of Greek knowledge), a pure 
condition of the mind without “all the trivial fond records”. This “folly tradition” has survived 
with God’s “holy fools”, especially in the orthodox world (through the Byzantine “salos” and 
the Russian “jurodivij”) and seems to have nothing to do with the old ritual traditions that 
built up the world of the carnival. Folly here should be pure “emptiness”, but Hamlet, as a 
deceived apostle, confuses his father’s ghost for Christ when he answers “the Call”. His 
mission is not Christ’s mission of love, but revenge, and he also becomes addicted to that 
mission.

This way his folly becomes something foreign to what I call “the wisdom of folly”. He, 
instead of facilitating the triumph of folly, becomes madly attached to his worldly issues: he 
chews on it, he is enlivened by it. While his “folly” prevails, he actually becomes—through 
his “pure emptiness” against a presumed “demonic fulfillment”—more and more covered by

599 1Cor 1,18-23. I am citing the official King James Bible from 1611.
600 According to Ritter’s laughter theory and the “place value” of the homo sacer as introduced in the first 
chapter.
601 John Chrysostom, A felfoghatatlanról és az Egyszülött dicsőségéről. Kilenc prédikáció az ariánusok ellen. [On 
the Unfathomable and the Glory of the First-Born. Nine Homilies against the Aryans] (translated by Perczel 
the world of seriousness, the war of ideologies (where religion, chastity, death and sin play fundamental roles). Whereas carnivalesque folly should liberate his mind, these pressing forces of seriousness actually limit and “imprison” him in Denmark more than ever. It is a prison of seriousness, where conflicting domains of Rule keep him at bay. Just one example is the paradox of a ghost from the Catholic realm (the purge) that orders him to take revenge even if it costs his life. But there are so many conflicting orders and Rules, duties and obligations that different interpretations on Hamlet’s hesitation could fill libraries. And they do.

Richard Fly in his interesting discussion about Hamlet recalls the similarity of Hamlet’s and Lear’s madness.602 He mentions how their state of mind turns their universe out of its corners and how with their death it turns back into the position of normality. But is that actually right? From the point of the theological structure of the two kinds of madness (madness being the condition of the homo sacer) they truly are similar to each other: while Lear instantly loses everything and becomes through this in a sense nothing, Hamlet, in emptying himself from the λόγος, can also become nothing, or null. Their languages are also similar: they speak in a mad manner with an underlying reason still concealed in the code of madness. This underlying reason, their addiction to their ideological issues (the plot) do not let them become entirely carnivalesque. Still, Lear’s melancholy seems to “lighten” up—even if this only proves to be the mean hoax in the tragic structure—while Hamlet’s madness just “stops” after some time. Also, the huge difference again comes from their potentials in action: Lear’s long passive misery and Hamlet’s passivity have nothing in common. The latter has every opportunity to do something, while the former did something that seems to be irreversible. Hamlet himself chooses a kind of “passivity” before acting, while Lear himself becomes sentenced to passivity by his former action. In this regard, Hamlet’s folly is closer to the folly of Edgar, who envelopes himself into the “madness” of “Poor Tom”, to change his personality entirely (for the sake of being non compos). But Hamlet is not able to transform himself the way Edgar does603; in this respect, he is similar to Caius/Kent, who is also

603 This is also shown in how he never transgresses the social borders for example. Without a spectacular play with changing social classes one can never truly “loose his personality” to (carnivalesque) folly, as Edgar’s, Lear’s, Toby Belch’s or—reversely—Malvolio’s example has shown.
unsuccessful in fully letting his personality behind, and thus can not become entirely *homo sacer*; that is why Claudius in the end can still find Hamlet dangerous. As Disher writes, the clown (in the Harlequinade) easily becomes the “x” in mathematics, “by leaving what Harlequin equaled to be worked out by the performance, the parody could be on occasion a satire too daring to be stated in plain terms” and this is what Hamlet also fails to accomplish: he is not able “to go down into clown” and this particularly means the failure of his “antic disposition”. Michael Neill, for example, notes that “the intolerable tension between his duties to articulate what has been rendered (literally) unspeakable” becomes a typical “linguistic breakdown which bespeaks an inner disintegration, while nevertheless allowing a kind of inarticulate utterance to the unutterable”. But madness and revenge become interconnected without attention given to a critical detail (and that is, of course, not the difference between “playing mad” or “being mad”). Madness, or folly—in Hamlet at least—is “failed” because of its inability to get rid of “the shackle of reason” that keeps revenge in motion. Hamlet’s *homo sacer* madness should move him into a safe distance from Claudius, who he also tries to plot against, from this same distance. But revenge also fails, because just this little foolishness already makes Hamlet passive enough “not to act”. Empson also discusses this in *Hamlet*, when he notes how “the effect of mutuality” seems to be parallel in the figure of the clown and the Revenger. Because the Revenger’s revenge will make more revengers (as the fool’s folly makes more fools), so that “the blood-feud goes on”. According to Empson “the final holocaust which makes so many Elizabethan plays too absurd to revive was meant to show his power to drag everyone to his own way of feeling.” The carnivalesque option of folly and “the position of the revenger” become mixed up by Hamlet, who tries to transgress “wrong borders”. While he is in search of the revenger’s identity, probably fearing the result of a “correct transformation”, tries out the clown identity instead. In conclusion, nor he, nor his uncle is essentially carnivalesque. As also Michael Bristol points out:

604 His madness folds itself into an Othello-like “blind” and raging madness, when he kills Polonius hiding behind the curtain. This is what Lear never reaches (although he asks for it when he screams at the stormy sky), and what Hamlet also refers to much later when talking to Laertes (5.2.204-221).
The characters adopt these personae, not because either one of them as a character enjoys any motivated relationship with authentic popular energies, but because these personae are the resources that theatre makes available for constituting the image of political and dynastic struggle.608

The “Doubleness” Tradition

Hamlet’s “changes in his identities” draws us to the critical tradition of his “doubleness”. “Doing” and “not doing”, “recoil” and “drawing back” together puzzle Hamlet’s attitude until the last part of the play, whereafter a major change in his attitude occurs soon after he leaves his “antic disposition”, which is difficult to explain. However his personalities actually organize themselves, it is easy to find a huge difference between his wished attitude and his present one, in Freudian terms, his ego and his superego. The play itself shows what Hamlet wants to be and also what he is, in the confronting example of Laertes. Polonius, when giving his son guidelines, exactly describes how Hamlet will behave:

[...] give thy thoughts no tongue
Nor any unproportioned thought his act.
Be thou familiar but by no means vulgar;
Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel,
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
Of each new-hatched, unfledged courage. Beware
Of entrance to a quarrel, but being in,
Bear’t that th’opposed may beware of thee.
Give every man thy ear but few thy voice;
Take each man’s censure but reserve thy judgment. (1.3.58-68)

Still, this is exactly opposed to what Laertes himself actually will do; he—without any further thinking—immediately would march into vengeance and act, even if his acting meant damnation.

[...] I’ll not be juggled with.
To hell, allegiance, vows to the blackest devil,
Conscience and grace to the profoundest pit.
I dare damnation. To this point I stand –
That both the worlds I give to negligence.
Let come what comes, only I’ll be revenged
Most thoroughly for my father. (4.5.129-134)

This difference between Laertes and Hamlet also shows very nicely when we notice how Hamlet in the third act (soon after the theatre scene) still chooses not to take Claudius’s life, because he is praying. This is exactly the behavior that is surpassed by Laertes, who could cut Hamlet’s “throat i’th’church” in his wrath after the death of his father and his sister going mad. Hamlet’s desire to acquire that attitude is also shown in his talking about the young Fortinbras (who is also more like Laertes). During his last appearance on stage in the fourth act, i.e. relatively late in the play, Hamlet contemplates on the marching Norwegian army. Here he seems to find his ideals embodied in the “tender prince” Fortinbras, “whose spirit with divine ambition puffed makes mouths at the invisible event exposing what is mortal and unsure to all that fortune, death and danger dare even for an eggshell” (4.4.47-52). Hamlet’s admiration shows the difference between him and his objects of awe, and this difference articulates Hamlet’s inability to act wonderfully.

But somewhere after these lines, in the next scenes, Hamlet, the unsuccessful plotter for revenge, the hesitant prolixchanges into a “daring” avenger. Being daring does not actually mean that he could at least seize the initiative (which he was plotting to do in the last four acts), and could at least devise a “successful plan” against the murderer of his father. Hamlet’s failure to take revenge at the end of the play is a failure, because he—as opposed to e.g. the Count of Monte Christo—lacks the triumph of those avengers, who can pose as the executor of the plot who was in control of the events at all the time. Hamlet simply lets revenge be. Still, he clearly changes into “something”. Where does this change actually happen in the play?

The difference between Hamlet’s costumes is one possible sign that can locate that change, at least according to Maynard Mack. He also notes, how Hamlet is actually “aware of that fine position of body and mind, feeling and thought, that suits the action to the word, the word to the action”, but he thinks Hamlet is vacillating too much “between undisciplined squads of emotion and thinking too precisely on the event”. Then, however, Hamlet in the

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609 It is memorable how T. S. Eliot assumed this an artistic failure: “The levity of Hamlet, his repetition of phrase, his puns, are not part of a deliberate plan of dissimulation [like in Thomas Kyd’s Hamlet], but a form of emotional relief. In the character Hamlet it is the buffoonery of an emotion which can find no outlet in action; in the dramatist it is the buffoonery of an emotion which he cannot express in art.” T. S. Eliot, “Hamlet and His Problems.” In: The Sacred Wood. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921. p. 93


611 Idem. p. 57
end “accepts his world and we discover a different man”; he accepts the role at the very end of the play. However, Mack’s interpretation, strictly speaking, leaves the problem without a real explanation—Mack thinks Shakespeare himself simply did not “outline for us the process of acceptance” here. According to Mack, it is the long absence from the stage that should usually warn us to be on the watch for a new phase in the development of the character. His similar example is King Lear, when he is left in Gloucester’s farmhouse and thereafter found again in Dover fields 612.

This “explanation”—as a supposed “dramatic-narrative failure” by Shakespeare—became later more articulated by James Calderwood, and his otherwise highly valuable To be or Not to Be. Calderwood introduces his interest as follows:

If cause and effect seem reversed here, we can attribute it to Shakespeare's own dramatic reveals and interventions, which are of two kinds. First, the moment of Hamlet's crucial change is not dramatized for us but narrated. The change itself takes place in that great off-stage void from which only ghosts, ambassadors, and pirate messengers return. As narrated history, then, Hamlet's nascent change appears in retrospect, filtered to us through time and distancer and Hamlet the tale-teller who is himself at one lucky remove from his experience. Thus the changing Hamlet at sea lives only in the voice of the changed Hamlet back at court, and the tone of that voice imparts a sense of composure and transcendence (literary providential transcendence) to an action described as »rash« and frightening. 613

Calderwood practically confesses his inability to find an explanation for Hamlet’s “metamorphosis” within the play and tries to explain it through an entirely strange sense of “narration” in dramatic genres as such. In Hamlet’s case, this narrative for Calderwood is the story Hamlet tells to Horatio about his adventures while at sea sailing to England. Thus Calderwood locates the turn outside the stage. However, we should recall that the lines Calderwood uses as evidence occur at the beginning of the second scene of the fifth act, long after, it seems, the Prince’s return to Elsinore. For the whole (close to 300 lines long) first scene he has no working explanation, so he even sets down this insufficiency to Shakespeare’s not being coherent enough. 614 Calderwood’s attempts soon become overcomplicated and difficult to follow. He concludes: “probably no attempt to account for

612 Idem. p. 57-58
614 Ibid.
Hamlet’s change on a purely psychological basis will prove entirely persuasive.” But this argumentation, emphasizing that the “decisive turn” was “most insignificant” for Shakespeare does not hold, although it became a trend for many years.

Roland Mushat Frye’s monumental *The Renaissance Hamlet* turned back to the actual performance and tried to locate “the turn” where it belongs. He also thought that it is not the revealing of background machinations or the turns of events that trigger the Prince’s transmutation (or transubstantiation) but something hidden in the last act. Nevertheless, he has his difficulties locating the main event. He finally selects the struggle over Ophelia’s corpse as the last event where Hamlet’s “wild and whirling” demeanor breaks out for the last time and whereafter his new, impressive “serenity” comes to the fore: at last he becomes forcefully pushed out of his doubleness. So Hamlet’s character can develop “into what Elizabethans would have regarded as a fuller (although by no means complete) wisdom and vision. The greater breadth and depth of understanding.” But with that, while actually saving the second part of the scene, Frye still ignores the first half: how does Hamlet’s “serenity” already fully function before it should begin? For him, the Gravedigger scene seems to be a powerful “mood changer”. R. M. Frye dives into the depths of the *vanitas* tradition, *memento mori*, *danse macabre* and even *carpe diem* to determine the Prince’s “serenity”, but the contradiction—how Ophelia’s burial breaks this—still remains. If the Hamlet before the burial scene is not the Hamlet with the “serenity”, and also not the Hamlet with the “antic disposition” anymore, not to mention the Hamlet, as the “newly found revenger”, then who is this Hamlet at the beginning of the fifth act at all?

