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EARLY MODERN PLAYERS OF FOLLY

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Abstract

This thesis examines the ways in which folly is used in early modern literature. It asks: how is it that such an ephemeral concept proliferated and endured in the culture of early modern Europe? My understanding of early modern folly as a discursive phenomenon that was used as a way of questioning the knowledge of the ostensibly reasonable world is illustrated by case studies of four characters—four players of folly. Dedicated a chapter each, they are Till Eulenspiegel, the great German jester; Pomet Trpeza, a typically Ragusan wit of Marin Držić's *Dundo Maroje*; Brother Jan Paleček, a Bohemian representative of holy folly; and Sir John Falstaff, the embodiment of folly in Shakespeare's *1* and *2 Henry IV*. Although they emerge from different cultural, linguistic and generic traditions, they nonetheless share a propensity for employing folly in ways that uncover possibilities for new understandings and challenge rigid certainties of the world around them.

Early modernity, the era that produced the works I explore, has become associated with shifts and instabilities. In this Age of Discovery, man was compelled to understand afresh a suddenly unfamiliar world. However, where man and his reason reign, folly gladly follows. I read each of my four players of folly as commenting on a different discourse that constituted an important line of thought in early modernity. Eulenspiegel's example concentrated on the discourse of corporeality; Pomet recognised and exploited the folly of politics; Paleček revealed the potential of the folly of Christianity; while Falstaff illustrated the folly of play. Their paradoxical wisdom appeared in the denial of constants and universals and in their ironic rejections of epistemological claims to absolute truth.

In order to grasp the shifting realities of early modern folly and its particular instances, I employ a methodology that draws on historicist mappings and textual analysis, supported by a theoretical framework based, predominantly, in the works of Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari. This furnishes me with a way of rethinking of early modernity as an age that coped with its own contradictions through a tireless and joyful interest in folly. Through their foolish commentary, my four players of folly attempt to affect and transform the discourses they engage with; they succeed in revealing the instabilities in dominant discourses. By laying

no claims to their own wisdom, however, they generate viewpoints that to this very day remind us things do not have to be how they are.

Abstrakt

Tato disertace zkoumá funkce bláznovství a pojetí bláznů v raně novověké literatuře. Klade si otázku, jak se tento nestálý jev šířil a přetrvával v raně moderní evropské kultuře. Chápání bláznovství jako diskurzívní praxe problematizující znalost zdánlivě rozumného světa dokumentuje výzkum čtyř případů „hráčů bláznovství", z nichž každému je věnována jedna kapitola. Prvním je velký německý šprýmař Till Enšpígl, následují Pomet Trpeza, intrikán z komedie dubrovnického autora Marina Držiće *Dundo Maroje,* Bratr Jan Paleček, český představitel novozákonního „bláznovství" víry, a rytíř John Falstaff ztělesňující bláznovství v první a druhé části *Jindřicha IV.* I když tyto postavy vycházejí z různých kulturních, jazykových a žánrových tradic, jejich společným rysem je objevovat možnosti, jak lze pomocí bláznovství nově chápat okolní svět a kritizovat tradiční jistoty.

Raný novověk, v němž vznikla zkoumaná díla, je spojován se změnami a nestabilitou. V této éře objevů se lidstvo snaží nově pochopit neznámou skutečnost. Nicméně bláznovství rádo kráčí ve stopách snah o nastolení nadvlády člověka a lidského rozumu. Každý ze čtyř zkoumaných hráčů bláznovství je proto interpretován jako komentátor určitého diskurzu, který v raném novověku utvářel důležitý myšlenkový proud. V Enšpíglové případě jde o diskurz tělesnosti, Pomet dokáže rozpoznat a využít pošetilost mocných, Paleček odhaluje možnosti bláznovství v křesťanském životě a Falstaff ukazuje bláznovství ve hře. Jejich paradoxní moudrost se projevuje v popření a ironickém odmítnutí stálých a univerzálních pravd a jejich absolutních epistemologických nároků.

K uchopení proměnlivých podob raně novověkého bláznovství je použita metodologie vycházející z jeho historického mapování a textové analýzy, která se opírá o teoretický rámec, jehož základem jsou především Foucaultova, Deleuzova a Guattariho díla. To umožňuje pochopit raný novověk jako dobu, která se vyrovnávala s vlastními rozpory také díky svému nezdolnému a radostnému zájmu o bláznovství. Jeho čtyři hráči, na něž se práce zaměřuje, ovlivňují a přetvářejí diskurzy, jichž jsou účastníky, a dokáží v dominantních momentech odhalit jejich nestabilitu. Protože nemají na svou moudrost žádné nároky, ukazují i v naší současnosti, že skutečnost není taková, jak si myslíme.

Zusammenfassung

Die Dissertation untersucht die Auseinandersetzung mit der Narrheit in der frühneuzeitlichen Literatur und fragt nach den Gründen für die Proliferation und Beständigkeit eines so ephemeren Konzepts in der Kultur des frühneuzeitlichen Europas. Mein Verständnis der frühneuzeitlichen Narrheit als eines diskursiven Phänomens, mittels dessen das Wissen der angeblich vernünftigen Welt infrage gestellt werden konnte, wird an vier Fallstudien illustriert. Bei den vier Akteuren der Narrheit, denen jeweils ein Kapitel gewidmet ist, handelt es sich um Till Eulenspiegel, den großen deutschen Narren; Pomet Trpeza, einen typisch ragusischen Schelm aus Marin Držić's *Dundo Maroje*; Bruder Jan Paleček, einen böhmischen Vertreter der heiligen Torheit; und Sir John Falstaff, der die Narrheit in den beiden Teilen von Shakespeares *Henry IV* verkörpert. Auch wenn diese Narren aus unterschiedlichen kulturellen, linguistischen und literarischen Traditionen entstehen, verbindet sie der Hang, über die Narrheit neue Formen des Verstehens sichtbar zu machen und die scheinbar unumstößlichen Sicherheiten der Welt, in der sie leben, zu hinterfragen.

Die Texte im Zentrum meiner Untersuchung entstehen in einer Epoche, die üblicherweise mit massiven Veränderungen und Unsicherheiten assoziiert wird. Im Zeitalter der Entdeckungen stand der Mensch vor der Herausforderung, eine ihm plötzlich fremd gewordene Welt verstehen zu müssen. Wo jedoch der Mensch und sein Verstand regieren, folgt die Narrheit auf dem Fuße. Alle vier Akteure der Narrheit kommentieren jeweils einen zentralen Diskurs frühneuzeitlichen Denkens. Eulenspiegel ist ein Beispiel für die Konzentration auf den Körperdiskurs; Pomet erkennt die Narrheit der Politik und schöpft sie weidlich aus; Paleček entlarvt das Potential der Narrheit des Christentums, während Falstaff schließlich die Narrheit des Spiels illustriert. Ihre paradoxe Weisheit zeigt sich in der Ablehnung von Konstanten und Universalien sowie in ihrer ironischen Zurückweisung von absoluten Wahrheitsansprüchen epistemologischer Art.

