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ASPECTS OF THE FOOL IN THE SHAKESPEAREAN TEXT

SCIENTIFIC DOCTORAL THESIS IN THE FIELD
OF THEATRE AND PERFORMING ARTS
SUMMARY

Scientific coordinator:

Professor Ph.D. habil. AURELIAN BĂLĂIȚĂ

Ph.D. Student:

Assistant Professor Ph.D. LIA CODRINA CONȚIU

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1. Key words and concepts

Fool, innocent, jester, buffoon, clown, minstrel, folly, wisdom, symbolic society, telling the truth, natural fool, artificial fool, Carnival, Feast of fools, upside-down world, marginality, comic, tragic, carnival, actors-jesters , Renaissance, Elizabethan theatre, 16th century, 17th century, Psalms, miracle plays, mystery plays, morality plays, sotties, farces, improvisation, Commedia dell'Arte, Richard Tarlton, William Kemp, Robert Armin, William Shakespeare, comic servants, rustics, court jesters, fools who cherish the carnivalesque part of life, motley costume, hood with rooster's comb / donkey ears / horns with bells, bauble, mime, histrions, Falstaff, Touchstone, Feste, King Lear's Fool, Dromio, Speed, Launce, Costard, Launcelot Gobbo, Bottom, Lavatch, Dogberry, Pompey, Elbow, Lucio, Parolles, costume, Royal Shakespeare Company, image library.

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3. Argument

Fools were called to the court to entertain their masters or to drive the “evil” out of the way of kings, for their deformities also presupposed paranormal qualities. Thus, the fool is brought from the outside world, characterized by disorder and mobility, from the anti-model culture, into an immobile world, that of the model and a static hierarchy, to play a role: that of the king’s jester. Entered the universe of the medieval or renaissance court, the jester is subject to the influence of the power of symbolic society, and the freedom he displays finds its expression and is also limited by the privilege granted to him by the authority of symbolic society - the king. The world, in which the fool entered, accepts his telling of the truth because the symbolic society, considered “wise”, considers the jester a “fool”. The fool is allowed as long as he does not interfere with the real world, he belongs to a world of game and carnival, which has its own rules. His words are accepted as a distorted image of reality, and his speech does not change the situation, because the fool’s self-consciousness cannot be transferred to the society that offers him the privilege.

The fool’s spirit and intelligence were often hidden under a deformed body or small stature that provoked laughter or contempt. However, the image of the fool, through the cleverness of his words and the truth of his deeds, often competed with the king’s position. Although they are marginalized, despised, mocked, they are wanted and sought after at any party or even for their simple company in the moments of respite and intimacy of the king or nobles. Beyond the joy it arouses, the fool has a penetrating understanding of life that causes him a sadness and depth that surprises all those who deal with him, his words being in fact a critical analysis of life and morals from that period. The disorder and folly of the one who is blamed and placed on the margins of society, feared because of his behaviour and the supernatural powers stemming from the deformity with which he was destined by fate, are found in his costume, in motley colours, in the bauble, in the pig’s bladder (swollen and caught by a stick) and in the coxcomb of the fool with the ears of a donkey (parodic reference to the donkey that was with Jesus on several occasions and the animal that people laugh at). If in the beginning the fools were natural, at the court we meet more and more artificial fools, who play a role, simulate the folly in order to enter under the incidence of the privilege enjoyed by the “fools”, entertaining their masters. At this point, the court jester takes over the characteristics of the carnival fool and the comedians in the markets, embroidering on the edge of the figure of the fool from birth.

Fools in the theatre often act as mediators between the stage and the audience, guiding the audience and telling the truth. These characters appear when they can “produce the greatest effect, usually to emphasize a turning point in the action or in a major character’s fate or development or to set major events and themes of the plot in relief”.¹ The language they use is different from that of other characters, because they use it to create misunderstandings, puns and to express, in a veiled way, the truth. Even if the fools are not the main characters in Shakespeare’s plays, they are of great importance and they have a unique way of interacting with other characters and the audience. Shakespearean fools, most of the time, appear in the list of characters under the name of jester, fool, clownish servant, rustic or clown, but we also discover other characters who take over this function deliberately (as is Hamlet in his dialogue with Ophelia or Polonius). The fool’s costume is defining for the character and had to be made in such a way that it was immediately recognizable. The motley or striped costume was usually worn with the hood having a rooster’s comb / the ears of a donkey / or horns with bells, and the bauble, as an emblem of his folly. In addition to this costume, there is also the one specific to

¹ Bente A. Videbaek, *The Stage Clown in Shakespeare’s Theatre*, London, Greenwood Press, 1999, p. 34.

the tramp, with loose, dirty, disproportionate clothes, similar to the character *The Tramp* played by Charlie Chaplin.