And, as the matter of fact, is the burial event really that quaint at all? Frye bases his thoughts on the strangeness of Hamlet getting into this unreasonable fight; Hamlet gives Laertes such a “thorough thrashing” in Ophelia’s grave that Laertes becomes “unable to

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speak again in this scene”\textsuperscript{619}. Let us—in a little rush—consider this short part in question. Firstly, while many critical editions choose the seemingly more rational solution to get Laertes out of Ophelia’s grave before their struggle with Hamlet, the first Quarto, as many other sources\textsuperscript{620}, clearly direct Hamlet to jump into the grave were Laertes already is (from 5.1.239). So there the question is: what is Hamlet’s reason to attack Laertes, a brother just bidding his sister farewell? The first question even is why Laertes himself jumps into the grave at all. He loudly declares: “[...] Hold off the earth awhile, till I have caught her once more in mine arms” (5.1.238-239). Hamlet here, for the first time, realizes what we—with the other figures of the play—already know: that Ophelia died. He thus runs to the grave and jumps into it, just next to Laertes, probably to do the same. This is a clear, unambiguous reaction, the most likely action one would take in real life. So, of course, it is not Hamlet who attacks Laertes (why would he?) but Laertes who seizes Hamlet (whom he sees for the first time, after he killed his father, drove his sister into suicide, and just next to him now, tries to take her body in his arms). Hamlet, probably in the shock of the sudden attack (he knows nothing about Ophelia’s death for sure) tries to shake off the furious Laertes, who does not let him touch the dead body of the woman Hamlet loved. He even asks Laertes to let him go:

I prithee, take thy fingers from my throat,  
For, though I am not splenitive and rash,  
Yet have I something in me dangerous,  
Which let thy wisdom fear. Hold off thy hand. (5.1.249-252)

Hamlet does not understand it at all: why would Laertes refuse him to touch Ophelia’s body, mourn her with all his hearth, as Laertes does? It is him, Hamlet, who loved her, “forty thousand brothers could not with all their quantity of love make up this sum” (5.1.258-260). Earlier Laertes very clearly blamed someone for the death of Ophelia (5.1.236-238), but he never actually uttered Hamlet’s name. The fight from the side of Hamlet first seems to be self-defense, but it quickly goes pretty rough:

‘Swounds, show me what thou’lt do.  
Woo’t weep? Woo’t fight? Woo’t fast? Woo’t tear thyself?  
Woo’t drink up eisel, eat a crocodile?


\textsuperscript{620} See the Arden annotation for line (5.1.247).
I’ll do ‘t. Dost thou come here to whine,  
To outface me with leaping in her grave?  
Be buried quick with her?—and so will I.  
And if thou prate of mountains let them throw  
Millions of acres on us, till our ground,  
Singeing his pate against the burning zone,  
Make Ossa like a wart! Nay, an thou’lt mouth,  
I’ll rant as well as thou. (5.1.263-273)

Hamlet does not understand the situation, so he asks for the reasons. And because of not getting an answer, he finally drops the problem with a “let him be” (5.1.277-279). The sentence here: “Let Hercules himself do what he may, the cat will mew and dog will have his day” (5.1.280-281) probably means just like that, something close to “better bend than break”. This situation seems to be clear and recognizable. There is no reason for considering this entirely understandable action itself a sharp turning point at all.

The Gravedigging Scene

For R. M. Frye and Calderwood the Graveyard scene, after Hamlet’s trip and before Ophelia’s burial, becomes only responsible for the mood; for getting the audience ready for Hamlet’s “turn”. The location matches Hamlet’s “gloomy resignation” very well: the burial site is also the burial of the Prince’s “antic disposition”. Calderwood cites Bridget Gellert Lyons, who thinks that the abandonment of the “antic disposition” is not only indicated by the Prince’s new apparel but also by his new language. Calderwood even suggests that Hamlet’s burying of the jester in himself—through the unburying of Yorick—reminds us about how there is no official jester permitted in the court of Claudius: “When the lie wears ermine, the truth cannot go even in motley”622. But this contradicts, inter alia, Hamlet’s “Whiteface accusations” against Claudius in the first act, so we do not have to pursue it further.

A fertile critical discussion of the actual Gravedigger scene in Hamlet mostly concentrating on the display of death began with C. S. Lewis’s short but thrilling essay, where he compares “death” in Hamlet to “death” in other plays.

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Macbeth has commerce with Hell, but at the very outset of his career dismisses all thought of the life to come. For Brutus and Othello, suicide in the high tragic manner is escape and climax. For Romeo and Antony, poignant loss. For all these, as for their author while he writes and the audience while they watch, death is the end: it is almost the frame of the picture. They think of dying: no one thinks, in these plays, of being dead. In Hamlet we are kept thinking about it all the time, whether in terms of the soul’s destiny or of the body’s. Purgatory, Hell, Heaven, the wounded name, the rights—or wrongs—of Ophelia’s burial, and the staying-power of a tanner’s corpse: and beyond this, beyond all Christian and all Pagan maps of the hereafter, comes a curious groping and tapping of thoughts, about “what dreams may come.” It is this that gives to the whole play its quality of darkness and of misgiving.623

This questioning position seems a decisive issue in the play, and was probably very much an issue Shakespeare’s older contemporaries began to be occupied with. Spencer even states that it was the English dramatic tradition that first faced the new concept of “death”, which particularly marks the beginning of individualism624. This also meets the opinion of Philippe Ariés himself in his The Hour of Our Death. To the contrary, Ralph Anthony Houlbrooke claimed that the new concept of death rather gave rise to individualism625, but it is not a question that Hamlet and its gravedigger scene should be included in a discussion of these matters. Michael Neill’s Issues of Death, which is one of the best monographs in the last few decades on death and the individual, suggests that we should see “episodes like Hamlet’s interrogation of the Grave-digger as gestic demonstrations [sic!] of what Renaissance tragic drama, at its core, is about—the discovery of death and the mapping of its meanings”626, and that these tragedies themselves “reinvented death” in the Renaissance. The “death” that is present in the Graveyard scene (or the “death” that is presented by the Graveyard scene) is, in fact, a key issue of the drama—and of Early Modern drama itself.

Still, these studies do not consider carnival and thus tend to forget how death should have been perceived from an entirely other, aesthetic point of view during carnival-time, when clowns and fools take the stage. In many editions, not to mention translations, it

remains hidden that the gravedigger and his friend are actually *clowns*, although the two Quartos and also the Folio do identify the players in the fifth act as “clowns”, which their behavior certainly confirms. Furthermore, even the most insightful critics who are aware of the gravedigger and his friend being *clowns*, do not relate them to the carnivalesque tradition. It is true that if one follows the Hotson-Wiles conception she has few chances to understand the role of these characters. At the beginning of my chapter I noted how Bakhtin, in his excerpts on Shakespeare, failed to make any important remarks on *Hamlet*, but in the Rabelais book, when he discusses Jean Paul’s aesthetics, he does mention how (according to Jean Paul) “melancholy clowns” of *Hamlet* are “deriding the entire world”. In the *Dialogic Imagination* *Hamlet* is referred to as well, when Bakhtin notes how the tight matrix of death with laughter, with food, with drink, with sexual indecencies can be found in other figures of the Renaissance as well. Shakespeare’s “Falstaff scenes, the cheerful gravediggers in *Hamlet*, the cheerful drunk porter in *Macbeth*” are shown to be parallel with Boccaccio (in the framing story itself, and in the material of the separate stories), with Pulci (the description of deaths and of paradise during the Battle of Roncevalles) and also with Margutte (a prototype for Panurge, who dies of laughter). Finally, with the gravedigger scene, we get to see a carnivalesque scene that we can work on. It is not *Hamlet*’s antic disposition that transforms him in the end, but the Gravedigger scene, where it is not him who is carnivalesque at all.

627 The third Arden edition is entirely right on the doubt of having two gravediggers in the play. There are no sure signs on the second clown being a gravedigger, see: pp. 144-145, n21. What we at least know about both of them that they are clowns.  
History and Inspiration

A scene in the graveyard seems to be a great innovation. The *vanitas* tradition, well known in fine art, has never been so visible in dramatic art. R. M. Frye states that the bones and skulls appearing on the stage were only seen in pictures on jewels and coffins before. Even more so, we are not aware, before or after *Hamlet*, of any other plays giving such an important role to gravediggers, as Frye observes (without any further commentary). Neill connects them to the superstitious fear that was also felt of hangmen, especially because of their joint appearances with the plague (through the figure of Death) which thereafter made them “the bringers of devastation.” But Neill’s sources (Deaux, Nohl and Chamberlain) only investigated the gravedigger in relation to the plague, therefore this superstitious fear from the figure seems to be exaggerated. Carnival and the sphere of death represented by tombs and graves became actually frequently related to each other from the Middle Ages; since *clowns* circumvented Death topographically, they were often represented in graveyards. The cemeteries, especially around churches and church walls became popular locations for carnival events. Such activities were mostly concentrated in the northern part which was also known as the “devil’s side” of the graveyard. Laughter and Death met basically on the level of festive symbolism, where their battle, as the clownish battle of Life and Death, became the most pure form of the *clown-play* described above. Bristol also notes how Thomas Dekker’s *The Wonderfull Yeare* refers to this carnivalesque mockery of Death and decay (even in the shadow of the plague). However, this is exactly (and especially *Hamlet’s* Graveyard scene) the form of carnivalesque in the Early Modern theatre which is aggressively attacked as early as in Sir Philip Sidney’s *An Apology for Poetry*. Sidney, fearing

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632 *Idem*. p. 225
636 See how Shakespeare uses the same setting for the Porter scene (2.3) in *Macbeth*.
“popular carnivalesque impact” discussed the problem of the carnivalesque in tragedy as an issue of dramatic genre:

But, besides these gross absurdities, how all their plays be neither right tragedies nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in the clown by head and shoulders to play a part in majestical matters, with neither decency nor discretion; so as neither the admiration and commiseration, nor the right sportfulness, is by their mongrel tragi-comedy obtained. I know Apuleius did somewhat so, but that is a thing recounted with space of time, not represented in one moment; and I know the ancients have one or two examples of tragi-comedies, as Plautus hath Amphytrio. But, if we mark them well, we shall find that they never, or very daintily, match hornpipes and funerals. So falleth it out that, having indeed no right comedy in that comical part of our tragedy, we have nothing but scurrility, unworthy of any chaste ears, or some extreme show of doltishness, indeed fit to lift up a loud laughter, and nothing else... 639

In the graveyard scene “mirth in funeral and dirge in marriage” (1.2.12) coalesce in the figure of Ophelia who, instead of marrying Hamlet becomes the “wife of Death” (as Gertrude laments in 5.1.233-235). Where marriage and burial are involved simultaneously, the ritual forms of carnival might be involved. That is successfully proven by the wordplay—and possibly also by the gegs—of the clowns in the scene.

How Shakespeare’s clown-actors themselves got involved in the actual gravedigger scene has become a central point in discussions nowadays, because the exact dating of the play has been connected to this question. If—it is argued—the clown-role was designed for Robert Armin, then he must have been already part of the troupe. That way he could pay a vicarious tribute to his mentor, Tarlton, when the gravedigging clown gives Hamlet the skull of the King’s jester 640. So Armin’s identity with the clown here cannot be ruled out completely 641. Mahood, for example, thinks that the gravedigger was the first role Armin played in the company. While the Hotson-Wiles categorization arbitrarily defines a particular Armin-figure, and thus is inflexible as to the possibility of the carnival-tradition, flexible clown characters can make that fairly plausible.

641 It also is possible that Shakespeare added to, or extended the Gravedigger-scene in a 1601-version because Armin joined the group in the meantime. About the dating of Hamlet see Jenkins (The Arden Shakespeare: Hamlet. (Ed. by Harold Jenkins) London and New York: Methuen, 1982. pp. 1-13): there are two stages in the composition of the tragedy. There is a play from late 1599, early 1600 and a rewritten version from 1601 in which Shakespeare added references to the theatre-war, the rivalry between the children’s companies led by John Lily and the adult companies such as Shakespeare’s company, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men.
However we calculate, while Armin himself cannot entirely be ruled out, the “rustic” figure of the gravedigger also has a lot in common with the “professional Fool type” or the jester as well. The mocking discussion between him and the Prince about the royal family indicates this as well. There are several recorded anecdotes and stories about Fools (clowns) and princes discussing matters in the way Hamlet and the gravedigger banter with each other. Many of them come, as Welsford observes, from the cultural memory of Shakespeare’s time. One of the most widespread figures of these anecdotes is Marcolphus, the Fool who frequently quarreled with King Solomon. It is told about Marcolphus (or Marcolf) that he solved Solomon’s riddles and replied, propounding in like matter, riddles to be solved in their turn. Their discussions, teeming with suggestive riddles and (for Marcolphus) indecency in a carnivalesque way, show many similarities to the Hamlet-Gravedigger exchange, and may also have a direct impact—through the Marcolphus connection—on Anglo-Saxon culture. Certain elements of his back chat lived on in stories of other fools for centuries in England (or in any other part of the world). William Sommer, who also “had many of the tricks of the stage-clown” used to mockingly “talk back to the king” as well, at least according to Armin’s work on fools.

Moreover, there is a scene directly coming from the carnival world at the time that can be linked with *Hamlet* (5.1). I already mentioned the carnivalesque “theatre-making” at the big universities around London—also operating in Shakespeare’s time—that was going on on popular holydays. Here festive Lords (Christmas Lord, Lord of the Bean) were chosen to rule upon the carnival society of the festival. The interrelatedness between the performances of the playing companies and these “amateur events” is nicely shown in how, for example, Shakespeare’s *Comedy of Errors* was introduced at “The Night of Errors”, a carnival event.