Um die wechselvollen Ausprägungen frühneuzeitlicher Narrheit und ihrer jeweiligen Beispiele fassen zu können, verbinde ich historistische Kartographierungen mit der

konkreten Textanalyse, ergänzt durch einen theoretischen Rahmen, der vorwiegend auf den Arbeiten von Foucault und Deleuze basiert. Auf diese Weise kann die Frühe Neuzeit als eine Epoche gedacht werden, die über ein unermüdliches und vergnügtes Interesse an der Narrheit mit ihren eigenen Widersprüchen umzugehen wusste. Durch ihre närrischen Kommentare versuchen die vier Akteure die Diskurse, mit denen sie sich befassen, zu beeinflussen und zu verändern, und es gelingt ihnen, die Instabilitäten der dominanten Diskurse aufzudecken. Indem sie selbst jedoch keinen Wahrheitsanspruch erheben, eröffnen sie Perspektiven auf die Welt, die uns bis zum heutigen Tag daran erinnern, dass die Dinge nicht so zu sein haben, wie sie sind.

I. Introduction: Fellows of Infinite Jest

> This fellow is wise enough to play the fool,
> And to do that well craves a kind of wit.
> He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
> The quality of persons, and the time,
> And, like the haggard, check at every feather
> That comes before his eye. This is a practise
> As full of labor as a wise man's art,
> For folly that he wisely shows is fit.
> But wise men, folly-fall'n, quite taint their wit.
>
> *Twelfth Night* (III.i.53-61)[1]

I.i. Carnivals Come Cheap

In the autumn of 2011, I was one of the students who laid down their suitcases in Canterbury, UK. We were embarking on doctoral journeys, ambitious to shed new light on the threadbare conceptualizations of early modernity. At roughly the same time, another, much larger and more disparate crowd started gathering in Zuccotti Park in New York. This other group brought banners and pitched tents. They were to form a movement of occupation that was to draw attention to the dissatisfaction of the self-proclaimed 99% with the increasing inequalities that plague contemporary society, at the site that perhaps best exemplifies the concentration of power: the financial district at Wall Street. They were ambitious to shed new light on the threadbare conceptualizations of late capitalist present. In their ill-fated attempt, they appropriated a visual image: stylized masks of Guy Fawkes, the revolutionary foolhardy enough to think he could damage the hegemony of a central power, immortalized for centuries in a Bakhtinian cycle of death and renewal as an effigy in carnivalesque festivities of every 5 November.[2] They were wearing the masks of folly. I was to study early modern folly.

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[1] Unless stated otherwise, this and all subsequent quotations of Shakespeare's plays are taken from *The Norton*

[2] Rather than being a direct allusion to the persona of the historical Guy Fawkes, the mask belongs to commercially produced merchandize accompanying the 2006 American-produced film *V for Vendetta*, directed by James McTeigue, which in turn is an adaptation of a British comic book series written between 1982 and 1989 by Alan Moore and illustrated by David Lloyd. Both the subtly provocative comic book series and the somewhat toned down film follow a masked anarchist revolutionary who fights a fascist regime in a dystopian

On 9 October, several weeks into the protests, the Occupy Wall Street crowd was visited by Slavoj Žižek. In the context of late capitalism and all its discontents, Žižek is a figure that regularly appears at events of occupation, flown in for his well-known status of staunch adversary to liberal capitalism. A prolific writer constantly questioning stale norms and insipid decorum, he is as insightful on Hegel as he is on Hitchcock. A superstar philosopher, whose theory encompasses the widest realms of culture, traversing the high and the low, he also happens to exhibit a vivid bodily grotesqueness that makes his spectators—of which he often has many—constantly aware of the inseparable unity of body and mind. "There is a danger. Don't fall in love with yourselves. We have a nice time here. But remember, carnivals come cheap," exclaimed Žižek in his speech[3] at Occupy Wall Street. His voice was augmented by the crowd around him, constituting what has come to be known as the human microphone, skilfully circumventing the ban on amplification. Perched on a small, makeshift podium, twitching and sweating in all his grotesque glory, he delivered a truth to the gathering of occupiers by means of his customary irreverence and wit, peculiarly reminiscent of a character far more ambiguous in nature than the predominantly straightforward celebratory incarnations of carnival culture.

Our contemporary world conspicuously lacks wise fools—aside from hosts of scripted satirical talk shows still liable to network censorship, political cabaret performers, or a few generally overlooked righteous-minded individuals—the position nowadays seems to lose edge and have its voice muffled and distorted, if not downright silenced. Considering Žižek's social agenda and his idiosyncratic public performances, he seems a likely candidate for comparison with such characters in today's globalized culture, both virtual and tangible. When he is endorsed, he is applauded for his paradoxes, which are at the heart of any witty

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near-future UK, fashioning himself a modern-day Guy Fawkes. In 2008, the mask debuted in protests of the activist group Anonymous against the practices of the Church of Scientology and soon spread to other demonstrations, Occupy Wall Street included. Not without further irony, the original *V for Vendetta* Guy Fawkes mask is copyrighted by DC Comics and Warner Brothers, although imitations of the mask that avoid paying royalties to corporations, naturally, abound.

[3] Full transcript of Žižek's speech given to the demonstrators can be found online, at <http://www.imposemagazine.com/bytes/slavoj-zizek-at-occupy-wall-street-transcript/>, while a recording of it is available on YouTube in two parts: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eu9BWlcRwPQ> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UpmUly9It4&feature=relmfu>. All links accessed 4 June 2012.

fool's performance: namely, for his unabashed capacity to transversally connect insights of the highest level of abstraction with interpretations of popular and mass culture performed with genuine academic rigour. To be solemn and hilarious, often in the same sentence. Žižek is also routinely employing elaborate jokes that draw on cultural nuances to get serious messages across. The laughter he provokes is never straightforward, but always tinged with an awareness that he is subtly reconfiguring received notions of sense. These are the properties equally present in early modern texts that contain the characters my thesis is concerned with.