The fool's ability to transcend the boundaries of a limited identity is the quintessential quality of the clown or fool, but that doesn't mean that only the "mobile" character is always the fool in the play. Other characters can take on the role of the fool, sometimes even us, the audience.

4. The Aim and the Objectives of the thesis

Fools have appeared and appear in history, culture and literature, in many forms, which either provoke laughter or force us to answer awkward questions. The fact that these characters, often deformed or bizarre, have been present since Antiquity, shows us that they play essential roles in society. Starting from these premises, the purpose of our research was to highlight the place that the fool holds in history, culture and literature. The playwright William Shakespeare had a predilection for this character that we found under different aspects in his plays especially in comedies. Thus, we considered a semiotic and comparative analysis of Shakespearean plays and the identification of the costume elements for Feste, Touchstone and King Lear's Fool in Royal Shakespeare Company's performances

5. Research Methodology

The research methodology included activities of documentation, data processing, analysis and interpretation. Both in the theoretical and in the practical approach we have to mention the specific methods of theatre and costume history, the methods of theatrical criticism, the methods of anthropology and the methods of theatre aesthetics.

The first three chapters capture the evolution of the fool in history and culture, the methods used are those of documentation and interpretation of data, but also of comparative analysis. In the applied part of the thesis we made a semiotic analysis of the Shakespearean text (two historical plays and twelve comedies) and a costume analysis in the performances of the plays *As You Like It*, *The Twelfth Night* and *King Lear* from the Royal Shakespeare Company, using the image library of the English company. In the research that was the basis of our doctoral thesis we did not want to analyse the entire Shakespearean work, but only those plays that best capture the fool's aspects.

6. Thesis Structure

The thesis is structured in **five** chapters, the first three having a theoretical and documentary character, the other two focusing on the analysis of the Shakespearean text in an attempt to capture the aspects of the Shakespearean fool and identify the costume elements used in the performances *As You Like It*, *The Twelfth Night* and *King Lear* from the Royal Shakespeare Company.

In **Chapter I - The Fool in History and Culture**, we tried to capture the evolution and functions of this character in society and history, to explain conceptually the terms used in English literature and drama (using the classifications of the following authors: Francis Douce, 1807 - *Illustrations of Shakespeare, and of Ancient Manners*, Frederick Warde, 1913 - *The Fools of Shakespeare, An Interpretation of Their Wit, Wisdom and Personalities*, Enid Welsford, 1966 - *The Fool. His Social and Literary History*, Bente A. Videbaek, 1999 - *The Stage Clown in Shakespeare's Theatre*, Vicki K. Janik, 1998 - *Fools and Jester in Literature, Art and History*), as well as the elements that define the fool – the Carnival, the Feast of Fools, the marginality and the oscillation between comic and tragic.

The fool is distinguished from the normal members of the group by a deviation, either as a person or conduct, they are considered ridiculous and inappropriate. The folly of the fool, the ugliness, the clumsiness, the lack of meaning or the possible deformity of the body represent the deviations from the corresponding group norms. The fact that his role is institutionalized in comedy and perpetuated in folklore suggests that the fool has important social functions. The actions of the fool function as a cleansing device, eliminating the upstarts, the hypocrites and the incompetents from the positions of influence.

The term *fool*, both in English medieval and Renaissance literature and dramaturgy, has a wide range of synonyms: court jester, clown, harlequin, joker, buffoon, trickster, vice, even devil and demon. Enid Welsford describes the buffoons as individuals who look at life free minded, provide entertainment to their peers and do not worry about the serious aspects of life. Both the fool and the buffoon are intruders, even if they are cherished by their masters, they are still on the fringes of society - the difference is that the fool is on the fringes of society because he is either a real or alleged fool, and the buffoon because he is an absurd person, an irresponsible and useless character who does not take life too seriously. When it comes to the analysis of the *jesters*, Welsford refers to them only through the light of the court jester, who lives with the other courtiers and entertains his masters. The difference between court jesters and clowns is that the former is a servant kept by their masters to be “the butt or wit of the household”² and the latter is an ordinary villager who dressed as a clown by virtue of tradition and specially to have fun. Depending on the costume they wear, fools can be defined as vagrants, those with loose, dirty clothes, or court fools wearing a dress with multi-coloured patterns; natural or artificial fools, depending on their physical peculiarities or natural talent for entertainment; as a villain, victim or accuser in the drama, depending on their motivation and behaviour³; in Hebrew *tarn* or *ksl*, according to their innocence or the wilful evil of their folly⁴; and in Latin as *incipiens* or *stultus*, according to their pride in denying God (in the first case) or innocent goodness (in the second case)⁵. Natural fools are those who are not able to function normally, both physically, mentally and emotionally, while artificial fools are those who imitate

² Enid Welsford, *The Fool. His Social and Literary History*, Gloucester, Mass., Peter Smith, 1966, p. 199.