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643 Ibid.
644 The Fool of the popular Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus (immortalized in János Arany’s *Pázmán lovag* [Knight Pazman]) is also one, who inherited many of Marcolphus’s adventures. But Bertoldo (from Lombardy), who had an enormous impact on Commedia dell’Arte, or the English Scogi were also carriers of his legacy.
646 See the chapter of the *Foole Upon Foole* about “A merry Foole”: Robert Armin, *Foole upon Foole. or Sixe sortes of sottes*. London, 1605. pp. 30-37.
647 William Canning – Francis Bacon – Francis Davison, *Gesta Grayorum, or, The history of the high and mighty prince, Henry Prince of Purpoole . . . who reigned and died, A.D. 1594 : together with a masque, as it was presented (by His Highness’s command) for the entertainment of Q. Elizabeth, who, with the nobels of both courts, was present thereat*. London, 1688. p. 23: “[...] Lastly, that he had foisted a Company of base and common Fellows, to make up our Disorders with a Play of Errors and Confusions; and that that Night had
in 1594. In 1607 at one of these events a dramatic play was staged under the “Misrule” of Thomas Tucker that has been preserved in text. We read here how in the plot a revolt starts against a Prince by a so-called Philosophus, who is angry because he was cold-shouldered. Philosophus also gains the support of Fortuna, who is outraged by the Prince, who fails to show signs of worship in her shrine. The Prince’s Councillors, finding that popular feeling has turned against their ruler, resign their offices. Only Stultus, the Fool remains faithful. The climax comes when the Prince pulls back the curtain that hides Fortuna's inner shrine, and beholds a tomb. The Councilors, terrified at the sight, throw their emblems of office into the grave and take to flight, while Stultus cries, “Ego non relinquam, sed adero certus comes”, and salutes the Prince as a yoke-fellow (colleague or close companion). So the Prince and his joking Fool at a tomb as a typical carnival event can be found on stage close to the year of King Lear. Thus, the Graveyard scene is proven to be a legitimate opportunity for carnivalesque playing.

**Role of the Clowns in the Gravedigging Scene**

First, we have to see how the clowns do not only take part in the scene but also rule the whole part. Bridget Gellert Lyons even notes how Hamlet’s first remark is tantamount to a denial of his own behavior in the earlier episodes, and in that respect the scene truly seems to “bury” Hamlet’s own clowniness, which could never actually commence. As Bristol sums this up, neither Hamlet, nor Claudius is able to provide a perfect amalgam of laughter and death because “authority for the comprehensive disclosure of death as a laughing matter resides with the two clowns.” The clowns very clearly argue for the carnival and oppose “the separation of death from life, praise from invective”. They also transgress the borders gained to us Discredit, and it self a Nickname of Errors. All which were against the Crown and Dignity of our Sovereign Lord, the Prince of Purpoole.”

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650 Michael Bristol in Carnival and Theater. Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England. London – New York: Routledge, 1989. p. 188, even if only one of them is demonstrably a Gravedigger, as noted before.

of fiction and reality, living in *plateia*: Hamlet’s Elsinore and Shakespeare’s England simultaneously. They speak about nearby alehouses (5.1.55-56, especially in the Folio), sing contemporary melodies\(^652\), and mention an England where—like Hamlet—everybody is mad (5.1.141-146). Their whole language is more of the familiar and casual kind heard on e.g. at the marketplace than being a kind of “historical reality” of a faraway time. From their position “in-between” they can also comment on the play itself, and—in a carnivalesque way—explain it as well. They, as Shakespearean *clowns*, indeed have the skill to paraphrase, actualize the plot, “refresh” the spirit of the audience and smuggle in Early Modern references through buffoonery, since *clowns* are independent of historical time. Since they have no past or future, they represent the ever-vibrant, vivid world of the present.

In their jovial discussion they call the liminal society of the carnival into life and deconstruct the separating borders of a society—as Death does— which, on the other hand, seems much more like Shakespeare’s Early Modern society than any other. The members of this society become one (the politician, the courtier, the lawyer, the tanner, even Ophelia, old Yorick and perhaps old Hamlet as well), the impermanence in each and “Every-body” becomes a laughing stock: the singing, dancing ritual clowns unite and unify humanity through laughter; the universe is laughing at itself in this non-hierarchical reality of the carnival.

GRAVEDIGGER: Why, there thou sayst, and the more pity that great folk should have countenance in this world to drown or hang themselves more than their even-Christen. Come, my spade. There is no ancient gentleman but gardeners, ditchers and grave-makers. They hold up Adam’s profession. (5.1.26-31)

The gravedigger calls into question hierarchical and religious boundaries. The “coat of arms” as the major symbol of status in his next pun (5.1.32-33) becomes deconstructed into “arms”, the “symbol” of any working man. John Ball’s speech that had been already transformed into a „proverbial rhyme” in Shakespeare’s time, easily comes to mind. I quote the whole paragraph:

When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman? From the beginning all men by nature were created alike, and our bondage or servitude came in by the unjust oppression of naughty men. For if God would have had any bondmen from the beginning, he would have appointed who should be bond, and who free. And

\(^652\) A version of Thomas Lord Vaux’s song, “The Aged Lover Renounceth Love”.
therefore I exhort you to consider that now the time is come, appointed to us by God, in which ye may (if ye will) cast off the yoke of bondage, and recover liberty.653

John Ball’s words never actually were carnivalesque because he never truly presented himself as a clown. He, as a figure of a serious world, fought for a rather different purpose, in the name of faith and hope, and not in the mocking of these. The proverb is “used” by the carnival and is—with the upcoming puns—made into a laughable aspect of life: more a fantasy of liminality than true intentions for a democratic utopia654.

The clowns also mock Death, and through that mockery they also defeat Death through vulgar derisions. As with the “politic worms” before, the coarse representation of death in the biggest part of the scene only functions to “draw Death to the ground”, to rob Death of its serious “dignity”, and through that, “impregnate” it and “fill it with life”. The atmosphere they produce corresponds with the man who, at the picture of Duccio di Buoninsegna, *The Raising of Lazarus*, holds his nose.

Death is already defeated and Life is victorious as the wheel turns into sunlight once again. “A pestilence on him for a mad rogue. ‘A poured a flagon of Rhenish on my head once!’” (5.1.169-170) Defeating Death after Ophelia’s painful and shocking death (known yet only by the audience) is well needed, so the carnivalesque turn here also works as a “stress

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relief valve”, as it is also frequently highlighted by the critics of the play. The clown-play here, this liminal situation provoking festive laughter, as it translates “the serious event” into a carnivalesque one, should already be clear. To reiterate the chapter about The Medium of Carnival: the clown interrupting the linear end of life and curving it into a circle “releases steam”, as his essence, the carnival releases tension. It is a kind of valve for the soul of the “participants” who are saturated with fear: as in the circus, where clown-play connects and separates (at the same time) dangerous, neckbreacking attractions which it also mimics and parodies in its own clownish ways.

The particular clown-play of the gravedigger and his friend is the acting out of Ophelia’s death, in a burlesque manner. With no direct stage directions about the details of this clowning, clues should be gathered from what we have. Fortunately, the text is quite clear, because the act of drowning oneself is very clearly described in an amusing and clownesque way in the Gravedigger’s “here lies the water” speech (5.1.15-20). The question of Ophelia’s fate—heaven or hell—becomes closely irrelevant when it is mimicked by the clown who falls into and rises from the grave. Whatever the real issue was (a serious problem in the tragic linearity of time), the “way of representation” makes it carnivalesque: irrelevant, not dangerous, but funny. The fear of Death becomes deprived of its strength, after the heavy burdens of the last scene. This clown-play parallels Gloucester’s clown-leap at “the rock of Dover” and “the bloody” battle between Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Sebastian.

While the clowns obviously distort the hierarchy of society, this is frequently overemphasized by many critics dealing with the carnivalesque; they fail to see how other ontological borders of “normality” (the borders of reason or the one between life and death) are simultaneously transgressed as well. Bristol, for example, tries to argue the positioning of the characters on the stage: one standing on the ground, while the other man is one level underneath him “both spatially and socially”. According to Bristol, this “positioning defines the encounter between two speech types and two contrasting views of matters of life and death”. This entirely misdirects his otherwise exemplary search for a carnivalesque interpretation. The clown here “stands” for much more than a level of social hierarchy. He is “halfway to Hell”, the trap-door leading below the stage to the pit in the English playhouse, from where he phlegmatically throws bones and skulls to the surface of “the Earth” (the stage itself). The gravedigger is much more than a rustic, talking (successfully) back to a prince, because he on the stage is “topographically” placed as the porter of the underworld
(exactly like his fellow in *Macbeth*). His role means more than illegal border-crossing between the dramatic and the contemporary Elizabethan reality. He, as a *psychopomp*, is also able, together with Hamlet, to transgress the border between this and the other world, give the Prince a tour in the “undiscovered country” (3.1.79), as he calls it in the “To be or not to be” soliloquy, and bring him back as a young, potent, reborn king. The scene appears to be a symbolic journey with time and space dislocated, able to transform, and round Hamlet out\(^{655}\) to be a true king. This would be a fine interpretation to make, if *Hamlet* were a simple carnivalesque play.

However, of course, there is a huge ambivalence that undermines the scene’s carnivalesque qualities. Hamlet finds the first clown’s song inappropriate, like a Whiteface, e.g. Malvolio found the carnivalesque song of Feste. His attitude takes us back to the well-known opposition of Carnival and Lent (which we saw also at the beginning of the play directed at Claudius’s behavior). But instead of feeling the overpowering cheerfulness of the carnivalesque song Hamlet deplores, it actually reeks of the subject of mortality. It is “the other kind” of Feste-song:

\[
\text{In youth, when I did love, did love,}
\text{Methought it was very sweet}
\text{To contract-a the time for-a my behove,}
\text{O, methought there-a was nothing-a meet! (5.1.57-60)}
\]

\[
\text{But age with his stealing steps}
\text{Hath clawed me in his clutch}
\text{And hath shipped me into the land}
\text{As if I had never been such. (5.1.67-70)}
\]

\[
\text{A pickaxe and a spade, a spade,}
\text{For and a shrouding-sheet,}
\text{O, a pit of clay for to be made}
\text{For such a guest is meet. (5.1.89-92)\(^{656}\)}
\]

Hamlet is shocked: “Did these bones cost no more the breeding but to play at loggets with them?” (5.1.86-87)\(^{657}\) He, now for real, seems like Sidney himself repining on how serious matters are mocked “with neither decency nor discretion” and how “hornpipes are

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\(^{655}\) At least according to Gertrude’s comment about Hamlet being “fat, and scant of breath” in the fencing scene of the fifth act: *Hamlet* (5.2.239)

\(^{656}\) The popular song of Vaux is modified at some places and made much more “falling”.

\(^{657}\) The “loggets” was a form of entertainment, a game of the popular culture that time. This also directs us to think that Hamlet holds the song too carnivalesque.
matched with funerals. But the song does not justify his argument. Let us follow the next lines as well.

HAMLET: [...] Whose grave’s this, sirrah?
GRAVEDIGGER: Mine, sir, [...]  
HAMLET: I think it be thine, indeed, for thou liest in’t.  
GRAVEDIGGER: You lie out on’t, sir, and therefore ‘tis not yours. For my part I do not lie in’t, yet it is mine.  
HAMLET: Thou dost lie in’t, to be in’t and say it is thine. ‘Tis for the dead, not for the quick. Therefore thou liest.  
GRAVEDIGGER: ‘Tis a quick lie, sir, ‘twill away again from me to you.  
HAMLET: What man dost thou dig it for?  
GRAVEDIGGER: For no man, sir.  
HAMLET: What woman, then?  
GRAVEDIGGER: For none, neither.  
HAMLET: Who is to be buried in’t?  
GRAVEDIGGER: One that was a woman, sir, but, rest her soul she’s dead. (5.1.110-128)

Death acquires enormous power here. One way to interpret the battle of words between Hamlet and the Gravedigger clown is to conclude that not even the grave is the property of the deceased. Is the deceased, like the clown, homo sacer? Is the deceased “nothing”, without properties in the world of the living (where everybody has something)? This carnivalesque similarity could work. But how can we describe the Ghost hereafter, retrospectively, who came from exactly the same place?

When old Hamlet comes from the lower stage of “Hell” he seems to be alive, complaining about his wife still cheating on him, bringing up topics of the living, and highlights events which keep annoying him (1.5.42-59; 80-83): he is not “nothing” at all, in a carnivalesque sense. As Mack notes: “the ghost is somehow real, indeed the vehicle of realities”. He speaks about Claudius’s “wicked wit and gifts, that have the power so to seduce” his “most seeming-virtuous” queen. Old Hamlet’s jealousy is unprocessed and raw: he is still comparing himself, as a living person, to his enemy in love who is “a wretch whose natural gifts” are “poor to those of” him, and the unfaithful wife also gets her due in the next lines. Neither does he ask Hamlet to revenge his death nor to take back the Danish throne, but to “Let not the royal bed of Denmark be a couch for luxury and damnèd incest”.

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659 This dialogue could happen in Lear, between the King and his Fool, if we chose to change the word “dead” for the word “fool”.
We also have to mention the very Elizabethan uncertainty and suspicion caused by the spirit. This is nicely summed up by C. S. Lewis:

This ghost is different from any other ghost in Elizabethan drama—for, to tell the truth, the Elizabethans in general do their ghosts very vilely. It is permanently ambiguous. Indeed the very word “ghost,” by putting it into the same class with the “ghosts” of Kyd and Chapman, nay by classifying it at all, puts us on the wrong track. It is “this thing,” “this dreaded sight,” an “illusion,” a “spirit of health or goblin damn’d,” liable at any moment to assume “some other horrible form” which reason could not survive the vision of. Critics have disputed whether Hamlet is sincere when he doubts whether the apparition is his father’s ghost or not. I take him to be perfectly sincere. 661

Lewis’s “Early Modern Should-have-been” ghost and the ghost presented in Hamlet, who makes the quoted comments on a wife who is “still cheating on him”, seem miles away. The Ghost’s jibber-jabber, and the very fact that he can come back to confuse Hamlet, shows the “pregnant death” of the circular notion of Life in the Bakhtinian sense, a death mocking Death. Shakespeare literally calls the Ghost with Horatio through the “terminology” of the carnival: “Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life extorted treasure in the womb of earth” (1.1.135-136). After considering the lines about the purgatory (causing much dilemma for the young Hamlet) we can assume that the Ghost comes back from the “Catholico-pagan Death” of the Middle Ages, when he crawls out to the stage through the trapdoor 662. This is the trapdoor where the clowns throw dead bones from on all over the stage. But these bones, compared to the ghost, are entirely tangible and alarmingly mute. 663 In her remarkable essay Phyllis Gorfain’s notes:

With the same grotesque freedom granted the gravedigger by his intimate knowledge of death, Hamlet holds the skull and speaks to it, domesticating death differently than he did when he taunted the midnight ghost as an ‘old mole’ (1.5.162). Now a daylight grave opens to belch up its bones and a gravedigger now serves as Hamlet’s ludic guide to the underworld. The circularity and carnivalesque logic of the clown reiterates Hamlet’s words to refresh language

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662 This is the opinion of a number of serious scholars, like Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa in their Staging in Shakespeare’s Theatres. Oxford University Press, 2000. p. 126.