In attacks against him, Žižek is called out on the very same characteristics that condition his remarkable popularity. Criticising his controversial opinions in a review of two of his books, *In Defence of Lost Causes* and *Violence,* Adam Kirsch, a senior editor at the American liberal publication *The New Republic*, constructs an image of Žižek as "The Deadly Jester" of the article's provocative title. He identifies Žižek's "intellectual promiscuity [as] the privilege of the licensed jester," condemning his "dialectical reversal, the clever anti-liberal inversion, that is the basic movement of his mind." Compiling a long string of contentious and mainly ambiguous quotes, taken out of context from several of Žižek's books and sensationalist enough to make a docile audience cringe in moral aversion, Kirsch arrives at the conclusion that "[u]nder the cover of comedy and hyperbole, in between allusions to movies and video games, he is engaged in the rehabilitation of many of the most evil ideas of the last century." In his flattened-out understanding of what he perceives as a univocal folly threatening to contaminate even more of his unblemished readers, Kirsch inadvertently assumes the role of an enraged censor, a keeper of the bastion of a privileged and indisputable reason, lashing out against a dangerously foolish triad: namely, that of Žižek, his audience and laughter. In his ultimate rhetorical plead, "[i]s Žižek's audience too busy laughing at him to hear him?"[4] Kirsch fails to make the crucial distinction between laughing *at* and laughing *with*. On manipulating this distinction, of course, hinges much of the

[4] All quotations taken from Kirsch, Adam, "The Deadly Jester," www.newrepublic.com, 2 December 2008 <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/books/the-deadly-jester> 10 June 2014.

success of the fellow who is "wise enough to play the fool" (*Twelfth Night*, III.i.53). And with this miscomprehension, Kirsch quite taints his own wit.

A "deadly jester" or a shrewd player of folly, having devised for himself a public persona that provokes wildly opposing views, Žižek evidently had the wit to recognise the band of occupiers as a carnival, if carnival is to be taken, in the Bakhtinian sense, as a temporary suspension of set hierarchies, a life turned upside-down and yanked out of its usual rut; a momentary, localized victory of life and nature over artificial authorities. Carnival, that is, as a wishfully radical moment in time when authority is ridiculed, hierarchies suspended and misrule licenced, the moment when the exuberant topsy-turveydom thus established acquires the permit to celebrate the newly-found liberties, present in potentiality at all times, but crudely subjugated by the powers that be. Žižek's method was deeply paradoxical and showed the play of folly at work. On top of his customary masks, he assumed a mask of collectivity, addressing the gathering in first person plural, seemingly erasing the boundary between himself and his addressees. However, his message directly contradicted this fragile equality and located him in an ambivalent position of a present outsider, implying that his jesting, ostensibly compliant in the creation of a liberating carnival atmosphere, the perpetuation of which was seen as an antidote to unbearable reality, but is, in fact, *also* a straight-faced warning. This warning was an implicit reminder that the disorder of carnival can be made to serve order, through a permit to let off steam.[5]

Žižek, therefore, stood apart from the carnival and uttered his warnings, fishing from his usual pond of ideas, teasing the audience with such brow-raising lost causes as the

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[5] In the early modern age, the power of this containment developed into ideological manipulation of the mob. On the topic in a specific early modern context, see Kinser, Samuel, "Presentation and Representation: Carnival at Nuremberg, 1350-1450," Representations 13 (Winter 1986: 1-41). Kinser presents an illuminating discussion of the interplay of official and popular forces in carnival's enactment and perpetuation in the context he studies. As he concludes, "[t]ension in the social system provokes not direct change in the cultural system but a wide variety of shifts and moves that should be studied in their mutual cultural relations no less than in their social relations. Urban popular culture puts pressure on as well as receives pressure from elite and official cultures of a variety of kinds—ecclesiastical, feudal, and bourgeois, all of them pushing and pulling on each other" (Kinser 32).

renewal of communism, justification of violence and the like, and virtually taking upon himself the role of a player of folly. Players of folly, those wisecracking fellows of infinite jest, they were the paradoxical "foolosophers"[6] with a licence to question reason and peek straight into the heart of darkness and serve us a truth on a silver platter. They had their characters distinctly formed in the literature of the early modern period that, in turn, influenced their multiple meanings ever since.

We should not forget the Žižek orating on that makeshift podium: "What matters is the day after, when we will have to return to normal life," he went on. The boundary between this "normal life" and the professedly subversive time of upheaval, the time of folly, however, is as hazy as that between Žižek and the protesters. The "normal life" has not forgotten its folly. Folly mutates, ostracised by the Kirsches of this world, persistently returning and recalling its early modern glory. Perhaps in seeing that this tomorrow Žižek speaks of succeeds even to a certain extent, as the lesson of the potential player of folly of today seems to urge, one should turn to yesterday, root out the arrogant position of judging the past and try to understand it as a living thing capable of informing presents and shaping futures.

This chapter serves the twin purpose of a conceptual summary and an introduction. In it, I unfold the idea of folly employed in the thesis, this fluid phenomenon that in its pervasiveness had a great impact on early modernity. From this particular understanding of folly as an amalgam of the popular and intellectual traditions alive in the day emerge the specific faces of the four fellows of infinite jest that are central to the following four chapters: Till Eulenspiegel, the great German jester; Pomet Trpeza, a typically Ragusan wit of Marin Držić's popular comedy *Dundo Maroje*; Brother Jan Paleček, a Bohemian representative of holy folly; and Sir John Falstaff, the enormous, polymorphous player of folly of Shakespeare's *1* and *2 Henry IV*.

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[6] Robert H. Bell notes the word "foolosophy" was coined by Sir Thomas Chaloner, for his 1549 translation of Desiderius Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*. In Bell, Robert H., *Shakespeare's Great Stage of Fools* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 139.

In order to grasp the shifting reality of early modern folly and its particular employments, I have devised a methodology that finds itself at the intersection of historicist mappings and textual analysis, both performing their regular tasks, but venturing likewise into analysing historiography textually and mapping the text historically. A disjointed construction thus built is supported by a theoretical framework based on Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy that provides a potent vocabulary for a rethinking of early modernity as an age that coped with its own contradictions through a tireless repetition of folly, focalising it in characters, the players of folly, who contest what is given, absolute and representational by teasing out the volatile, the surprising and the potential that lurks behind all certainties.

I.ii. Renaissance Folly

Pinning down folly and forcing it into the shackles of a definition is one of the difficulties anyone who (foolishly) ventures into dealing with a concept of such wonder and complexity is bound to face. Folly is as shape-shifting and as elusive as that oracular "Old Man of the Sea," Homer's Proteus. It can be profoundly negative and unacceptable when abused, the very un-civilising element of society that threatens to undermine its feeble foundations. It can be deeply disturbing and alienating, turning those who are touched or labelled by it into social pariahs, either dangerous or despicable undesirables. But it can also be used in a way that brings out supremely affirmative qualities in one—it can cause joy when it points out paths and solutions previously unrecorded, when it changes our vision and opens a space for alternatives.