³ Peter Happe, "Fancy and Foly: The Drama of Fools in Magnyfyccence.", *Comparative Drama*, 21.4 (Winter 1993-1994): 426-452, p. 427.

⁴ Sandra Billington, *A social history of the Fool*, Faber & Faber, London, 2015, p. 16.

⁵ Sandra Billington, *A social history of the Fool*, *loc cit*.

the limitations of natural fools. Being wise enough to play the role of the fool without being real idiots, they use this false condition to be allowed to speak freely and make fun of others in society, thus allowing them to cross or ignore the boundaries that other people have to respect. In addition, artificial fools use their abilities to entertain people, and the wisdom they have makes them become isolated observers of the world in which they live.

In the 7th century BC, in Sparta, there were itinerant troupes of comedians called *deikelistai* who performed short farces, being associated with jugglers and acrobats and included in the category of professional comedians. These clowns, as well as the shows they performed, came to be known as *mimes*. Mimes used puns, lyrics, riddles, and songs, often with a comical appearance: a large, hairless head, a prominent nose, a swollen stomach and back, and sometimes a hunchbacked back. In the Roman mime show, the shaved-headed fool wore a sharp hat and was called *stupidus*. The ability of histrions and mimes to improvise and use their bodies with enviable ease continued into the Middle Ages and we find them mentioned under different names: *histriones*, *mimi*, *saltatores*, *bufones*, *gladiatores*, *joculatores*, *jongleurs*, *ministrels*, *scomoroki* etc., depending on the country in which they performed. There was no clear distinction of these fools, most of the time their name was given according to their social status and not according to what they did on stage. Starting with the 14th and 15th centuries, the fool appears more and more frequently in miracle plays and morality plays. The role of the fool was offered to the best actor in the company because his creativity was especially important in capturing the attention and interest of the audience.⁶ Medieval allegories, frequently used especially in miracle plays, are taken over by fools to support their social and political ideas. Thus, fools' societies perform caricatural parodies with allegorical characters during the popular holidays and carnivals. These representations are called *sotties*. With emergence of the Renaissance, the court life with holidays and masquerades develops greatly, and the appetite for carnival and popular holidays decreases more and more. If the performances were performed by amateurs, in the 16th century the professional actors tried to impose themselves, with predilection in Italy, crossing the country and presenting a new concept of theatre: Commedia dell'Arte. The art of mountebanks, dancers, jesters and acrobats, who joined the troupe of actors brought new features to these masks taken from the Venetian carnival. The farces of these histrions found their appreciation both in the common people and in the refined aristocrats, the Commedia dell'Arte being the most popular art form. From the gallery of characters reminiscent of the image of the fool, but also of the ancient mime, Arlecchino is the one that has undergone an incessant evolution. At first, a little naive, but full of skill, being the victim of Brighella's pranks, he gradually became more and more sophisticated, this can be seen in his costume, the irregular pattern of clothes becoming symmetrical. In the medieval and Renaissance courts there will be court jesters, being paid to play the role of "fools", those who provoke laughter, who say meaningless words, but also the role of confidants, advisers of nobles and even the king, those who under the pretext of "folly" can say anything, even laugh at their master, without being punished.

The carnival parodies the rules and customs of the real world, but their overthrow is not final. After the coronation of the false king and the parody of all the rules, by dethroning the fool the people return to the norm of the fortress, the carnival having more a therapeutic role of liberation than of destroying the legitimate authority and power. The carnival introduces an upside-down world, in which the role of the king is taken by the fool, and in which everything is allowed, for a period of time. After a year of obedience, prayer, and morality, the crowd needed a valve of revelry, laughter, and amusement, and so the *Feast of Fools* was born. Having

⁶ Beatrice Otto, *Fools are everywhere: The court jester around the world*, University of Chicago Press, 2007, p. 212.

their origins in the carnival and the Saturnalia of ancient Rome, these holidays tried to include the pagan ceremonies, being organized in the period between Christmas and Epiphany or the Shrovetide. In the carnival, the folly was, most of the time, mimicked with the aim of parodying and stimulating the playfulness, all the actions, gestures, language were thickened to the grotesque, having more of a therapeutic quality, of liberation and recovery of an original time. The folly is not of the world, but of man and of their own truth, it is that mirror in which man mirrors themselves and sees only what they want to see. The ambiguity of folly has been used successfully in comedies, in *quiproquo* forms in which everything that seems true is false and vice versa. The comedian exposes the falsehood, and the person who submits to ridicule is brought back to their right size by unmasking.