663 “In these passages, death is no pale abstraction, but a tangible reality which claws us in its clutch: we can feel it, sense it, touch it, smell it until we emphasize with the very processes of dissolution. The effect is powerfully synaesthetic.” R. M. Frye, The Renaissance Hamlet: Issues and Responses in 1600. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. p. 231
and meaning in a very different fashion than did the revengeful values of echoing ghost.\textsuperscript{664}

Does it change anything that this skull thrown up from “Hell” proves to be the skull of Yorick?

**Yorick**

Next to the loquacious ghost he is the other one getting back from the world of the dead, so Hamlet can confront another *clown*. And he is a *clown* indeed. The detailed listing of his activities shows deeds also done by the *gravedigger*, or Hamlet himself in the theatre scene.

[... ] A fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath bore me on his back a thousand times, and now how abhorred in my imagination it is. My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your jibes now – your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now to mock your own grinning, quite chapfallen.

(5.1.174-182)

Francis Douce quotes an important source on the performative tasks of Fools in a singular tract by Lodge, entitled as *Wit’s miserie*. I think this to be surprisingly consistent with the description of Yorick’s behavior by Hamlet, especially with the highlighted expressions.

Immoderate and disordinate joy became incorporate in the bodie of a jeaster; this fellow in person is comely, in apparell courtly, but in behaviour a very ape, and no man; his studie is to coine bitter jeasts, or to shew antique motions, or to sing baudie sonnets and ballads: *give him a little wine in his head*, he is continually felearing and making of mouthes: he laughs intemperately at every little occasion, and *dances about the house*, leaps over tables, out-skips mens heads, trips up his companions heeles, burns sack with a candle, and *hath all the feats of a lord of misrule in the countrie*: feed him in his humor, you shall have his heart, in meere kindness *he will hug you in his armes, kisse you on the cheeke*, and rapping out an horrible oth, crie God’s soule Tum, I love you, you know my poore heart, come to my chamber for a pipe of tabacco, there lives not a man in this world that I more honor. In these ceremonies you shall know his courting, and it is a speciall mark of him at the table, *he sits and makes faces* [...]\textsuperscript{665}

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Here it is easy to see how the seemingly different types of clowns, naturals, madman, Lords of Misrule, and the official or artificial Fools are connected through a clownish behavior that is exactly the one described by the young Prince. The word “Jibes”, according to the Arden edition, means “taunts” or “scoffs”, and that is exactly what Hamlet’s Antic Disposition, as this scene and the tricky mockery between the Prince and the Gravedigger, was all about. The “gambols”, as “playfull tricks” might refer to the ritual clown-plays that were just illustrated by the Gravedigger’s performance at the beginning of the scene (during the “Here lies the water…” speech). In Hamlet the line between fools (clowns) and non-fools can be drawn based on the question of who sings in the play. Both Hamlet, as clown, and the Gravedigger sing songs, that once could be sung by the jester Yorick, which were “wont to set the table on a roar”, as seen in Twelfth Night when Feste sings in the court of Olivia. And Feste is also a drinking clown who is likely to “poure a flagon of Rhenish” on one’s head (5.1.170) at times.

The most significant fact is that Yorick was a par excellence clown. This is also shown in how he is even made to refer to Richard Tarlton, the famous clown of the 16th century. In the text of the first Quarto, instead of Q2’s and F’s “Here’s a skull now hath lien you I’ th’ earth three and twenty years” (5.1.163-164), “the age of the skull” is set as “this dozen years”, which—according to Katherine Duncan-Jones—could point to the date of Richard Tarlton’s death. This way Richard, or “Rickardo” could have been called for in the “meaningful name” or pun: “Yo, Rick”!

The clown-play of the clowns always disregards ontological borders: it celebrates the limitless triumph of Life, as we have seen. The roly-poly toy that always turns back on his feet is the simplest topographical representation of this structure, where the always recurrent victory of Life triumphantly shows itself. Strumbo, the clown in Locrine fakes death on the battleground and resurrects thereafter. According to Bristol, Strumbo’s clown-play (as, I would add, the Gravedigger’s burlesque version of Ophelia’s death does) makes the

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666 According to the Arden notation.

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real death of a character (Albanact) easier to endure. Falstaff himself performs this *clown-play* in the first part of Henry IV: he throws Death from himself as a mask, and from under this mask his red clown nose appears. *Clowns* trick Death, “the governing Rule of the serious world”, and typically *never die*. A “dead clown” is something paradigmatically new.

Neill and his *Issues of Death* is interested in the paradox of Yorick, the dead clown, but never truly considers the connection to carnival. He claims that Yorick here, in fact, comes from the iconographic tradition of the *totentanz* (*danse macabre*, or dance of death). He bases his entire argumentation on the painting of *Der Basler Totentanz* originating from the 15th century (painted by Conrad Witz) and the *memento mori* tradition. Between the many figures who dance along with their dead *doppelgängers* we can find (somewhere in the middle of the painting) the figure of the “transi” who is also on the cover sheet of Michael Neill’s book. This, at first sight, seems to make the concept of carnival entirely unnecessary in the gravedigger scene, and even more: it contradicts my argument about the improbability of “a dead clown”.

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670 Here is the scene from *Henry IV*, Part 1:

[Falstaff] [‘Riseth up’]

Embowell’d! if thou *embowel* me to-day, I’ll give you leave to powder me and eat me too to-morrow. ‘Sblood, ‘twas time to counterfeit, or that hot termagent Scot had paid me, scot and lot too. Counterfeit? I lie, I am no counterfeit. To die, is to be a counterfeit, for he is but the counterfeit of a man, who hath not the life of a man: but to counterfeit dying, when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed. The better part of valour is discretion, in the which better part I have saved my life. ‘Zounds, I am afraid of this gunpowder Percy, though he be dead. How, if he should counterfeit too and rise? by my faith, I am afraid he would prove the better counterfeit. Therefore I’ll make him sure; yea, and I’ll swear I killed him. Why may not he rise as well as I? Nothing confutes me but eyes, and nobody sees me: therefore, sirrah,

Stabs him

with a new wound in your thigh, come you along with me. (5.4.111-128)

Death in the *totentanz* tradition is a unifying and uniting death that equates all the momentary differences of the living; it proclaims “the Democracy of Decay”. It is well described by John Donne, Shakespeare’s contemporary:

[We] must all pass this posthume death, this death after death, nay this death after burial, this dissolution after dissolution, this death of corruption and putrefaction, of vermiculation and incineration, of dissolution and dispersion, in and from the grave. When those bodies which have been the children of royal parents, and the parents of royal children, must say with Job: “To corruption, Thou art my father; and to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister.” Miserable riddle, when the same worm must be my mother and my sister and myself. Miserable incest, when I must be married to mine own mother and sister, and be both father and mother to mine own mother and sister, beget and bear that worm which is all that miserable penury, when my mouth shall be filled with dust, and the worm shall feed, and feed sweetly, upon me. When the ambitious man shall have no satisfaction if the poorest alive tread upon him, nor the poorest receive any contentment in being made equal to princes, for they shall be equal but in dust.⁶⁷²

The “democracy of decay” here obviously shows its particular “liminal” side. Because this kind of functioning, “death” seems to be very close to the carnival⁶⁷³. This picture of the overcoming “unity” of vermin is not exclusively “gloomy”, or, even more: “serious”, specifically looked at from the carnivalesque side:

If anyone seeing a player acting his part on a stage should go about to strip him of his disguise and show him to the people in his true native form, would he not, think you, not only spoil the whole design of the play, but deserve himself to be pelted off with stones as a phantastical fool and one out of his wits? But nothing is more common with them than such changes: the same person one while impersonating a woman,

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⁶⁷³ This, in the carnival, is also represented by “participation”. The carnival (as its folly) is universal: it simply involves everybody, without “asking for participation”.
and another while a man; now a youngster, and by and by a grim seignior; now a king, and presently a peasant; now a god, and in a trice again an ordinary fellow. But to discover this were to spoil all, it being the only thing that entertains the eyes of the spectators. And what is all this life but a kind of comedy, wherein men walk up and down in one another’s disguises and act their respective parts, till the property-man brings them back to the attiring house. And yet he often orders a different dress, and makes him that came but just now off in the robes of a king put on the rags of a beggar.674

The identification of “carnivalesque folly” and “death” through the “democracy of decay” is beautifully described by Michel Foucault in his book on *folly*675, which actually takes up the topic in the Early Modern age. In his reasoning death’s annihilation at the time is “no longer anything” because “it is already everything” then. Life itself became only “futility, vain words, a squabble of cap and bells”. The Early Modern “head that will become a skull is already empty” and folly becomes the déjà-vu of death676. Erasmus was a carnivalesque author and also most of Foucault’s other examples are based on carnivalesque motives677, so “folly” and “death” meet on the rather “merry occasion” of the carnival. In a simple way: “the democracy of decay” can be funny. This means that clowns can play in the graveyard, and when they do, that event definitely has to be categorized as carnivalesque. In the graveyard, which Hamlet enters, the circular notion of time is present first, and the “doomsday image of the grave is from this viewpoint not something grim and gloomy, but,

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675 I placed the word *folly* in place of Foucault’s *madness*, because at this point, it is quite clear that it is carnivalesque folly Foucault is speaking about in the first part of his book (as we could see in *Lear* for instance). My essay on the topic: Bársony Márton, “...egy igazság talánya”. Az archaikut-rituális bohóc Foucault *A bolondság története* című művében.” [“...an enigmatic truth”. The archaic-ritual clown in Foucault’s *The History of Madness*] In: *Asteriskos. Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Doktori Iskolák tanulmányai 4.*. (edited by Vilmos Bárdosi), Budapest: ELTE BTK, 2013, pp. 211-228.


677 “The ship of fools” for example that Foucault takes into play, was frequently criticized by historians: ships like that, boarded by fools, never actually existed. Of course, the fool-ship was not an actual historical reality, but a carnivalesque motive that was popular in countless festivals around Europe. See also Zita Turi’s dissertation on the topic. My related paper: Bársny Márton, “...egy igazság talánya”. Az archaikut-rituális bohóc Foucault *A bolondság története* című művében.” [“...an enigmatic truth”. The archaic-ritual clown in Foucault’s *The History of Madness*] In: *Asteriskos. Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Doktori Iskolák tanulmányai 4.*. (edited by Vilmos Bárdosi), Budapest: ELTE BTK, 2013, pp. 211-228.
on the contrary, the occasion for ‘drink’ and merriment. In the graveyard of Elsinore “victory over fear is not its abstract elimination; it is a simultaneous uncrowning and renewal, a gay transformation. Hell has burst and has poured forth abundance.” Thus the *danse macabre* tradition can easily be connected to the carnival because they can both celebrate the liminal moment of “the democracy of decay”. Functionally, the universal Rule of Death perfectly fits the universal folly of the world, and they frequently met each other in medieval art and on Catholico-pagan festivities.

In various guises, in literary forms and visual representations, this experience of the senseless seems extremely coherent. Text and painting constantly answer each other and swap roles, now as commentary, now as illustration. The Narrentanz or dance of fools is a theme found time and again in popular balls, theatrical performances and engravings, and the last part of the Praise of Folly is built on the model of a long dance where the professions and orders file past and form the eternal round of unreason.

Neill would be actually right if he—through the combination of the symbols of the *Totentanz* and the carnival—would have stopped at the description of the Ghost or the Gravedigger. These figures both have some of this medieval “superstitious” fear of death combined with the immense comedy of the carnival: they truly seem to be the mixtures of the “transi figure” and the clown. Both proclaim their worlds (of death and folly) omnipotent but still emphasize its apophatic nature: the circular notion of time, the transgression of the borders (here and back) and the Wheel of Fortune, which also raises one high just as much as it lets them fall.

The difference between the “transi figure” and the single skull brings Neill to the issue of the *Et in Arcadia Ego*. But the direct evocation of the image, with the tombs in Arcadia and the skull at Guercino’s version, is actually unreasonable. The message of “memento mori” which very clearly seems to dominate these images itself is not a message for Hamlet, who has been contemplating about death since his first appearance in the play. The real

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679 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World.* (translated by Helene Iswolsky) Bloomington – Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984. p. 91. These lines are—I hope this to be quite surprising—not written about *Hamlet* at all.


682 Guercino’s version is from 1618-1622, while Poussin’ versions are from 1627 and 1637-1638.
attraction begins with a much less known version of the *Et in Arcadia Ego* theme (but actually older, from 1543) in Andreas Vesalius’s *De humani corporis fabrica libri septem*. The woodcut illustrations in the books constituting the *Fabrica* are of a strange kind: the artistic ingenuity and the developing illustrating technology combine with an early occurrence of what we may call “scientific”. The depictions of the dissected human bodies begin to have a kind of “non-aesthetical” side that is more “useful” for e.g. the objectives of the medical sciences. While it would be hugely anachronistic to emphasize this side of the *Fabrica*’s illustrations, it is obvious that the beginning of “scientific” thinking is already present and what is more: it is ingeniously at odds with the aesthetical iconology of the middle ages. The picture in *Fabrica* based on the *Et in Arcadia Ego* is an excellent example of this.