Folly is hated and is adored; it is chastised and it is praised and culture constantly warns us of its omnipresence. As Homer's "Ruinous Folly,"[7] Atë, the goddess of mischief, delusion, ruin and folly, she diverts and blinds mortals. Both in the Old and in the New

[7] See Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975) 460.

Testament folly is condemned as blatant inability to recognize the will of God and to direct oneself by divine laws, wherefore it leads to sin. Prophets of the Old Testament are particularly vociferous on folly's threats.[8] Jeremiah writes of having "seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied in Baal, and caused my people Israel to err" (*KJV*, Jeremiah 23.13); Isaiah (44.9-23) voices warnings on the folly of idolatry; the text of Ecclesiastes is permeated with guidance against foolish ways of the world in which, as the Latin text of the Vulgata has it, "*stultorum infinitus est numerus*" (Ecclesiastes 1.15).

Pauline Christianity, conversely, assumes folly as one of its defining characteristics, a position especially pertinent for the chapter of this study that looks at Paleček, the Bohemian early modern fool. "We are fools for Christ's sake," (*KJV*, I Corinthians, 4. 10) thus Paul aligns early Christians with weak fools, but also with the mighty *stultitia Dei*, the love prepared to endure sacrifice for the sake of humanity. Walter Kaiser notes the importance of Pauline thought for medieval theological ideas:

> Pauline paradoxes were received with particular favor, as one might expect, by the medieval mystics, and all through the Middle Ages the tradition of the Fool in Christ, whether articulated precisely as such or not, was preserved by such figures as Gregory the Great, Scotus Erigena, Francis of Assisi, Jacopone da Todi, and Raimond Lull.[9]

To these figures, two further late medieval thinkers are added, Thomas à Kempis and Nicholas of Cusa. Each in his way, they "gave the medieval world its final theological apologies for the fool"[10] in their works—Kempis' *Imitatio Christi* and Cusanus' *De docta ignorantia.* Both thinkers were educated at the same Latin school run by Lebuïnuskerk in the Dutch town of Deventer, where the young Deisderius Erasmus, the creator of the

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[8] This is not to say that Jewish culture is bereft of wise folly. For instance, *badkhn*, a Hebrew jester appearing at wedding ceremonies, who utilised learned, scholarly humour packed with Talmudic references, is a tradition that still survives (see Liptzin, Solomon, *A History of Yiddish Literature* (New York: Jonathan David Publishers, 1972) 22-23).

[9] Kaiser, Walter, *Praisers of Folly: Erasmus, Rabelais, Shakespeare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963) 8-9.

[10] Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly* 9.

Renaissance witty fool *par excellence*, will later receive schooling in the same philosophy of Christ.

The year of medieval[11] man was punctuated with feasts and festivities, when laughter and folly were freely expressed, although throughout the Middle Ages some of the connotations of folly itself were sinful. Yet, a vivid medieval example that influenced subsequent representations of fools is the figure of the Vice, a wicked but often humorous character that rivalled Virtue in morality plays. As one of the claimants for the soul of Everyman, the Vice would reveal his devious plans to the audience in conspiratorial soliloquies, often applauding himself, proud of his wit. Initially a serious role, which inspired later villainous characters of the Renaissance stage, the Vice was appropriated for comedy, where he provided delight for the audience by his witty confrontations with other characters in the plays, and sometimes even with the Devil. In describing the Vice, Francis Hugh Mares speaks of its characteristics the fool will later come to possess, to a certain extent at least:

> [t]he Vice was a favourite with the audience, and the man who played the Vice seems to have been the major actor of the company. His is almost invariably the longest single part. He has less time for doubling than the others, and it is his job to keep the audience amused in the lulls of the action while other characters are off stage changing for another part.[12]

The Vice did, however, remain niched in the negative tradition that would likely lead the hero astray. This study will, however, focus on what was in many ways folly's heyday, when its meanings changed and exploded all over literary production—folly in the Renaissance. Early modern fools stepped down from the medieval morality stage and paradoxically

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[11] For a thorough study of medieval feasts and the literature of laughter see the chapter "Rabelais in the History of Laughter" in Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984 [1965]) 59-144.

[12] F.H. Mares, "The Origin of the Figure Called 'The Vice' in Tudor Drama," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 22.1 (1958: 11–29) 13. See also the standard work on the subject Spivack, Bernard, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to His Major Villains* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958).

amalgamated folly with wit, displaying a character far more nuanced in nature than their medieval likenesses they left behind.

Early modernity, the era that produced the works I explore, was a time that we, through our historicizing vision, have come to associate with shifts and instabilities; it was an age of discoveries, when the world became bigger to the Western mind, an age that sought to chart and record, to understand afresh, the suddenly unfamiliar world. The gaze of reason was directed to the newfound lands. Europe, in its interconnected polyphony that preferred some voices while stifling others, was still largely unaware of its shape and unbothered by its nascent exceptionalism. It nevertheless found itself contemplating its centrality and conceptualising Christianity—a religion already divided, standing on the brink of yet another challenge—as a universal mission and a preferred identity. A scientific revolution was on the horizon, constituted of a series of discoveries and reconfigurings that were to transform the image of nature and man alike. At its onset, the universe was described by an astronomy of enlarged cognitive and conceptual scope.

Along with the inquiries into cosmic spheres and the vast terrains of world and nature, runs the early modern fascination with the microcosm of the human body. Fuelled by a renewed passion for dissection[13] and identification of the parts that constitute a perfect whole, with bringing inwardness to the surface in order to grasp it, the body rises on the horizon of intellectual imagination and artistic expression as a powerful image, parallel to the world and even more fascinating in its perfection. In his 1624 *Devotions upon Emergent*

[13] Diligent early modern dissectors likewise turned to folly and strove to expound it through their scientific means. In an attempt to demonstrate a correlation between the size of the brain and idiocy, Thomas Willis, a pioneer in the anatomy of the brain and a founding member of the Royal Society, performed a dissection of a brain that belonged to "a certain youth that was foolish from his birth" (Willis, Thomas, "The Anatomy of the Brain," in *Dr. Willis's Practice of Physik […]*, (London, T. Dring, C. Harper and J. Leigh, 1900 [1684]) 46)). He ultimately describes the outcome of the experiment stating that "we could find no defect or fault in the Brain, unless that its substance or bulk was very small" (Willis, 132) and therefore confirming a necessary difference between a fool and a "normal" person. For a short but insightful consideration of the repercussions of Willis' dissection of a fool's brain, see Colville, Tom "The Day of the Fool Dissection (1660s?)" (Early Modern Forum, Warwick, 3 July 2013
<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/emforum/projects/adayinhistory/thedayofthefooldissection/> 10 August 2014).