In a space of reason and natural order, of sacredness, as society is seen and then the court of aristocrats and especially the royal court, the fool is a marginal who is not allowed to integrate into the life of the city. At the king's court, only the fool can tell the truth without suffering the consequences of this fact. But truth is not the prerogative of the inferior man, but the attribute of power. That is why the fool is kept at the court in an *interiority of marginality*.

In **Chapter II - Fools and Jesters at the Court of England**, we made an analysis of the fool's image as it appears in the illustrations of the time, in documents and literature (Guilelmus Peraldus, Geoffrey Chaucer, John Mirc, William Langland, John Redford, John Heywood, Nicolaus Cusanus, Thomas Morus, Erasmus of Rotterdam), as well as its historical existence at the court of England, in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, in various forms: innocents, court jesters, minstrels.

The medieval conception links the figure of the innocent, the one who does not have an adequate mental capacity, to that of the man who denies God, being considered the agent of evil. The image and idea of folly fascinated the late Middle Ages, with people believing that the number of fools is practically infinite. In this sense, medieval literature abounds with descriptions of fools of various kinds. The fools, in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, appear either as vagabonds trying to earn a penny from the good mood they manage to bring to the public, or to the royal court and in the nobles' houses where they are innocents or court jesters, clever and full of wit, or minstrels, those buffoons-comedians who used their voices or musical instruments to "sing" their story or ballad. The utterance of the truth was a function intended for the court jesters, they were the reflection of that side of the king's personality that could not be revealed directly in front of the court, but through intermediaries, sometimes considered "silly". Whether natural or artificial, fools were present everywhere in the 15th and 16th centuries, at fairs or festivals, in taverns and brothels, but also in the dramatic creations of the time, in mystery plays, farces and sotties.⁷

If we move away from popular literature and theology and look for records from the court of the late Middle Ages, we find that in England it is more difficult to separate innocents from minstrels or court jesters, and the former were rather "silly" than mentally ill.⁸ The Latin terms *joculator*, *scurra*, *mimus*, *ministrallus* were used to designate jesters and minstrels in the medieval period, without a clear distinction, because, most of the time, these characters were performed by one and the same person. In the 16th century there are mentioned the jester Sexton, William Sommers (the famous jester of King Henry VIII), the innocent Jane, and Queen Elizabeth held at court innocents or dwarf women - Ippolyta the Tartarian, Thomasina, Sara Snow, jesters like Jack Grene (who seems to have introduced the fashion for wide, bulky pants),

⁷ Heather Arden, *Fool's plays. A study of satire in the sottie*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 1-4.

⁸ John Southworth, *Fools and Jesters at the English Court*, Sutton Publishing, London, 1998, p. 53.

Monarcho (the most eccentric Elizabethan jester, mentioned even by Shakespeare), William Shenton, John Garret and the famous fool-comedian Richard Tarlton. Under the reign of James I of England (1567-1625) there are mentioned Charles Chester, Stone the Fool and Archibald Armstrong.

The Mimes and histrions, who roamed the lands, retreated in the nobles' houses, forming that circle of servants around the monarch. They combined several occupations and functions throughout the Plantagenet period and even in the Tudor Dynasty. The ability to play an instrument was a basic requirement for any type of servant, so those who were responsible for the waffles, those thin, round sweets that were served at the end of meals, after dinner practiced their skills as "cabaret artists".⁹ At that time, the profession of minstrel involved the association with a patron or a certain place, although these comedians were also very mobile because they undertook numerous tours without their masters. Both the king and the nobles used to keep comedians in their homes, offering them land and properties at retirement, and often these clowns were referred to as *joculatori*. In the 12th - 14th centuries, the comedians of the Plantagenet dynasty had the status of minstrels or minor servants, their abilities were combined with their duties at court, and a "minstrel king" took care of their activities and behaviour at the court.¹⁰ At the end of the 13th century, these minstrels were no longer part of the lower category of servants, the best were called "Master" or "Monsire", received a horse and a servant to take care of them, and their number grew up, every nobleman had at least one minstrel.¹¹ If the beginning of these minstrels was a glorious one, in time they degenerated a lot, being part of the category of poor buffoons, who, according to the law from the 16th and 17th centuries, were considered vagabonds.