The problem was well summarized by Gail Kern Paster, who confronted Neill himself by saying that, like other *memento mori* gazers, the meditative skeleton clearly signals his relation to the skull as mirror as—strictly speaking—they both are dead things, but there is more to learn here. The mirroring is only partial, because the skull cannot serve as synecdoche when it is juxtaposed with the skeleton’s completeness and monumentality. Paster is correct in arguing that the skeleton’s completeness actually “turns the skull into a synecdoche manqué, into a part that—unusually for the memento mori—stands not for a

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683 While the pictured bodies still stand in aesthetized postures and are drawn in front of beautiful, natural backgrounds, their parts (the muscles, the bones, the tendons and organs) are carefully marked with numbers and categorized: taken into catalog.
whole but for its disappearance.” The “living” skeletons of memento mori, as the “lively” Ghost and the—maybe fearful but still—“living” Gravedigger hugely differ from Yorick who is only a “fragment”, who reflects on death in a totally different sense. This skull is not investable neither with Life any more, nor with the life of anybody. Yorick’s skull is not coming from the memento mori tradition or from the dans macabre: it brings in a much more modern vision about death without the vivacity and the playfulness of the former two.


685 The shock felt by the Early Modern audience because of the “muted” skull on stage is not comparable to “the jovial conversation of a man and a theatrical decor” that we are getting used to in our modern theatres (especially with the seemingly direct references to Richard Tarlton in Q1, that the contemporary audience probably recognized). Still, there actually was a modern staging that was able to produce a kind of shock comparable to what was meant by Shakespeare. The Royal Shakespeare Company inherited the skull of André Tchaikowsky in 1982, and the Clause 13 of his will stated: “13. I HEREBY REQUEST that my body or any part thereof may be used for therapeutic purposes [...] and in due course the institution receiving it shall have my body cremated with the exception of my skull, which shall be offered by the institution receiving my body to the Royal Shakespeare Company for use in theatrical performance”. About the use of Tchaikowsky’s skull, as Yorick, in the Royal Shakespeare’s Hamlet (the Prince performed by David Tennant): David A. Ferré, “Story of the Skull.” André Tchaikowsky website. Web. Retrieved from: http://andretchaikowsky.com/miscellaneous/skull.htm 20 Jan. 2016; “Bequeathed skull stars in Hamlet.” BBC News. Web. Retrieved from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/arts_and_culture/7749962.stm 20 Jan. 2016; “David Tennant’s Hamlet featured real human skull all along, admits RSC.” The Telegraph. Web. Retrieved from: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/celebritynews/6645908/David-Tennants-Hamlet-featured-real-human-skull-all-along-admits-RSC.html 20 Jan. 2016. These events perfectly describe the degree to what Shakespeare himself was trying to break the taboo of Death on stage.

686 The taboo breaking thought of the dead clown can also be found in the tradition of the fool epitaphs. In 1499, when the famous II Matello, the court fool of the d’Este family died, Il Pistoia wrote a touching poem on his death: “Lifeless his body lies: if he blest / Even now, I think his parted soul set free / Is making all Paradise laugh heartily; / But if he is in Hell, then verily / He cheers and quiets Cerberus with a jest. / For Nature made of him so odd a fellow, / So touched his brain even from his earliest year, / That all who knew him, called him II / Matello. / To both the Marquis and his wife most dear, / And not to them alone; all joyed to hear / His jokes, whether in the country or the court, / With him even Death made sport, / And during the transit, laughed with him awhile / And then, still jesting, killed him with a smile.” To illustrate how the “smiling Death” of the “dead clown” changes I would like to compare this text to another court fool epitaph that Welsford recalls, which seems much closer to Shakespeare in time and location (but still before him): William Sommer himself was commemorated in poems. This whimsical epitaph is from his biographer: “Stay Traveller, guess who lies here: / I tell thee neither Lord nor Peer, / No Knight, no Gentleman of Note, / That boasts him of his antient Coate, / Which Herald’s curiously emblazon, / For Men (well skill’d therein) to gaze on; / Know then, that this was no such Man, / And I’ll express him as I can: / He that beneath this Tomb-stone lies, / Some call’d him fool, some held him wise: / For which, who better Proof can bring, / Than to be favour’d by a King: / And yet again, we may misdoubt him, / A King hath always Fools about him, / Is he more Idiot than the rest / Who in a guarded Coat can jest? / Or can he Wisdom’s Honour gain / That is all Bravery, and no Brain? / Since no such Things; Wit truly bred, / I’ th’ Habit lies not; but I’ th’ Head. / But whether he was Fool or Knave / He now lies sleeping in his Grave, / Who never in his life found Match, / Unless the Cardinal’s Fool call’d Patch: / Of whom some Courtiers who did see / Them two alone, might say. We Three: / And may be fear’d it is a Phrase, / That may be us’d in these our Days. / Well more of him what should I say /
So Yorick’s clown skull is taboo-breaking. He is not like the clowns before: surviving all adversities and celebrating Death as a harmless episode of Life (as a Death already pregnant with Life), but a clown who entirely is struck numb, “not one now to mock his own grinning” (5.1.181-182). With the dead clown Hamlet not only finds the corpse of an old acquaintance but faces a rather serious problem in the history of humanity: the disappearance of the world coming after this one; the end of time. If Hamlet (Shakespeare) were the first to recognize that notion, we could finally understand the magnitude of the drama we have always attributed to the play. As Maynard Mack also claims, “after the graveyard and what it indicates has come to pass in him, we know that Hamlet is ready for the final contest of mighty opposites”687. But what does the muted clown actually “tell” Hamlet? And how does the arriving funeral procession finalize the conclusion?

Both Fools and Wise Men turn to Clay: / And this is all we have to trust. / That ther’s no Difference in their Dust;/ Rest quiet then beneath this Stone, / To whom late Archy was a drone.” (Chronicles of the tombs. A select collection of epitaphs, preceded by an essay on epitaphs and other monumental inscriptions, with incidental observations on sepulchral antiquities. (edited by Thomas Joseph Pettigrew) London: G. Bell, 1888. p. 474-475)

The punning in the second epitaph between “artificial” and “natural” folly becomes resolved by the “Wisdom of folly”, and again the “fool” and the “knave” are played out on each other. Sommer’s popular contemporary: Patch could connect to this (Twelfth Night’s lines: “that’s mended is but patched: virtue that transgresses is but patched with sin; and sin that amends is but patched with virtue” (1.5.38-40), and also Hamlet’s “king of shreds and patches” (3.4.99) comes into mind), and their clown double already comes with the joke Feste himself also cracks in Twelfth Night (“How now, my hearts? Did you never see the picture of ‘We Three’?” (2.3.14-15) See my note 491.) The last sentences about all men turning into clay and losing all the “earthly differences in dust” directly seem to refer to the contemplation of Hamlet from the unknown lawyer to Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. The buried fool returns to life no more; he is muted for eternity, and this obviously seems entirely different from the court fool who “cheers and quiets Cerberus with a jest” and who “even made sport with death” in the first epitaph. There is a paradigmatic difference between the lively joking and the muted clown: the latter is impossible from the perspective of carnival. The fact that Will Sommer died long before Shakespeare wrote Hamlet, should not startle us because the epitaph in question could hardly have been written in the 16th century. Not only Patch, Sommer’s contemporary but another court fool, “Archy” Archibald is mentioned at the end of the poem. In the Pleasant History (A pleasant history of the life and death of Will Summers. How he came first to be known at court, and by what means he got to be King Henry the Eight’s jester. With the entertainment that his cousin Patch Cardinal Wolsey’s Fool gave him at the Lord’s house, and how the Hogheads of Gold were known by this means. (by an anonymous author) London, 1676), the source also used by Enid Welsford, another variant of the name: “Archer” comes up. Still, we can be pretty sure that the name refers to the same person, who, as the court fool (and a new type of court fool: more a politician than a comic actor) of the Stuarts (James VI) became only known after the first decade of the 17th century—many years after the performance and the publication of Hamlet. The Pleasant History itself became printed only in 1637 (David Wiles, Shakespeare’s clown. Actor and text in the Elizabethan playhouse. Cambridge University Press, 2005. p. 185). So the epitaph could only be written in this form after Yorick was already “born” in Shakespeare’s play. 

“What dreams may come?”

For understanding Hamlet’s position Hamlet’s “big questions” have to be revisited. The grand soliloquys and seemingly rhetorical questions may be much more than abstract contemplations; the Prince’s wavering motivation is anything but accidental, and the process of his thinking—which is practically goal-oriented—very linearly leads to his conclusion in the graveyard (and not before or after that). Hamlet’s very problem that shackles him in its Renaissance cultural context is being death. And being death is certainly not equivalent to dying because what Hamlet fears, while he thinks himself a “vermin crawling between earth and heaven” is the “after-life” that comes after the act of dying. His concept of “after-life” is but a very complicated set of religious—even theological—fears, “popular” superstitions, and modern uncertainties. His balancing between these “serious” concepts of death and between its singular “lightsome” carnivalesque reading makes up the majority of the play, at least until the scene of Yorick.

But this constantly comes with very structured and direct connections to the actual plot. What Hamlet is contemplating about is inseparable from the play’s events. As Lewis observes:

I have started with the ghost because the ghost appears at the beginning of the play not only to give Hamlet necessary information but also, and even more, to strike the note. From the platform we pass to the court scene and so to Hamlet’s first long speech. There are ten lines of it before we reach what is necessary to the plot: lines about the melting of flesh into a dew and the divine prohibition of self-slaughter. We have a second ghost scene after which the play itself, rather than the hero, goes mad for some minutes. We have a second soliloquy on the theme “to die ... to sleep”; and a third on “the witching time of night, when churchyards yawn.” We have the Ding’s effort to pray and Hamlet’s comment on it. We have the ghost’s third appearance. Ophelia goes mad and is drowned. Then comes the comic relief, surely the strangest comic relief ever written—comic relief beside an open grave, with a further discussion of suicide, a detailed inquiry into the rate of

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688 These are at least not abstract contemplations about blurred visions of “truth” or “justice”, because these have absolutely no relevance in the play.

689 Most of my sources, like Mack, Lewis, R. M. Frye, and Neill also build their interpretation on this fact. For example C.S. Lewis: “If I wanted to make one more addition to the gallery of Hamlet’s portraits I should trace his hesitation to the fear of death; not to a physical fear of dying, but a fear of being dead. And I think I should get on quite comfortably. Any serious attention to the state of being dead, unless it is limited by some definite religious or anti-religious doctrine, must, I suppose, paralyse the will by introducing infinite uncertainties and rendering all motives inadequate. Being dead is the unknown x in our sum.” C. S. Lewis, “Death in Hamlet.” In: Shakespeare, The Tragedies: A Collection of Critical Essays. (edited by Alfred Harbage) Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964. p. 73

690 In the sense of “common”, “platitudinous”.
decomposition, a few clutches of skulls, and then “Alas, poor Yorick!” On top of this, the hideous fighting in the grave; and then, soon, the catastrophe... 691

Hamlet does not philosophize on death because “many are dying”, while “others should die”. I would like to argue with Wilson Knight, who, in his famous essay about Hamlet and The Embassy of Death writes that it is not “the negation of life” that makes up Hamlet’s philosophy but “death”. 692 The two, in the case of Hamlet, are one. Hamlet cares about “death”, but the death he mostly cares about is the death of only one person: the death of his own. And that is what he is promised if acts out the “negation of life”. He, almost selfishly, fears the damnation of his own soul because of suicidal thoughts. C. S. Lewis sensed this well. Passivity, the safety of inaction opposes “action” which also means death—that is what Hamlet is well aware of. He fears the underworld and fears death, especially through the act of self-destruction. And this fear is very concrete, as many of Hamlet’s lines demonstrate, even before he meets the Ghost:

O that this too sallied flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon ’gainst self-slaughter. (1.2.129-132)

At the very beginning Hamlet has an honest objective: he wants to kill himself. He has long since let go of his material body, but he fears his soul. When his companions warn him about going with the Ghost, he asks:

Why, what should be the fear?
I do not set my life in a pin’s fee,
And for my soul—what can it do to that,
Being a thing immortal as itself? (1.4.64-67)

But what the Ghost asks from Hamlet is exactly the “thing” that Hamlet feared most; he is asked, as it will be proven below, to strictly speaking, kill himself, because that obviously is what the killing of the King in Elsinore means. It is a suicide mission. Bodily annihilation does not terrify him (he already had thoughts about that), but where does this mission direct his soul “after” he dies? Hamlet’s ethical dilemmas have been hotly debated, but his thinking is

a targeted thinking: where would an act “put me” (in the given situation)? Where would I end when I die (because of my suicidal act)?

The Ghost himself (with his request) is, in a way, very ambivalent. He (among other possibilities) is either the “real” old Hamlet who deserves his revenge, or a demonic temptation: the trap of the devil. Can we trust the words of somebody who has come up from the underworld to babble?693 Still, Hamlet’s struggling is not caused by his “inability to decide” about revenge; the play is not about “to do, or not to do”. Thus, my claim is that Hamlet’s starting point is his desire to die. The problem is that he still has his doubts from before, which are actually amplified, and even reinforced, by the Ghost. Old Hamlet, either as a vicious devil or as a suffering spirit from purgatory (1.5.2-4) directly implies and recalls otherworldly punishment and the loosing of the soul. The mission given to Hamlet may have ethical issues, like: who is a sinner? Is Claudius one? Was old Hamlet a sinner? Will Hamlet be a sinner if he kills Claudius? Will Hamlet be a sinner, if Claudius is a sinner, and he does not kill him? And what if Claudius already killed a sinner? But the play actually never really asks these questions, and neither does Hamlet.694

“Sin” only comes into question as a partial problem of “atonement”. But it remains marginal; an “imminent death” (4.4.59) can easily come to a bad end on its own. Or, from another aspect, it can easily come to a happy ending too: Hamlet is hesitant to kill the praying Claudius, like a traditional avenger would, in the middle of the third act because he is afraid that he would directly get him to heaven. This, in fact, has nothing to do with Claudius being guilty or not.695 So the test in the theatre scene and its “result” (Claudius actually never openly admits anything) seem to be entirely irrelevant. Death, for Hamlet, seems like a door on which in short intervals different places it can be opened to flare up. He is sure that he will pass the threshold, but he always withholds his step because of the fear of entering “the wrong room” on the other side. The threshold and the room “thereafter” in

695 He also adds in his letter how Rosencrantz and Guildenstern should be killed without “shriving time allowed” to make sure they would be condemned (5.2.47).
Hamlet’s magnificent speech becomes the “sleeping and the dreaming” that directly refers to the problem of the “afterworld”\(^6\) This is how we should read the soliloquy.