Occasions, John Donne contemplates this parallel, giving clear preference to man, whose parts dwarf the world in their magnitude:

> It is too little to call man a little world; except God, man is a diminutive to nothing. Man consists of more pieces, more parts, than the world; than the world doth, nay, than the world is. And if those pieces were extended, and stretched out in man as they are in the world, man would be the giant, and the world the dwarf; the world but the map, and the man the world.[14]

Where man is the central preoccupation and where his reason reigns, folly gladly follows: early modernity was likewise an age that had a taste for folly in most of its endeavours. A powerful contemporary visualisation that testifies to the ubiquity of the phenomenon comes in the form of a map, usually referred to as "Fool's Cap Map,"[15] an image that marries folly to the world. World clad in motley, or a mirror for the viewer even, this peculiarly ominous visualization of early modern attitudes towards folly and worldliness uses Ortelius' new world map, itself a symbol of the age, or a text of its time. This time's innovation was to link the fool's cap with a modern map—a system of signs representing the world by means of geometrical projection discovered by early modern cartographers. The paradox is blatant: the rational system of representations is framed into something that eludes rational representation. With the new map encompassed into the donkey-eared cap, that old symbol of buffoonery, the image conveys a sense of incongruity and contradiction in terms, aspects that have become defining in association with early modern folly. As Richard Helgerson suggests, "[t]here is a visual/verbal pun at work here. All the world—*tout le monde*—is a worldly fool."[16] The world is a fool, but the fool is also worldly: the image is simultaneously a good jest, but also blatant truth. Its content may appear foolish, but the message is quite serious: at the time of the map's creation, one of the recognizable truths was

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[14] Donne, John, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions. Together with Death's Duel* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1959 [1624]) 23.
[15] For a comprehensive discussion of the said map, see: Helgerson, Richard "The Folly of Maps and Modernity," in: Gordon, Andrew, and Bernhard Klein, eds. *Literature, Mapping, and the Politics of Space in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 241-261, esp. 243-249.
[16] Gordon & Klein 243.

that the whole world was mad. So Robert Burton confirms in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, addressing the reader with:

> thou shalt soon perceive that all the world is mad, that it is melancholy, dotes, that it is, (which Epichtonius Cosmopolites expressed not many years since in a map made like a fool's head with that motto *caput helleboro dignum*), a crazed head, *cavea stultorum*, a fool's paradise.[17]

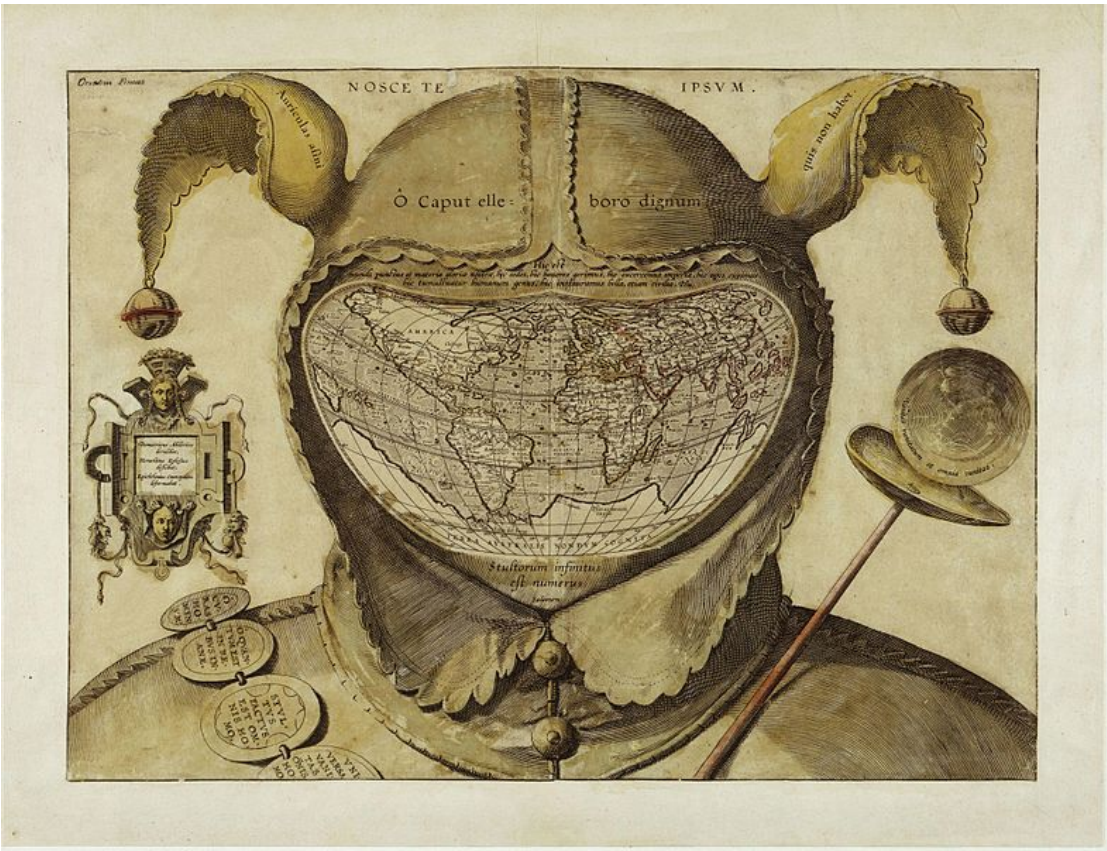

Image 1: Fool's Cap Map of the World[18]

[17] Burton, Robert, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, vol. 1, ed. Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicholas K. Kiessling and Rhonda L. Blair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 24.
[18] Source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fool's_Cap_Map_of_the_World.jpg>

Folly was fluid and flexible whenever it would appear on the stage of history and so it was in the early modernity; it had its specific embodiments, singular uses and was subjected to different receptions from various audiences. The chapters that follow bring four distinct examples of Renaissance folly's richness of expression. Early modernity was likewise a time when folly was undeniably ubiquitous in culture and literature. As Michel Foucault formulates in *Madness and Civilization*, the editorial abridgement of his 1961 study, *History of Madness* (*Folie et Déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*), it was a time that saw