In **Chapter III - The Fools on the Elizabethan stage**, we made an analysis of the dramatic texts in which the role of the fool appears and we discussed about three famous fool-actors of the time.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, with the development of drama, more and more roles of fools appear in the plays of authors such as Nicholas Grimald, John Marston, Robert Green, Samuel Rowley, Thomas Nash, Thomas Dekker, Henry Chettle, William Haughton, George Whetstone, Anthony Munday, Thomas Heywood. The development of the fool on stage knows several directions: the court jester, the rustic clown and the agile and joking servant, although the latter is not "touched" by the specific folly of the others. The court jester appears in the form of two distinct characters: the innocent and the artificial fool, aware of what he is doing. Both appear in plays but the second type predominates. If we talk about rustic clowns, there are two categories: the booby and the more sophisticated clown.

The famous comedians of the period are **Richard Tarlton** – The famous actor of the Queen's Men from 1583 to 1588, the year of his death, he personified the naivety, rudeness and simple wisdom of the country man, wearing wide pants and a red vest, boots and hat with buttons. He was known for his predilection for sarcastic perspiration and improvisation. In addition to his career as a comedian, Tarlton owned a tavern, was a playwright and jig author (jig - a rhyming farce, sang and danced after a popular song). He was Queen Elizabeth's favourite and managed to cheer her up whenever she was sad. **William Kemp** was known as a dancer, rustic clown and one of the founding members of Lord Chamberlain's Men, who is

⁹ Constance Bullock-Davies, *Register of Royal and Baronial Domestic Minstrels, 1272-1327*, Boydell Press, 1986, pp. 44-50 apud John Southworth, *Fools and Jesters at the English Court*, Sutton Publishing, London, 1998, p. 36.

¹⁰ Clair C. Olson, „The Minstrels at the Court of Edward III”, *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Sep., 1941), p. 602.

¹¹ John Southworth, *Fools and Jesters at the English Court*, Sutton Publishing, London, 1998, pp. 42-43.

known to have played the role of clowns in Shakespeare's early plays. One of Kemp's strengths was physics-based humour, best known for the morris and jig dance (four of which were recorded for publication between 1591 and 1595). In terms of his art, Kemp embodied a rustic clown who spoke simply, being either an idiot or shrewd, depending on the requirements of his various roles. **Robert Armin** is known for continuing the tradition of rustic clowns illustrated by Tarlton and Kemp, turning them into sophisticated and wise court jesters, a quality that stood out in the dramatic circumstances in which they appeared or in the interaction with other characters. Armin, a constant observer of the predominant tastes and of those actions that received authorization, gradually transformed the role of the clown into one that matched the requirements of the court and the state. With his move to Lord Chamberlain's Men and the development of his ties to the London nobility, Armin abandoned the image of the clown, which had its roots in popular humour, for a jester figure better placed in the political context of the time.¹² Armin combined two historical characters, the idiot or the innocent and the court jester, both feeling comfortable and being common characters at the court.

In **Chapter IV - The Fool in the Shakespearean text**, we analysed the hypostases in which the fool appears in Shakespearean plays, especially in comedies: Comic Servants, Rustics, Court Jesters and Jesters who cherish the carnivalesque part of life. The Shakespearean fool is situated at a point where several elements meet: the Vice, the character from the morality plays of the Tudor Dynasty, the buffoonery of popular theatre, and the medieval and humanist conception of folly, all being merged into a new form. Shakespeare retains from the Vice's features his ability to play with words and rhetoric, as well as to be a sly schemer, removing his wickedness and maintaining only his predilection for game and antics. None of Shakespeare's fools are identical, each has his own personality, just as each comedy has its own specificity.

First of all, we are talking about the *comic servant*, the one who is playful and cunning, full of wit and naughty with his master. The roots of this character are found in the new Greek comedy, represented by Menander, and later in Plautus and Terence's comedies, from early Latin literature. Even if this character is not touched by "folly", he plays the role of a fool at the master's court, in addition to the usual duties, and is full of cleverness and insight. Here we find the twin brothers Dromio from *the Comedy of Errors*, Launce and Speed (the clownish servants) from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Lancelot Gobbo (servant) from *the Merchant of Venice*, and Lavatch (a clown) from *All's well that ends well*.