To be, or not to be? That is the question—
Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And, by opposing, end them? To die, to sleep—
No more—and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to—’tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished! To die, to sleep.
To sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there’s the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause. There’s the respect
That makes calamity of so long life.
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
Th’ oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law’s delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of th’ unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveler returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.—Soft you now,
The fair Ophelia!—Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remembered.\(^7\)

While “action” obviously occurs here, no reference can be found to action as “revenge”, or the “murdering of the King” or “obeying the damned goblin”. It is clearly a form of “suicide” which is taken into consideration here. To kill oneself: to oppose “the sea of troubles” (as we can see from the listing: that means Life itself) and “to die, to sleep”, to

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\(^6\) See also Géza Kállay’s “‘Lenni vagy nem lenni’ és ‘Cogito ergo sum’: gondolat és lét a Hamletben és Descartes Elmélkedéseiben [‘To be or not to be” and “Cogito ergo sum”: thought and being in Hamlet and Descartes’ Meditations] In: A nyelv határai: Shakespeare tanulmányok. Budapest: Liget, 2014. pp. 119-162

\(^7\) Following my usual practice I highlighted those word in italics which have a special relevance to my argument.
“make quietus with a bare bodkin”. There are no ethical considerations; “action”, as the rush “flying to other ills”, is identifiable with the rushing towards death.

If being death puts such an incredible pressure on the drama, carnival should, with its “mortal blow” of laughter that defeats Death again and again, redeem Hamlet. The Prince engaging in a banter with the Gravedigger has to meet the carnivalesque “democracy of decay” to understand death in another way. Sin, from the aspect of atonement, is very cleverly questioned by the Gravedigger, who asks the riddle: “What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright or the carpenter?” (5.1.37-38) The first given answer will be the gallows-maker, which is a nice try indeed. Yet one thing is amiss: the hangman only deals with criminals. The gallow-maker—as a servant of the hierarchical order of society—is not a master of his actions. He only deals with people condemned by courts of justice. He has no power over innocents, acquitted criminals or the ones who stand above the law. All (perceived) innocents of the world are beyond his reach (for example Claudius, the “kingslayer” as well). This notion of death—as a threshold with the door leading in so many directions—is somehow decisive according to a very complex system of seriousness and ideologies. But ideology and decision give no correct answer here. The solution of the riddle is, of course, the “gravedigger” who “rules” over all. This is meaningful: the world of the dead does not only lack the contrast between rich and poor but also lacks the contrast between the sinner and the innocent, the King and the Prince, etc. In the powerful hands of death all become members of this “democracy of decay” and this is a very carnivalesque—non-ethical, non-serious—solution for Hamlet’s problem which could finally help him to follow the suicidal mission through.

The problem of suicide, itself, has a carnivalesque solution here, in the clown-play that mocks and caricatures the suicide of Ophelia, as we have seen. We must also look at this part with Hamlet’s eyes:

Here lies the water – good. Here stands the man – good. If the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, willy-nilly, he goes. Mark you that. But if the water come to him and drown him, he drowns not himself. Argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life. (5.1.15-20)

Janet Clare, in her “Buried in the Open Fields”: Early Modern Suicide and the Case of Ofelia states how in the first Quarto Ophelia’s suicide seems much more probable than in Q2, where she is more likely in a “victim” role. Still, this does not really seem to appear in the discussions of the clowns who deprive the seriousness of the suicide of its ethical and religious overtones through carnivalesque mockery in both editions.
Also the definition of suicide as “action” is parodied and ridiculed just before these lines:

It must be se offendendo. It cannot be else. For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act. And an act hath three branches—it is to act, to do, to perform. Argal, she drowned herself wittingly. (5.1.9-13)

In the first quote we can insert “Hamlet” where “the man” (i.e. the person, Ophelia) is written and we can change the noun “the water” to “Claudius”, and there we have the story of Hamlet. He himself could ask how his action (at long last) in the end would “mean or nor mean” in an indirect process nothing less, then suicide. The clown’s mockery about suicide as “action” makes the whole process—from the aspect of carnival—non-ethical, or more specifically, in a “caricaturesque” way: non-consequentialist. The ridiculed action where suicide “comes” to the suicidal is actually what will happen to Hamlet: it is not that he becomes more “active” but that he actually falls into the trap of Claudius and Laertes, and finishes his suicidal action through their plot. This way, by “not being guilty of his own death, he does not shorten his own life”. Hamlet, through this clown-play of the Gravedigger and his companion, could be freed from the responsibility, and his death could also become a carnivalesque death that we could laugh at.

Nevertheless, there is a small problem here: Hamlet is not present to learn about these carnivalesque solutions. This is not because, as Calderwood claims, something significant would happen to Hamlet in the ocean voyage “outside the stage”699, but on the contrary: his voyage is a perfect dramaturgical opportunity for him to miss the relevant developments of the play: Ophelia’s death, the Claudius-Laertes plot and the interposed carnivalesque solutions of the action. This all falls on his head like a bucket of ice-cold water when he slowly opens that “door” to look through it—in the graveyard. At this point the shocking dead skull of a clown appears and the decarnivalization begins.

The Decarnivalization of the World

When Hamlet sees the skull of Yorick he is as shocked as anybody in the Early Modern theatre. Death introduces itself from a new side, not anymore as “the democracy of decay”

699 Not even the seemingly important letter Claudius sent to the English King seems to be a major development. Hamlet already has the letter that proves Claudius guilty and still goes to the Graveyard instead of rushing to the palace. This may happen because he never actually focused on Claudius’s guiltiness at all (he has long been suspecting that), but rather on the issue of his own “action of suicide”, which he never became closer to in the so-called un-scene.
that should be waiting soothingly on the other side of the threshold, but as a new notion of "nothingness": close to the nothingness felt by Lear only after the death of Cordelia. The total elimination of the self. It is not an “absolute” death, but death in the form of annihilation that is only experienceable from “the outside”:

“May your ashes rest in eternal peace.” The conception of peace, eternity, nonexistence, and annihilation. The contingency, insignificance, of annihilation and death; nothing can be said; death is something transient that essentially says nothing, there are no grounds for viewing it as absolute; viewing it as absolute, we turn nonbeing into dull being, absence into dull presence; death is in time and is temporary, for we know its effect only on the tiniest segment of time and space (the death of flesh—the thieving box).  

When Ophelia’s body is carried on the stage Hamlet—unlike us—is unprepared because he did not know that Ophelia died. He just put down the skull of the clown and then catches a glimpse of the woman he loved: her dead body waiting to be lifted into this graveyard of oblivion. Here, in this “temporary moment of the presence” of death—as also later in Lear, when he wails about his “hanged poor fool”—the “Fool’s death” becomes mixed up with the death of the “beloved one.” They even actually switch places in the tomb. The death of the clown together with the death of Ophelia should confront Hamlet very directly with the “non-carnivalism” of the world, showing the most tragic point of the drama. And this double-event: the emerging understanding of a new face of death through the figure of Yorick and the sudden shock of the death of Ophelia determine Hamlet’s attitude at the end of the play.

Hamlet learns how the “democracy of decay” works without the carnival: it means the total elimination of the self and the absence of reconciliation. Ophelia, as Yorick, became part of a mute death which can never be returned into life and this is exactly what awaits Claudius, and what is even more important: this is the death that awaits him, Hamlet, as well. He, after giving up the role of the clown (who is not saved anymore by any “carnivalesque vitality”) also gives up the role of the revenger. That is, because he not only

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701 Yorick’s is practically the only skull which they are sure about. Everybody else here could be anybody: they are forgotten.
702 I earlier stated that only the clowns are singing in the play, and according to this claim Ophelia herself should become somewhat a carnivalesque fool in her madness scene in the fourth act. See especially (4.5.48-66).
proved to be inferior to his enemies in “plotting”, but because he lost his aim for plotting. He actually never became a true revenger—who after building up and executing an ambitious plan could look back in merciless satisfaction—because he had never aimed at the downfall of the King. All his plots and changes of characters, secret discussions and conspiracies were more about “saving his own soul” from the “dreams (nightmares) that may come”, and this is exactly the mentality that becomes excluded through the brutal destruction of the afterlife in decarnivalization.

The most widespread reading of the “providence-speech” is that Hamlet comments on the emptiness of life that is sentenced to the state of constant waiting:

> There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be, ’tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all, since no man of aught he leaves knows what is’t to leave betimes. Let be. (5.2.197-202)

For him fearing death becomes meaningless, because death means only to become “the real nothing” (that we have seen at the end of Lear). These few lines are actually answering the Hamlet of before, who asked “To be, or not to be”. And this “Let be” seems to mean a more passive attitude than any other “Hamlets” had before. Still, the passivity of “the readiness is all” is not an actual passivity but more an expression of how “things are already on their way”. This, again is not a meditative contemplation without relation to the events of the play, but a commentary on what is actually happening: Hamlet knows that closure is already in motion, that is, Claudius will try to kill him soon. There is another line that is frequently considered to be a “religious” statement (fatalist at times): when Hamlet tells us how “there is a divinity that shapes our ends” (5.2.10). But this actually does not say anything new about what the notion of death has become for him. This only means what he thinks: it does not actually matter what will happen or how it will happen, at all. Not because “anything can happen” by the work of providence, but because “providence is made

703 He is perfectly conscious about this: “Being thus benetted round with villains, or I could make a prologue to my brains, they had begun the play.” Hamlet (5.2.29-31)

704 While the main sources used for this (de)carnivalesque chapter hugely differ in questions of how Hamlet’s “religious mind” changes, I do not think about this as a major problem. In fact, Neill’s argument is the closest to my interpretation which, through the new image about “afterlife” (that there is no afterlife), brings Hamlet’s new vision closer to the protestant kind of vision. Still, Hamlet’s thinking, in a way, seems to go much further (not in fatalism, but in picturing death) while also neglecting related doctrines (like the question of sin). The more recent work on Shakespeare and religion: David Scott Kastan, A Will to Believe: Shakespeare and Religion. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
special”: there is an already “falling” sparrow, whose fate has already been decided and it is the “how” that does not matter anymore. Hamlet knows that only one kind of ending exists for him, so none of his attempts to determine this ending is able to alter it.

In the world of the dead clown you can not decide what “you will be” when your life is over, but “what you are now”. You can neither do anything for anybody who died⁷⁰⁵: Hamlet’s ending is not about the accomplishment of old Hamlet’s revenge in any way. He is one step further than Lear was, who—until the end—tried to believe in reconciliation, because if “she lives, if it be so, it is a chance which does redeem all sorrows” (5.3.265-266). What happens after Hamlet’s “grand recognition of death” is absolutely the story of Hamlet himself. Neill’s assumption is partly true about the tragic heroes of the Early Modern age, who through their successful fight for an “individualized death” can oppose “the impersonality in death”⁷⁰⁶. But in Hamlet’s case this is much more complex. This hero finds his “individualized death” through consciously letting “individuality” go. He becomes “someone” through letting go everything he before tried to identify himself with. He chooses at the end a “let it be” that actually means “not to be”. This point in the history of literature can be marked as the beginning of the modern individual and modern death, but they do not follow from the other in any way. It is the decarnivalization of the “democracy of decay” through the figure of the “dead clown” that starts this process.⁷⁰⁷ In letting go of all his personae (with the possibility of carnivalesque transgression as a whole) and surrendering himself to death, Hamlet gives up plotting, but with the most radical statement given at the most important point of the drama he indirectly still commits the suicidal action we were waiting for. His superb proclamation—immediately after his grand recognition—“of self” presents itself in the new concept of time with its ending in death as annihilation:

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⁷⁰⁵ In this new—decisively Protestant—world with the elimination of purgatory (and the discarding of Catholic Indulgence) there are no more options available.

⁷⁰⁶ Michael Neill, Issues of Death. Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy. Oxford University Press, 1998. p. 33-36. About choosing the “right death”: “The ritualized drama of confession and absolution by which the ‘good end’ contained the chaos of death reduced the dying person to a passive sufferer whose only role was willingly to surrender the last frail trappings of selfhood; by contrast, to those who were ready to meet it, the once dreaded morse improvisa provided the occasion for an improvisational theatre of defiance in which the power of death was subordinated to self-display [...] To shape one’s own end, these authors declare, is to render oneself immune to the unshaping hand of death.”

⁷⁰⁷ My concept about Hamlet’s role in the construction of human individuality here is not suggesting Harold Bloom’s in his Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human. New York: Penguin-Putnam, 1998, rather the authentic human being that is achieved by “being-towards-death” in Heidegger’s sense.
This is I, Hamlet the Dane. (5.1.246-247)

Hamlet here, coming to the fore\textsuperscript{708}, claims himself to be the legitimate King of the Danes before the whole royal court: Laertes, the Queen and the King (“and other Lords with a Priest after”). This does not simply mean the hero’s “finding himself at the peak of the play”, but it means downright treason in Elsinore! After these words there is absolutely no doubt that the bloody conclusion soon has to become implemented.\textsuperscript{709} This is Hamlet’s long awaited “rush decision”, the short few words, a man’s life that is no more than to say “one”\textsuperscript{710}. It is not a new persona, a repositioning of the self, but the triggering of the final conclusion without any complicated tricks or devious manipulations. When he speaks about rushness and providence, he is not wishing for it anymore but confirming \textit{what he has already done}:

\begin{quote}
Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting
That would not let me sleep. Methought I lay
Worse than the mutines in the bilboes. Rashly –
And praised be rashness for it – let us know
Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well
When our deep plots do fall [...] (5.2.4-9)
\end{quote}

With this short statement of oneself yelled at the others, Hamlet not only “acts out” suicide—without any care for dead ghosts or dreams in death—but also steps out into the linear time of history and remembrance. This decision makes him comparable to Malvolio, who also, through his decision to tear himself out of it, decarnivalizes the world.