> a great disquiet, suddenly dawning on the horizon of European culture at the end of the Middle Ages. Madness and the madman become major figures, in their ambiguity: menace and mockery, the dizzying unreason of the world, and the feeble ridicule of men.[19]

This disquiet occurred when, according to Foucault, *folie*—a term that encompasses both madness and folly in its semantic range—leaves the place in the hierarchy of Vices that the Middle Ages had assigned it, and steps out into the limelight of literary, philosophical and moral concern. It contests the truth of man's knowledge by pointing to its absurdity and becomes, among other things, "the punishment of a disorderly and useless science."[20] Not merely a sin among other sins any longer, madness, or folly in early modernity becomes a tool of derision and a method of a Madman who in early modern farcical forms "is no longer simply a ridiculous and familiar silhouette in the wings: he stands centre stage as the guardian of truth."[21]

A major problem recognised by Foucault is the change in the status of madness/folly in the early modern time. He records a shift from the paradoxical foolosophers akin to the four presented in this study and vagrant madmen to the lunatic asylums of the 18th century—that is, from uncontrolled movement to confinement. Foucault famously

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[19] Foucault, Michel, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Routledge, 2006 [1964]) 11.
[20] Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 22.
[21] Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 11.

identified a "strange act of force"[22] that occurred in the age of reason, when madness was defined, pathologised and disconnected from reason by Rationality. In this traumatic split "the classical age was to reduce to silence the madness whose voice the Renaissance had just liberated, but whose violence it had already tamed."[23] My study takes its cue from Foucault's understanding of the singularity of Renaissance treatment of folly as clearly separated from what precedes and what follows it. By showcasing four distinct treatments of folly embodied in four characters, four early modern players of folly, it will argue for a particular vision of the phenomenon that permeated different discourses and achieved vastly different results, nevertheless maintaining that alternatives come into view once the paradoxical value of folly is recognised. This particular vision of folly could only have come into being in a specific historical moment that fostered the foolish discourse and cherished its ambiguous cadences.

A proviso of sorts is due, however. In "Cogito and the History of Madness" Jacques Derrida presented a penetrating critique of Foucault's concept of madness based on their diverging understanding of the Cartesian Cogito.[24] For Foucault, insofar as it is used to achieve certainty, Cogito dispels madness form the realm of Reason. In Derrida's view, however, Descartes never confines madness, because the certainty attained through the Cogito "need not be sheltered from an emprisoned [sic] madness, for it is attained and

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[22] Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 35.

[23] Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 35.

[24] The debate on the interpretation of the Cogito between the two philosophers continued. Foucault responded to issues Derrida raised in the essay "My Body, This Paper, This Fire," where he stressed the importance of dreaming in Descartes' *First Meditation* (see Foucault, Michel, *History of Madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (London & New York: Routledge, 2009 [1972] 550-574)). In another essay, "Reply to Derrida," Foucault raises further points concerning Derrida's reading of his work (see Foucault, 2009, 575-591). Derrida went back to the topic in "'To Do Justice to Freud:' The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis" where he relates the Cartesian evil genius to Freud (see Derrida, Jacques, *Resistances of Psychoanalysis* trans. Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault, and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998 [1996]) 70-129). In her own interpretation of the debate, Shoshana Felman contends that "[f]or Foucault, the fictions of madness undermine, *disorient* thought. For Derrida, on the contrary, at least in the case of Descartes, the fiction of madness has as its end to *orient* philosophy (see Felman, Shoshana, *Writing and Madness: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985) 48). My own purposes for bringing in this discussion are to raise a point that historicising *does* inevitably rationalise foolish discourse, but that, nevertheless, an anti-rational expression of the idea of folly is possible in works of art—hence the four examples I discuss in the following four chapters. This could also be the reason why, throughout the chapter "*Stultifera Navis*," Foucault keeps invoking examples from Renaissance literature (see Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 1-34).

ascertained within madness itself. It is valid *even if I am mad*."[25] But what is more important for this study, Derrida also questions Foucault's intention of writing a history of madness itself, such as it existed before having been captured by knowledge, the intention of performing this archaeology of silence. As Derrida reads Foucault:

> Foucault wanted to write a history of madness *itself*, that is, madness speaking on the basis of its own experience and under its own authority, and not a history of madness described from within the language of reason, […] crushed beneath psychiatry, dominated, beaten into the ground, interned, that is to say, madness made into an object and exiled as the other of a language and a historical meaning which have been confused with logos itself.[26]

This, to Derrida, is unfeasible, even the *maddest* aspect of Foucault's ambition, because in writing a history, the aggression of rationalism is inevitably repeated. As Derrida contends, "[a] history, that is, an archaeology against reason doubtless cannot be written, for, despite all appearances to the contrary, the concept of history has always been a rational one."[27] My study, therefore, makes no claims to unearth folly in its pristine state, exactly as it appeared in early modernity and before it started changing and mutating. By looking at examples that are reasonably remote from one another, I instead aim to make a convincing argument for the uniqueness of specifically early modern articulations of folly, which are produced equally by their contextual conditions and aesthetic choices.

The uniqueness of early modern folly is concentrated in one specific example, often singled out as the herald of a new way of thinking. At the dawn of the Renaissance, Desiderius Erasmus installed an ambiguous "guardian of truth" of his own, one that became an unprecedented influence on subsequent literature and imaginings of folly in general. His shrine-bereft Moria identifies the entire world as a temple dedicated to her veneration, because "[w]hy shoulde I fynde lack of a temple, seeyng all this worlde is in manner of a

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[25] Derrida, Jacques, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2001 [1967]) 67.
[26] Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 39.
[27] Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 42-43.

temple most goodly (as I take it) vnto me? And as for priestes of my law, ministers of my religion, I am sure I want none in any place, wheras men want not."[28] With the publication of *Praise of Folly* in 1511, a new, paradoxical sort of philosophising came into being.[29] The ironies of her jocoserious oration refract institutions, discourses and values of the serious world through the prism of folly. For one, Moria indicates the folly of generic types of people in the tradition of Estates Satire that lampooned and castigated the disappointing behaviours of all social strata. But she also clad the globe in a jester's hat, pointing out the absurdity of human aspirations to certainties and the way that watertight methodologies are grossly at odds with everyday experience.