Another category is represented by the rustic (natural buffoon), the one who comes from among the lower classes, most often a man from the country, and who behaves naturally, without trying to seem intelligent, not knowing that this is the fact that arouses the laughter of others. Bottom from *A Midsummer's Night Dream* is the notable representative of this category, he is the character "whose manifest absurdity clings to the fancy like the beauty of first-love, and whose follies are recounted like the legends of a paladin"¹³. Another character who falls into this category is Dogberry, the night watchman from *Much Ado About Nothing*, along with his partner Verges. Both Dogberry and Verges misuse the words, especially those used by scholars, thereby mocking the pedantry and preciousness of fake scholars. Elbow and Pompey from *Measure for Measure* join the other characters, through the corruption of words (the first) and an understanding of life full of truth, but also cunning (the second), and Lucio is the one who abuses the language and speaks the truth without fear of consequences.

¹² Dana E. Aspinall, „Robert Armin”, in Janik, Vicki K. edit., *Fools and Jester in Literature, Art and History, A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut – London, 1998, p. 43.

¹³ Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, The Society of Gilbert Keith Chesterton, The Critic, <https://www.chesterton.org/midsummer-nights-dream/>, [accessed 30 June 2019].

In a third category there are Touchstone (court fool or jester) from *As You Like It*, Feste (jester) from *The Twelfth Night* and the Fool from *King Lear*. These are court jesters, maintained by the king or nobles or paid, whose duty was to bring joy to the court through their comic behaviour and the jokes they told. They are not natural fools, but rather artificial ones, who know their place and the fact that they have to play a role, and who, through their witty words, analyse the folly of wise men.

The category of fools who cherish the carnivalesque part of life consists of the shepherd Costard (a rustic), who loves food, women and jokes about others, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and Sir John Falstaff, from *Henry IV* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, who becomes the perfect exponent of the Carnival and the carnivalesque part of life.

The Elizabethan fool appeared as a result of an amalgam of influences, all contributing to the formation of its characteristics. The comic servant from the Greek and Roman plays, the vice of the medieval morality plays and the tradition of Commedia dell'Arte contributed to the development of the fool's skilful repartees, and the popular tradition to the acrobatic movements. The village idiot or the country bumpkin offered him his honesty and naivete, which often served him very well when he spoke the truth to those who did not want to hear it. Later, the jester added to the fool the licence to speak freely, his professionalism and many items of clothing.¹⁴

In Chapter V - Aspects of the Shakespearean Fool on the Theatre Stage we analysed the fool's costume, as it appears in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, as well as the costume elements for the characters Feste, Touchstone and King Lear's Fool from the performances staged by the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Fool's costumes fall into two categories. First of all, we have the clumsy-looking dress, which appears in the form of clothes worn by vagabonds, loose, sometimes long, often ragged and dirty, a crumpled hat and excessively large shoes. These elements emphasize the disproportion, and make the fool look small by contrast. The second type of fool's costume is similar to the one worn by Arlecchino, a tight-fitting suit in bright colours and striking combinations of highly decorative, nature-inspired accessories, "the guise that chaos assumes when attention is paid to it".¹⁵ Since there is no clear evidence of the type of costume used by the fools in Shakespeare's plays, a clue may be the manner Queen Elizabeth dressed her court fools. The clothes offered to the Italian jester Monarcho, to William Shenton and Jack Grene, are an exaggerated mixture of colours, combined with the usual livery of the courtiers. Thus, Grene received a pair of red and green stockings, Shenton received hats with lace and multi-coloured feathers and combined clothes made of striped sackcloth with wrought velvet and tufted taffeta¹⁶, and Monarcho got clothes that were striped, with a combination of velvet, taffeta and sackcloth.¹⁷ Striped clothes, of different materials and colours, were also used by court servants, especially minstrels, even before the Elizabethan era.¹⁸

It is possible that the fool's clothing on stage was inspired by the reality of life at the royal court, but also by popular theatre and carnival performances, so that most of the time, it

¹⁴ B. A. Videbaek, *The Stage Clown in Shakespeare's Theatre*, London, Greenwood Press, 1999, p. 2.

¹⁵ William Willeford, *The fool and his scepter: a study in clowns and jesters and their audience*, Northwestern University Press, 1969, p. 16.

¹⁶ John Southworth, *Fools and Jesters at the English Court*, Sutton Publishing, London, 1998, pp. 112-113.

¹⁷ John C. Meagher, *Pursuing Shakespeare's Dramaturgy: Some Contexts, Resources, and Strategies in His Playmaking*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003, p. 230.