And in the decarnivalized world, this new age, the always returning time (and with it the religious time of otherworldly eternity as well) becomes eliminated. For the new Hamlet hereafter the notion of \textit{time} as history becomes the great collection of stories. Stories that are vague memories of individuals, who once lived, but are “nothing” anymore: not \textit{homo sacers} without understandable words, but mute skulls without words at all, in the total elimination of the self. The only question remains, what story one becomes. Is the one able, to become a story at all? Marjorie Garber sees the Ghost’s parting “remember me” (1.5.91),

\textsuperscript{708} There are many lines that prove how “the Dane” actually means “the King of the Danes” in the whole play: \textit{Hamlet} (1.1.13); (1.2.44); (1.4.45)
\textsuperscript{709} There is absolutely no violent \textit{structural aposiopesis} here.
\textsuperscript{710} \textit{Hamlet’s Folio} (5.2.75), see Appendix 1 in the Arden Shakespeare. This immediately followed by Hamlet expressing his regret of hurting Laertes, which also happened in the graveyard immediately after his “I, the Dane” statement.
Yorick’s skull and Hamlet’s dying request to Horatio “to tell my story” (5.2.333) simultaneously as the elements of the *memento mori* tradition\(^\text{711}\), which can hardly work out, as I tried to show. Still, these parts can finally be connected with each other at the end, at least in Hamlet’s development of though. Hamlet tried to explain this last order of the Ghost (“remember me”) as a complex construction of madness (as folly), death, damnation, and salvation. There are many matrixes this “remember me” may imply and Hamlet soon becomes entangled in those, fearing his destiny “thereafter”. But after the dead clown deconstructs all of them, Hamlet can revisit the Ghost’s last words. In the decarnivalized world death becomes definitive and the life lived before becomes “the only life”, the only individual place, what is more, the only place left for individuality which only leaves memories behind: memories in the minds of others. The dying hero has control only over the memories that he leaves behind for the memories of the others. And Hamlet welcomes this ending almost wistfully.

> You that look pale and tremble at this chance, 
> That are but mutes or audience to this act, 
> Had I but time (as this fell sergeant Death 
> Is strict in his arrest) – O, I could tell you – 
> But let it be. Horatio, I am dead. 
> Thou livest: report me and my cause aright 
> To the unsatisfied. (5.2.318-324)

> O God, Horatio, what a wounded name, 
> Things standing thus unknown, shall I leave behind me! 
> If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart 
> Absent thee from felicity awhile, 
> And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain 
> To tell my story. 
> [...] (328-333)

> O, I die, Horatio. 
> [...] (5.2.336) 
> I do prophesy th’election lights 
> On Fortinbras: he has my dying voice. 
> So tell him, with th’occurrents, more and less 
> Which have solicited. – The rest is silence. (5.2. 339-342)

Only the story remains about an individual, who is “no more” (1.3.10 and 5.2.305) and the “rest is silence”. Hamlet’s victory here is the success of leaving his story behind. He does

not want to be like old Hamlet or Ophelia, who never really had the chance of leaving their stories for posterity. Horatio’s promise and short summary on stage to Fortinbras carries on the promise of remembrance and retelling. Hamlet may fear that we have missed his story, but we will also remember, and Fortinbras will remember as well (he already “remembers” Hamlet as he should, as a person who “had he been put on, to have proved most royal” at 5.2.381-382). So Hamlet can become the second remembered individual in “history” where “time out of joint” ends once and for all. His death becomes the second modern death, faithfully following his superior, a dead clown, Yorick, the only person who could be remembered in Elsinore’s graveyard of oblivion.

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712 Old Hamlet even had to return as a spirit, or a “false memory” of an individuum that once existed. His story is blur, not remembered to, so his personality became almost forgotten. “Who is there?” (1.1.1), (1.1.18), “What art thou?” (1.1.45)

Conclusions

It is, of course, impossible to draw one grand conclusion from the decarnivalization of the world by Shakespeare, because the next few hundred years were more than eventful. Many theories have been constructed as to how and/or where carnival disappeared in the end: how, for example, the victorious Protestantism, or, on the continent, the similarly (or more) rigorous counter-Reformation suppressed the carnivalesque traditions. The newly based thinking and aesthetics of the Enlightenment also made the forms of carnival seem rough and outdated. The opening up of the world to other, often tribal cultures (with many ritual and carnivalesque forms of the older kind) made the desire to be different (to be more “developed”) stronger, while the slow but accelerating establishment of industrial capitalism probably had an impact on the carnival as well. The expulsion and the discrediting of the carnival (and the clown) have had their long story and have been encouraged by several circumstances. This is also shown by the medial history of dramatic art that found its way from the medieval stages to the marketable printed publications of the modern world, as research nowadays frequently emphasizes. Natália Pikli, for instance, describes this process in Jan Assmann’s popular terminology: how in the new world of “writing”, that is, the culture of textual coherence, the oral ways of rituality—with their cyclical concept of time—have become “outdated”. The written text, through the possibilities of its multiple interpretations, gives place to new options to organize society, so the old society—ritually kept in peace with its “always-returning cycles”—is outdone by the thoughts of “development” and “revolution”. And in this world, where major frontiers have to be conquered, “the hobby-horse is forgot”\textsuperscript{714}. While this obviously plays some part in the disappearance of the carnival, this is neither an accentuated, nor a full, nor an independent reason, because the carnivalesque tradition—through its clowns and their excellent transgressive skills—proved to be, nevertheless, more flexible, at least “medially”, than formerly predicted. We have seen how the texts of the 1623 Folio seem to be less carnivalesque than the Quarto texts at times, but we have also seen how a narrow “textual reading” of the dramas can forget that there are actual (frequently carnivalesque) performances behind the texts. The “non-apparent carnival” does not directly mean “non-

existent carnival”. Also, there are several genres where “orality” and even more: carnivalesque performance and play could live on, like in the circus, especially from the beginning of the 19th century. The circus with its popular forms of entertainment and semiotic-theatrical language perfectly showed how carnival—even if extruded from the main route of art—can survive in the end. To say that the carnival is eliminated by “text” is to say with Roger Caillois that the “festive era” was defeated and replaced by the “administrative era” 715. Such reasoning also assumes that the carnival disappeared from one moment to the next, which is demonstrably not true.

Victor Turner, as the exponent of another view, believed the carnival (broadened into liminality) to be radically more flexible, and developed the concept of liminoid to explain that. The liminoid is the liminal in the modern world: it became entirely conscious, economical 716, optional (for its participants) and non-existential. Any of these features easily show how the carnival and the liminoid are entirely different from each other. If “coming back”, or reconciliation becomes impossible then life becomes the carnival’s only “conscious” area of activity. That, of course, shows how the liminoid can be originated from the liminal of a kind. But if the transgressability of the border (or “limit”) between life and death becomes irrelevant, then only the individual linear reality of life—that ends in lonely death—is left to be “carnivalized”. That is, if time becomes limited to this small individual span of time, its linearity leaves carnival with the only opportunity to become the “border experience” of “development in human life”. This is what Turner calls liminoid. But this can definitely not be likened with the liminal as carnivalesque, because there is a big mistake “left in the system”: apophatic liminal, as carnivalesque, is the opposite of “development” 717. The carnival only functions as a “comeback”, as peaceful circularity. Otherwise “carnival” can become a twisted edition of Thomas Kuhn’s scientific revolution. Or, in the worst case, Marxism.

The “Hegelian reading” of Bakhtin came to this solution, thus the carnival became interpreted as a form of “development”, a dialectical fight between “social classes”: it became politics. (This was, of course, also strengthened by the suspicion that Bakhtin’s work

715 In his Man and the Sacred he combined “text” and “authority” (paralleling Bakhtin’s “Official”) in a historically excessive way.
716 Not that early carnivals were entirely non-economical, but that was at least not their only reason of existence.
717 See my subchapter on “Making Him Apophatic”.

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did not remain immune to the Marxism surrounding the author.) Even at the end of the 20th
century, scholars like Annabel Patterson (who originates this reasoning from Weimann)
explores art (Shakespeare’s plays), while starting out from these assumptions. She believes
that Weimann’s decision to include Shakespeare’s tragedies into the analysis of the “popular
tradition” was a conscious decision to take “development”—even in the sense of Marxist
“class struggle”—into the interpretation of the carnivalesque. This also meets the extreme
case of the concept of development worked out by Michael Bristol. Bristol also thinks
apophaticism to be a neglectable part of carnival, because, according to him, the lower
classes frequently “learned from it” and used it to build up real revolutions. So in the end
they made carnival into a stimulus of social (political) development.

But the carnival is not something one can “learn from”, because it is not “claiming”
anything. It is entirely non-ideological, or at the most: it is the caricature of ideology. Its
universalism which helps it to swallow everybody in its mass incorporates the positive
negation of every “claim” that exists. The carnival can never become something so
inherently and offensively “ideological” to only “care” about one part of the society or “one
side of the truth”. It is still closer to what Durkheim thought about it: it never existed to
make any (old or new kind of) separation in the social community, but it promoted the
cohesion of community as such, as the active promotion of social continuity, because
collective experience is prior to any experience of individuality. Solidarity and identification
with communal life, according to Durkheim, are themselves objects of desire as well as
preconditions for viable personal existence. But, one might ask, where is the carnival then
in the 21st century?

If carnival did not entirely disappear with Assmann’s “ritual coherence”, and it did not
“develop” into the “stimulus of social development”, either, then it could hide and conceal
itself somewhere. If there is any relevance in supposing art’s—at least partial—autonomy,
then we have a whole universe of texts written by early art theorists and later estheticians,

718 In contrast to Barber, for example.
up against the words of Bakhtin himself about Shakespeare, who—while letting go the delusory “generic”
orientation—states how in the plays Shakespeare always has “the two aspects, seriousness and laughter,
coexist and reflect each other, and are indeed whole aspects, not separate serious and comic images”. Rabelais
122.
and Unwin, 1915
who addressed the problem. Here, at long last, “the medium of carnival” also becomes involved, because, the expulsion of the clowns meant the expulsion of the carnival from art as well. In England, soon after Shakespeare, and even among the critics of the Ruling order, carnivalesque clowning became obnoxious:

[Tragedy’s] small esteem, or rather infamy, which in the account of many it undergoes at this day, with other common Interludes; happening through the poet’s error of intermixing comic stuff with tragic sadness and gravity, or introducing trivial and vulgar persons: which by all judicious hath been counted absurd, and brought in without discretion, corruptly to gratify the people. 721

Also on the continent the carnivalesque clowns, “the grand critics of the world” became offended by other well-known connoisseurs who—themselves no stranger to mockery and laughter—in turn themselves were critics of more substantial authorities without the harmless apophatic thinking of the carnival. The popular figure of the French revolution of though: Voltaire, himself, even directed his attacks straight against the carnivalesque clown-representations in Shakespeare’s dramas. 722 So Carnivalism, in the end, became persecuted in the works of (theatrical and literary) art. Bakhtin list tons of examples of how the carnivalesque elements left in some artworks became entirely empty. One of those is Goethe’s work on Faust, where the young fool becomes far distant from the popular, carnivalesque clown that defined the Rabelaisean story, because Goethe gave Faust a lyrical form 723. Only through this “emptiness” can an interpretation like Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s, where Shakespeare becomes a “philosophical aristocrat”, come into being.

It is quite obvious, that in the separation of the “high” and “low” forms 724 of art the upcoming aesthetics of “taste” discards carnivalesque. 725 The “lowness” of the carnival

724 Or even more: in “loading” them with ideology and making high and low “qualities”: two ends of a vertical scale much like the scale of morality.
725 There were ambitious advocates of the carnivalesque side of the clowns as well, for example Justus Möser in his Harlekin: oder Verteidigung des Groteske-Komischen and Karl Friedrich Flögel in his Geschichte des Grotesk-Komischen. Bakhtin himself has read these German authors and also makes use of their reasonings.
becomes tastelessness, mainstreamness, in a negative way: it becomes poor. “Popular” gets a new, derogatory meaning. But these theories are hardly uniform and timeless. Laroque’s summary on how the clown was “disparaged by those—both men and women—who took offence at the clown’s free and biting tone”726 is absurdly naïve and unsustainably simplistic. Later, some forms of art willingly started to use the clown-cap (with special regard to some of its carnivalesque qualities) again, like romantic poets and avant-garde painters, who even tried to use the cap to say something “new” about art itself.727

While the carnival’s society—as communitas—celebrated its continuity and ritually renewed itself, the clown persona that is chosen by modern artists seems to be speaking about the solitude of the individual and the impossibility of connection between individuals. There are also theories on how the carnival actually disappeared with the entire “ritual notion” of society (in Turner’s terminology: communitas). It is explained through the individual closing himself up in the age of reason, and through the exclusion of “society” from the possible subjects of empiricism, both believed to be irreversibly suppressing the carnivalesque.728. The former: the carnival’s retreat into the human psyche is, for example, described by Stallybrass and White.729. They argue that the formerly collective “language of the grotesque body” became privatized, silenced as an inner psychological space and returns as the repressed of the bourgeoisified individual. This rather analytic stance beautifully echoes Bakhtin’s Shakespeare-notes:

The topographical coordinates of act, word, and gesture have faded and rubbed off, they wound up in the dense (impenetrable) ordinary-life and abstractly historical plane that the limits and poles of the world could no longer glow through. The remaining topographical elements (the nethers and heights, fronts and rears) become a relative and conventional unfelt form. Act, word, and gesture acquire a practical and ordinary, pragmatic and storyline-related meaning, one that is abstractly historical (rationalistic), but the main and decisive meaning becomes the

728 At least until sociology became established. But the finding of a way back to any non-ideological concept of society proved to be irrelevant for that discipline. Shady concepts, like communitas were left to anthropologists and other “visionaries”; researchers of “obsolete communities”. Sociology—being entirely present-interested—still seems to believe that any other theory of society than an ongoing war of ideologies is more likely to be a children’s tale, or is at least long ago superseded and devoured by ideologies.,
expressive one: they become the expression of the individual soul, its inner depths. If earlier the gesture was perceived, “read”, extensively, in relation to the concrete (and visible) topographical limits and poles of the world, between which it extended, stretched (it pointed to the heavens or to earth, or beneath the earth—to the underworld, showed the front or the rear, blessed or annihilated, made its object partake in life or in death; see Goethe’s characterization of the plot of Faust), if, when reading it, our eye had to move from pole to pole, from limit to limit, drawing, delineating, a topographical line, the axial coordinates of the gesture and of the human being, localizing the one acting and gesturing with his soul in the whole of the world, now the gesture is read intensively, i.e. only in relation to one point—the speaker himself, as a more or less deep expression of his individual soul [...] 