Generically an oration, *Praise of Folly* employs a subtle and complex kind of irony which Walter Kaiser singles out as the first major use of the technique since Lucian of Samosata, the 1st century Assyrian satirist translated into Latin by Erasmus and More, while Erasmus himself is hailed as the first post-classical author to employ irony "in any *sustained* fashion and to perceive its infinite potentialities."[30] In her *Praise*, Folly expresses sharply critical remarks about the church, theologians, monks, the clergy, but also about political leaders and most of the learned professions. The monologue is rhetorically brilliant as well as satirically charged, as its purpose is not to establish rational proofs but to contemplate on the state of the world. Its finale emphasizes the folly of the Cross—that is, the willingness of the

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[28] Erasmus, Desiderius, *The Praise of Folie,* trans. Sir Thomas Chaloner, ed. by Clarence H. Miller, Early English Text Society, 257 (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 67.

[29] Walter Kaiser partly locates the roots of this paradoxical philosophy, which is in his view symptomatic of the Renaissance, in the late medieval theology of Nicholas of Cusa. Cusanus has long been considered one of the great inspirations for the early modern thought. Ernst Cassirer noted how "every study that is directed towards comprehending the philosophy of the Renaissance as a systematic unity must take as its point of departure the doctrine of Nicolas Cusanus" (Cassirer, Ernst, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972) 7). Even if the position of an originator is unlikely to be verifiable for Cusanus, and describing historical periods in terms of systematic unities is hardly satisfactory, it is worth noting Cusanus' influence, especially for the purposes of examining paradoxes and incongruities that shape early modern folly. More particularly, an inspiration for the juxtaposition of folly and wit, at least the one Erasmus will later come to champion, is said to be found in Cusanus' paradoxical doctrine of learned ignorance described as a concord of opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*), his major concept, discussed most prominently in *De docta ignorantia*, dated 1440. Kaiser notes that Cusanus worked toward elucidating "the possibility of knowledge, the wisdom [that is derived] from the antithesis between the irrational absolute and logical reason, and the rejection of rational theology to which these lead him" (Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly* 10). In Kaiser's conclusion, these concepts significantly influenced Erasmus' paradoxical character of Moria.

[30] Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly* 21.

Son of God to suffer pain and death for the salvation of sinful humanity. Robert H. Bell succinctly describes Erasmus' Moria as "[p]layfully celebrating harmless peccadillos or pillorying serious transgressions, now tongue-in cheek, now derisive, the bane of logic. Moria resembles the Cretan declaring that all Cretans are liars."[31]

In choosing to praise folly, Erasmus was creating something of a semantic labyrinth, opening up space where multiplicities of meaning are able to shift kaleidoscopically. One would immediately guess the praise of folly to be a mock praise, therefore, a condemnation of folly, especially considering who the man who authored it was, both in his own age and to us. However, Erasmus chose the speaker of the praise of folly to be Folly personified. And if Folly is praising folly, and therefore condemning it, we could ask ourselves if she is not *de facto* praising wisdom. But on the other hand, if Folly is indeed praising wisdom, would that not mean that Folly (being Folly) is really condemning the wisdom she appears to be praising? The vicious cycle thus produced—resembling the Delphic prophecy of Socrates being the wisest of all men, for he knows that he "knows nothing"[32]—is deliberate and the meaning is to be sought in the ambiguity itself. This ambiguity constitutes the core of any performance delivered by a shrewd player of folly.

The early modern time also saw a split in the concept of the fool; all were no longer the same, as they came to be divided into natural and artificial ones. When the harmless half-wits wandering loose through the medieval world began to be perceived as "naturals", this was followed by the recognition of artificial fools: professional buffoons who used the all-round license of the natural fool for personal advantage. Our politically correct culture, ever striving for delicate euphemisms, would nowadays in all probability classify the aforementioned "naturals" as persons with learning disabilities or intellectually challenged, and would rule out laughter about them as politically incorrect. They were accepted in the Middle Ages mainly because they were, unlike today, a common everyday sight and

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[31] Bell 2.
[32] Plato, *The Symposium*, ed. M. C. Howatson and Frisbee C. C. Sheffield, trans. M. C. Howatson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 216c.

perceived as close to God—a position that was sanctioned by Pauline Christianity and derived from the teachings of Christ himself. The foolish behaviour of the naturals was tolerated and their freedom of speech quite extensive. It was believed that God spoke through them. A very illuminating and hitherto under-represented early modern example of folly allowed on the grounds of its affinity with God, is presented in one of the following chapters and found in the character of Brother Jan Paleček, the Bohemian foolosopher.

Before long, however, the devious trickster types realized that playing licenced fools would not be completely unwise. Therefore, a profusion of wittily foolish characters was introduced into the newly blossoming literature in the vernacular. However, what seems like a clear distinction and an elegant divide into a dualism of nature and art was, of course, not that clear-cut at all. As Kaiser notes,

> [b]etween the two extremes of the village idiot and the court jester, the natural and the artificial fool, there are as many degrees of fooldom and foolery as there are degrees of madness; but whoever is called foolish, whether the lover, the dupe, the sinner, or the theatrical clown, is called so because he acts like a man deprived of his wits—like the natural fool.[33]

Many texts of early modern folly straddle high humanist culture and low culture, amalgamate them and feed from both.[34] The texts this study is concerned with will illustrate

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[33] Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly* 4.

[34] Two important studies give insight into the relationship between popular and aesthetic, specifically concerning Shakespeare's plays. C.L. Barber's *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* illuminates the historical interplay of popular and artistic forms in its subject matter. Barber records specific Elizabethan holiday traditions and relates them to Shakespeare's comic form, stressing the cyclicality and communality of the human experience and concludes that the structure of Shakespeare's comedy is rooted in the popular manifestations that celebrate festive misrule. See Barber, Cesar Lombardi, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2012 [1959]). The relations of popular dramatic traditions to Shakespearean drama are thoroughly examined in Robert Weimann's *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater*, where a genealogy of popular dramatic forms is traced from ritual and mime to their fullest expression on the Elizabethan stage. He raises some interesting points on the nature of Shakespearean fools. Weimann sees Shakespeare's foolish characters as heralds of "a counterperspective of self-expressed interest and truth, a naive and joyous, or bitter, sense of freedom from the burden of ruling ideologies and concepts of honor, love, ambition, and revenge. In this sense the ritual sources of popular disenchantment and the Vice's irreverence, suffer a sea-change. The power of negation is turned against the representatives of

this point over and again. Customs and practices of the carnival, "a privileged time when what oft was thought could for once be expressed with relative impunity,"[35] as Peter Burke has it, provided a well of inspiration for early modern authors employing folly. Importance of the carnival for the development of Renaissance literature saw its most influential postulation in the works of Mikhail Bakhtin. As Caryl Emerson writes, "[o]f all Bakhtin's ideas, the 'problem of the carnival' has proved the broadest, most appealing, most accessible, and most readily translated into cultures and times distant from its original application."[36]

Bakhtin is credited with drawing attention to the way in which ludic traditions and their representations disrupt official discourses and put forward alternative routes out of the prescribed everydayness. In *Rabelais and His World*[37] Bakhtin attached historical significance to François Rabelais in whose works radical laughter of the carnival square entered "the world of great literature"[38] and brought about the birth of the carnivalesque, an event which dovetails with the expansion of folly. The prime characteristic of the carnivalesque type of literary expression is the prevalence of the grotesque, especially expressions of the workings of the grotesque body. Always open, growing and changing, devouring, defecating, copulating,

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the vicious world itself: the negation of negation dialectically gives them a positive structural function." See Weimann, Robert, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function*, ed. Robert Schwartz (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978 [1967]) 158.