¹⁸ *Register of Edward the Black Prince*, IV, (England, 1351-1365), pp. 472, 509-510 apud John Southworth, *Fools and Jesters at the English Court*, Sutton Publishing, London, 1998, p. 57.

consisted of a short doublet, hat with bells and motley pants. The cap worn by fools does not always finish with a rooster's comb or donkey's ears, but one or more bells were attached, sometimes feathers, or the fools had their heads shaved. The wooden stick or dagger becomes signs for fools or the Vice of the medieval morality plays, the one who used this instrument to beat the Devil. A larger pouch or purse, worn at the waist, are old elements of the fool, they also appear in the illustration of the fool in the tarot cards or in Richard Tarlton's costume.

To capture the type of costume used for the fool's role and its evolution in performances, we used the image library of the Royal Shakespeare Company, analysing the costume elements for Feste from *The Twelfth Night* (period 1936-2017), Touchstone from *As You Like It* (period 1952-2019) and *King Lear's Fool* (period 1936-2016) - <https://images.rsc.org.uk/action/viewHome>. We also reviewed the performances staged in Romania, based on statistical data provided by the National Heritage Institute - Bucharest Institute of Cultural Memory.¹⁹

In Romania, *The Twelfth Night* was staged 21 times, since 1949, in the thesis we analysed the fool's costume elements in the performances staged in 2015, directed by Victor Ioan Frunză, from the Metropolis Theatre and the one from 2016, at the North Theatre of Baia Mare directed by Eugen Gyemant.

In Romania, *As You Like It* has been staged 21 times, since 1951, in the thesis we analysed the fool's costume elements in the performances staged in 2016, directed by Vlad Cristache, from the Theatre of Youth of Piatra Neamț, the one at the North Theatre of Baia Mare in 2019, directed by Aleksandar Ivanovski from Macedonia, and the one staged at "Nottara" Theatre, in 2019, by the director Alexandru Mâzgăreanu.

Since 1930, in Romania there were 11 productions of the play *King Lear*, in the thesis we analysed the fool's costume elements in the performances staged in 2006 by Tompa Gabor at the National Theatre of Cluj-Napoca and by David Doiashvili, in 2016, at "Ion Luca Caragiale" National Theatre of Bucharest.

¹⁹ Institutul Național al Patrimoniului, Direcția Patrimoniul Mobil, Imaterial și Digital (fost cIMeC), Premiere [National Heritage Institute, Mobile, Intangible and Digital Heritage Directorate (former cIMeC), First night performances], <http://cimec.ro/>, [accessed 20 August 2019].

7. Conclusions

“Silly” or mentally competent, the fools, be they court jesters or minstrels, are an unchanging factor of the medieval and renaissance courts. Even if they are included in the category of minor servants, as in the case of minstrels, there is no royal or noble party in which we do not find clowns, comedians and musicians. They are the ones who animate the party, through the artistic and athletic skills they have, but also through the jokes that make some laugh and others get angry. The jester, especially the intelligent one, is an important member of the royal family, illustrating that facet of the king that could not be revealed in front of the court. If some of these jesters retire to the monastery, when their age or illness makes it difficult for them to carry out their daily activities, others manage to raise a small fortune and live quietly in old age, as it was Archie Armstrong. At the beginning of the Plantagenet period, the records regarding minstrels or jesters are quite few, but they become more and more numerous, which demonstrates the growing importance that these characters play in the landscape of the royal or noble court, culminating with the well-known character of the Tudor dynasty - William Sommers and later Archie Armstrong from the Stuart dynasty.

Robert Armin talked about the natural fools and the artificial fools, those who used their abilities to entertain people, and he differentiated between them, as the artificial fools foolishly or not, follow their own minds. So are Shakespeare’s fools, full of wisdom, with a sharp mind, who like to make a show for their own amusement or to make fun of the stupidity and “folly” of the “wise” characters. The fool always acts on two levels, between the stage and the audience, revealing the illusion of stage fiction, in contrast both with the reality of the audience and with the actual reality of the main subject. On the first level, the fool’s word is the one that brings to light the folly of the characters, on the second level, the fool shows and proclaims this folly. The action of the fool does not change the course of the main action, his words only interact with the other characters, entering a kind of competition: the word of the fool and the “wise” speech of the others.

Whether they are comic servants or natural fools, court jesters or carnivalesque characters, like Sir John Falstaff, Shakespearean fools draw attention to the discrepancy between appearances and reality, between love and deception, emphasizing the utopian values of fictional worlds in the playwright’s comedies. Stupidity, superficiality and pedantry are criticized and brought to light by the fool, in an attempt to restore the balance of life. For, deceived by their own aspirations, the main characters need the spirit of the fool to find reality and to find themselves. However, the fool does not contribute to the happy resolution of the stories. He is the one who contrasts, through lucidity and cleverness, although he is considered stupid by the symbolic society, with the lack of reasoning and folly of the main heroes, those “sages” who get lost in this struggle between body and soul, stupidity and wisdom, Carnival and Lent.