Still, the most fundamental topographical gesture that the clown “plays out the carnival” with, when he is falling into death and immediately returning to its standing position, defeating Death as a whole, is lost. The process of the decarnivalization is nicely shown by Michel Foucault in his History of Madness, but Foucault does not emphasize the changing notion of death, at least not properly enough. Shakespeare, as I tried to show, in the only act of “killing the clown” breaks this taboo in one dramatic moment. The “decarnivalization of the world” became presented on the stage of The Globe and had a most shocking artistic impact, while also remaining an inherent part of the given dramaturgy.

The carnival was not simply an aesthetical perspective at particular folk festivities, but an extremely complex way of sensing the whole world, which started out from human existence and the perception of time, as being. The social structure itself was an allegory in the Middle Ages: Rule could have been a sign for many other social or natural orders, “larger orders that form a chain of significance leading to that which does not signify – the divine Logos.” And every Rule had to be in an opposition with Misrule, the null, the “funny end” of any “made-up arrangement” of the world. That is how the strongest, more unavoidable Rule of Life, Death became approachable and accessible as well: as “pregnant death”, being part of Life. The miracle of birth, living and dying was perceived as the order and a fight “against” the order; this is simply how Life in its circular notion presented itself. When the “rationalization” of Rule and the fights between the different forms of Rule became dominant, apophaticism, and with it: carnival came to an end. I already quoted Bakhtin’s notes about the seriousening of the world:

The officialization of the image and its related single-tonedness. From the ambivalent sphere, the image is transferred into the purely serious plane, becomes unambiguous, the black and the white, the positive and the negative, are set apart and contrasted. This is the process in which new boundaries between the meanings, phenomena, and things of the world solidify, in which an element of stability enters the world (the stabilization of a new hierarchy), the process of perpetuation (canonization); this is the process of seriousening the world (its images, thoughts about it, valuations of it), of inserting into it elements of threat, of intimidation, of fear. But this process, in which the images of the world solidify and are made serious only takes place in the official spheres, however this officialized culture is but an islet, surrounded by the ocean of the unofficial.

But, according to Bakhtin, two different seriousnesses can be distinguished. The first one is the “official seriousness” that is the ideology that can be fooled and caricatured, a potential seriousness of a Whiteface. But there is another, a second type of seriousness as well, that refers to the fear of the termination of the individual. This last seriousness could not be outdone by any Augusts anymore. This is the seriousness that can kill a clown as well.

Shakespeare was not only able to “summarize” the ongoing change, but he also was literally ahead of his time. The “death of the clown” paralyzes and shocks the audience of his plays for centuries to come. His corrupted rituals were probably hardly explicable at times, but still felt to be intuitive and effective. The real changes of Western knowledge from the second half of the 17th century verified Shakespeare’s “recent” decarnivalizations and through the total rollback of this kind of popular culture “concealed” his revelations at the same time (in diminishing their starting point). I have to emphasize: it was not the Christian religion and the Christian religious authority (the Church) that revoked the carnival in the first place. In fact, “the decarnivalization of the world” was a mortal blow for Christianity as well, which—without the hope for reconciliation—began to lose her grip (without Death) on Life. While this obviously would take us very far, far beyond the scope of this dissertation732, I still have to mention the—formal but still critical—carnavalesque impact on the Christian liturgy. The ever popular forms of risus paschalis (also referred to by Bakhtin), as a kind of “ritual laughter” accompanying the Passion ceremonies, “functionally” corresponds to the archaic-ritual laughter of the clown-ceremonies; it is still laughing at “the death of death”,

accentuating the temporality of annihilation. Christ “crushes death with his death, with this redeeming mankind from the slavery of death.”

Of course, we cannot ignore the mistakes in identifying the old tradition as the specific root of early Christian festivity. Jesus Christ did not come to this world as a ritual clown, he was the depositary of another sense of the world. The tradition of the clown-ritual was based on an entirely different view of time and space. The combination of the ritual of the Messiah and playacting became only possible after the early Church became open to the absorption of the Greek tradition as well. From generation to generation, from year to year reconciliation as reaggregation—into the same existence and to the same reality, into the same Rule—in constant circularity and self-repetition: that was the organization of time in the carnival. The Christian view of time (as the concept of time in Ancient Israel) was based on the structure of salvation, thus being thoroughly linear. Christ’s one and only death and resurrection in Christianity trims human history into two pieces: it destroys death once and for all. It is non-recurrent, it is not announcing the victory of “returning-to-the-same-place”, but opens the door to another form of existence in the “afterlife”. Thus, considering its theological basis it is considerably different from the religious phenomena of the carnivalesque world.

Death was not perceived as an inevitable aspect of life itself, beyond which life triumphed again and continued (life, taken in either its essential collective or historical aspect), but was perceived rather as a limiting phenomenon, one lying on the fixed boundary between that perishable temporary world and eternal life, like a door opening out on another, transcendental world.

As Szilágyi points out about the tradition in the Orthodox Church, Eastern Christianity has always given particular emphasis to the death of Christ which it interpreted as the death of death, a death saving us from death. At the week of Easter they still bury the dead following a unique ceremony. There is only very little reference to the deceased; the whole ceremony—from the beginning to the end—proclaims the Easter joy; they do not remember the dying but celebrate the resurrecting Christ instead, that is: there is no death, because

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734 It is a closely related fact that theatre was an unknown institution in Ancient Israel.
death is defeated. Therefore this ceremony of death was until very late accompanied by
honest laughter in the Orthodox world. Because of that, carnivalism in the end also
remained much stronger in the Eastern parts of Western culture as well. No wonder it was a
Russian, Bakhtin, who found the way back. His favorite author from Russian realism, Fyodor
Dostoyevsky himself was a deeply religious, dedicated Orthodox believer. He was also very
reluctant to write about the sacred fool, a remnant of the carnivalesque culture (by means of
the “salos-jurodivij” tradition) in Russia. The tradition of the sacred fool delicately adds
Christian linearity to the carnivalesque folly with leaving both potent, as Dostoyevsky’s idiot
follower of Christ, Prince Myshkin, a “most perfectly beautiful man” also exemplifies.

In The Idiot Dostoyevsky perfectly describes the impression and the effect of what
Yorick’s skull could have on Hamlet’s early modern audience when he is describing Hans
Holbein’s painting of The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb at Rogojin’s place:

There was nothing artistic about it, but the picture made me feel strangely
uncomfortable. It represented Christ just taken down from the cross. It seems to me
that painters as a rule represent the Saviour, both on the cross and taken down from
it, with great beauty still upon His face. This marvellous beauty they strive to
preserve even in His moments of deepest agony and passion. But there was no such
beauty in Rogojin’s picture. This was the presentment of a poor mangled body which
had evidently suffered unbearable anguish even before its crucifixion, full of wounds
and bruises, marks of the violence of soldiers and people, and of the bitterness of the
moment when He had fallen with the cross—all this combined with the anguish of
the actual crucifixion. The face was depicted as though still suffering; as though the
body, only just dead, was still almost quivering with agony. The picture was one of
pure nature, for the face was not beautified by the artist, but was left as it would
naturally be, whosoever the sufferer, after such anguish. I know that the earliest
Christian faith taught that the Saviour suffered actually and not figuratively, and that
nature was allowed her own way even while His body was on the cross. ‘It is strange
to look on this dreadful picture of the mangled corpse of the Saviour, and to put this
question to oneself: ‘Supposing that the disciples, the future apostles, the women
who had followed Him and stood by the cross, all of whom believed in and
worshipped Him— supposing that they saw this tortured body, this face so mangled
and bleeding and bruised (and they MUST have so seen it)—how could they have
gazed upon the dreadful sight and yet have believed that He would rise again?

The shock given to Myshkin refers to the shock also experienced by Dostoyevsky himself,
who was confronted with this painting in Basel. He, according to his wife’s log entry, was


As, of course, Alyosha Karamazov.

Even if the picture was finished more than a quarter millennium before Hamlet.
close to be tossed into an epileptic seizure by the impact\textsuperscript{739}. The Protestant Holbein’s painting is hanged over the threshold of a door in Rogojin’s “burial-ground-like” house and it also makes another threshold disappear. For Myshkin (and Dostoyevsky) the confrontation with the painting directly suggests that there is no resurrection any more\textsuperscript{740}, and with the picturing of Christ’s dead body—the ritual clown of carnivalesque Orthodox Christianity—it eliminates metaphysical relief as an option, and deprives Life of death as “pregnant Death”.

Since Shakespeare’s time the story of the clowns continued. It is quite obvious that the clowns even managed to save some decisively carnivalesque functions and attributes in the circus, the pantomime and burlesque movies thereafter. While these types of clowns all have their own separate artistic history they can frequently remind us of the clown-plays of the carnivals, and at other times they also consciously seem to problematize this relation. In 1842 the famous mime, Jean Gaspard Deburaud\textsuperscript{741} staged one of his genuine plays at Théâtre des Funambules in Paris. His Pierrot—the clown type he himself has partly created—at the end of the play The Ol’ Clo’s Man, died\textsuperscript{742}. The clown fell to the ground and he did not stand up. The curtain closed, revealing the clown’s motionless legs on “the side of the audience”.

In 19th century France, in the center of Western culture, even after the several centuries of

\textsuperscript{739} Translated from Hungarian by me: “[The painting] had a devastating effect on Fyodor Mikhailovich, who stood before it as he had been paralyzed. I could not watch it for long, because it had a painful impact on him, and since I also did not feel too well I went over to the other rooms. After around fifteen-twenty minutes I returned, and Fyodor Mikhailovich was still standing before that picture without moving. His excited face had that startled expression that I have observed several times in the first minutes of his epileptic seizures. I quietly grabbed my husband’s hand and showed him to the next room, seated him on the bench and prepared for the seizure. Fortunately, it did not come. Fyodor Mikhailovich calmed down, and before we left the museum he insisted to see the picture that has moved him as such, for one more time.” Quoted by Ákos Szilágyi in his “A temetés temetése” [The burial of the burial] In: Halálbarokk. Budapest: Palatinus, 2007. p. 412.


\textsuperscript{741} He also came from the eastern part of Europe, Bohemia, on the name of Jan Kašpar Dvořák. He also was a great fan of Shakespeare and also staged Hamlet for example.

\textsuperscript{742} There is a possibility that Théophile Gautier could have been involved in the invention, but that has no real importance here. The story is known at least from his “self-review” in the Revue de Paris that was released on September 4, 1842. See further for example in Jean Starobinski’s Porträt des Künstlers als Gaukler. Drei Essays. (translated by Markus Jakob) Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1985.
development in human thought, the dying clown still shocked the audience. The strange
ingiving caused a scandal, so the clown play could never again be performed in the Théâtre
des Funambules. However, at the end of my dissertation, this does not seem to be so
mysterious at all. The ritual form again became cruelly deprived from its inherent third part:
the purified return, the reconciliation of the world, the triumph of Life over Death.

Ah, this is not the moon-struck dreamer here,
That used to rail his forbears, o’er the door.
His joy, quite like his candle, is no more.
Today his specter haunts us, thin and clear.

And now where flashing lightning takes its flight,
His pale blouse has the air as of a shroud;
With mouth agape, he seems to shriek aloud
Against the gnawing worm that holds him quite.

And with the flapping of some bird of night,
He makes with sleeves that flutter long and white,
The foolish signs none answer from the earth.

His eyes are holes that burn with sulphurous flame,
And frightful are the powdered cheeks that frame
The bloodless face and pointed nose of death.743

Not only became the “hobbyhorse forgot” in the grand decarnivalization of history, but
through this decarnivalization a whole sense of the world became entirely excluded. While
the world, thus, became decarnivalized in history and by history through a very complicated
process, Shakespeare’s major achievement is that he could compress the act of
decarnivalization into dramatic moments so skillfully that, while we are watching his plays
and reading his dramas, we still feel the gravity of these scenes in a world built on the ruins
of the carnival.

In St. Leonard’s Church at Shoreditch there is a cemetery, where the biggest clowns, like
William Sommer, Richard Tarlton and many others became buried. This is the cemetery
where Yorick, this mute pile of bones “comes from” in the beginning of the 17th century.
And this is where the old humanity’s naive-cheerful carnivalesque sense of the world
became buried with them as well.

743 Paul Verlaine, Pierrot. In: Bergen Weeks Applegate, Paul Verlaine, his absinthe-tinted song, a monograph on
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**Own writings in the topic**


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