Combining elements of the Vice from medieval morality plays, the buffoonery of the popular theatre, as well as the medieval and humanist conception of stupidity, the Shakespearean fool transcends these influences and becomes a unique character, always different with each comedy, with both dramatic and metadramatic features. The fool belongs to a world of game and carnivalesque life, which has its own rules, his actions being the secondary subject of the play, for two reasons. One is to limit the possibility of the actor, who played the role of the fool, to improvise and move away from the written play, the second is to offer the less educated audience the portion of comedy and humour. Humour, which is found not only in comedies, but also in the historical plays and tragedies, is a vision of life that the playwright conveys to us. It combines the popular language full of originality with the laughter which has

no irony or tendency to annihilate the human being. It is that humour so necessary to bring to light the folly of the “wise” characters, the role of the fool being that of a commentator on the deviations of the main heroes, his semi-detached position allowing this.

With the advent of Robert Armin as an actor of the company of Lord Chamberlain’s Men the role of the fool takes on another dimension. Thus, we discover Touchstone, the critical observer of the pastoral world in which the main characters live their love stories full of sentimentality, Feste, the comic catalyst of the party on the twelfth night of Christmas, but also the one who raises money for black days and King Lear’s Fool, the fool who holds the “truth” that the other characters have lost and the one who, always with the king, helps him in discovering the true values of life, even if it means that the sovereign loses his reason.

The fool’s costume, a symbol of its dramatic function, cannot be included in a single category. We have the loose, sometimes dirty clothing, torn in places, with a hat on the head, specific to the tramp, and the motley costume, either by colour, by patches of different shades or diamonds, and the cap with a rooster’s comb, with donkey ears or horns with bells. The performances of the *Twelfth Night* staged by the Royal Shakespeare Company emphasize Feste’s qualities of singing, dancing and entertaining the world, and his clothing has several characteristics: it is colourful, in the style of the costume used by the courtiers, or combines the colour of the clown, sometimes it is even slightly dirty, or it has a simple costume, in black and white, similar to the character *Tramp* played by Charlie Chaplin. Touchstone’s costume, in the performances staged by the Royal Shakespeare Company, is distinguished by the fact that it is “special”, whether it is considered elegant, grotesque or hilarious, specific to the characters of the fairy tales or of a goblin, and, especially, colourful. The colours that appear in most costumes are yellow, red, brown and green, but also combinations of white, black and bluish. King Lear’s Fool, considered by many to be an innocent or a fool, the king’s fool through his costume suggests this image. In the RSC shows, he either wears the coat of the natural fools kept at the court or a hilarious costume that suggests folly, or the clothing specific to the festival fool, wearing a cap with bells or a rooster's comb. In terms of colours, the Fool’s costume is either very colourful or dark, perhaps in an attempt to give it a note of sadness and tragedy.

The fool’s costume, through the “disorder” it illustrates, either by design, colours or by the combinations of clothing used (loose clothes or made of coloured patches), suggests the chaos that is meant to be represented. This clothing chaos is the perfect disguise for the fool, a balanced spirit, who knows the truth of life and who knows that folly is his prerogative. This disorder provokes laughter and makes the fool a comic character, but it is also that disguise that misleads us and gives us the feeling of superiority over the fool. But the folly of the fool is the one who holds the truth, the one who sees things as they are, without being deceived, under the hilarious aspect being hidden a wise spirit full of depth.

The confusion that occurs in the Elizabethan period between *fool* and *clown* is maintained even after that, the first was that innocent or court jester who was maintained to amuse his masters, and the second was either a rustic, or a clever and cunning servant or even a jester. Both the productions of the Royal Shakespeare Company and those from Romania are not consistent with the use of a single costume type for the same character, even when the staging is a modern one, combining elements specific to the fool with those of the clown.

But we must not draw such a clear line between the different aspects that the “fool” can manifest. Symbol of folly, in a humanistic conception, so necessary in human life, the fool is found on all levels of life. Even if we try to decipher him and include him in a clear category, the fool slips through our fingers and, laughing, turns his mirror to the audience: after all, what does folly mean and who is the fool?

8. Continuation of Research

A research dedicated to the fool can only be a starting point for other studies that are meant to complete the picture of a character so colourful and complex that has incited and still incites the curiosity and amazement of the audience.

We want to go deeper regarding the evolution of the fool in terms of history and culture, to analyse other characters from the Shakespearean opera which take on some fool's characteristics, such as Hamlet, and to focus on other playwrights who illustrated this character in their work.

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