[35] Burke, Peter, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009 [1978]) 184.

[36] Emerson, Caryl, *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997) 162.

[37] It has become customary to read Bakhtin's works as an example of "Aesopian language," one that veils its true meaning. Mikhail K. Ryklin, in his essay "Bodies of Terror", presents a rather unusual reading of *Rabelais and His World*. He sees the work as a self-therapeutic narrative intended to heal the trauma of living under ever-growing circumstances of oppression, surrounded by the ever-present collective corporeality. He looks beyond Bakhtin's celebratory tone and reads the *Rabelais* book, written in the Stalinist 1930s, as a requiem for the individual body that becomes expendable and speechless, while all the rhetorical and reproductive rights fall in the hands of the massive collective body of the people. And since *it* is immortal, its constituent parts might very well be unleashed to kill the individual body that refuses to conform. The jolly crownings and decrownings on the carnival square suddenly lose their jovial appeal and start looking dangerously similar to *čistki*—the systematic removals of people from positions, and in most extreme cases, this world. So for Bakhtin, Ryklin argues, the carnival worldview and writing about Rabelais become ways to actively confront the trauma of Stalinist terror from within and at least try and come to terms with living in such a world. See Ryklin, M. K., "Bodies of Terror: Theses toward a logic of violence," trans. M. W. Wesling, and D. Wesling (New Literary History 24.1, 1993: 51–74).

[38] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 96.

giving birth and dying, the grotesque body in itself becomes a celebration of the ambivalent cycle of life, where every birth involves a death, but every death also ensures fertility and promises a rebirth. The grotesque body is represented as favouring protrusions and extensions, as well as orifices, stressing connectivity with other bodies and the world. It engages in biological, but also social exchange. By making the grotesque body the subject matter of his novel, Rabelais made the dynamics of human physiology an arena where political conflicts are enacted. Bakhtin viewed the grotesque as a concept that "discloses the potentiality of an entirely different world, of another order, another way of life. It leads man out of the confines of the apparent (false) unity, of the indisputable and stable."[39] This is especially pertinent for the view of folly that this thesis endorses, and will be particularly applicable to the discussion of Eulenspiegel in the following chapter.

In his seminal study *Carnival and Theatre*, Michael D. Bristol[40] draws on Bakhtinian theories and builds an image of theatrical culture in Elizabethan England as a professionalised form of carnival that was formed in a complex relationship to political and social reality. His work fills the void in Bakhtinian thought that bypassed the potential of dramatic expression to provide "the most vital institutional setting for literary and verbal creativity."[41] The two chapters of this thesis that deal with dramatic characters that utilise folly—namely, Držić's Pomet and Shakespeare's Falstaff—will serve to illustrate the different potentialities of foolish discourse to postulate a way out of quotidian expectations and the deadlock of certainties. In describing his project that collates carnivalesque subversiveness with politically charged idiom of the theatre, Bristol contends that it

> would have to consider Carnival as something much more than a system of images and transgressive rhetorical devices. […] Such a project must take into account the unselfconscious, ritual character of the carnival and its utility as a durable strategy for

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[39] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 48.
[40] See Bristol, Michael D., *Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (New York: Methuen, 1985).
[41] Bristol, *Carnival and Theater* 23.

> maintaining social cohesion, as well as its selfconsciously pragmatic character as an instrument for altering the status quo.[42]

The Bakhtinian theses, however, are not without their problems. His view of the carnivalesque is based on a specific interpretation of time. It is a dual conceptualization that underlines the division of the workaday time and the festive time, when official powers relax their reach and laughter is allowed to roar.[43] What is problematic here is the insufficient distinction between these two kinds of time. Bakhtin emphasizes the connection of the carnival with an idealized time of labour that looks back to a lost age when man and nature existed in harmonious unity. This, in turn, influences interpretations of certain characters of folly commonly perceived as carnivalesque—Falstaff being one case in point, as one of the following chapters discusses—that cannot be adequately connected to such idealising vision.

A further difficulty arises when Bakhtin's conceptualisation of laughter is considered closely. The Renaissance conception of laugher Bakhtin, quite lucidly, described as having

> a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man; it is a peculiar point of view relative to the world; the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from a serious standpoint. Therefore, laughter is just as admissible in great literature, posing universal problems, as seriousness.[44]

A similar point, in relation to folly, is raised by this thesis. Namely, that Renaissance folly, expressed equally in comic as in serious discourses, postulates alternative visions of the world and that this was brought about by both historical contexts and aesthetic choices made by authors utilizing folly. However, the drawback of the Bakhtinian thesis and its subsequent ubiquitous applications lurks in its privileging the transgressive and subversive model of

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[42] Bristol, *Carnival and Theater* 25.
[43] For a full elucidation of Bakhtin's thought on the nature of time, see his chapter "Forms of time and chronotope in the novel" in Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 84-259.
[44] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 71.

carnivalesque laughter. As Manfred Pfister observes, the impact of such a model "is perhaps somewhat unfortunate, as it has tended to obliterate historical difference once again and thus re-instated one particular historical form of laughter as laughter's anthropological and timeless essence."[45] The laughter that follows players of folly, specifically those presented in this study, is multifarious at the very beginning, in the texts that contain them. And as inquiry into adaptations in which these players survive will show, the laughter they generate acquires further, historically contingent dimensions.

One of the usual weapons of a Renaissance player of folly is humour—even though mirthless laughers, such as Hamlet or Lear, are hardly rare in the period. The four players of folly in this study do share an ability to provoke laughter through their use of humour. Humour amplifies folly's structural ambiguities, since it resides in incongruities, in unexpected juxtapositions of seeming opposites. What a player of folly will do is offer a version of reality, one that usually stands in a specific relation to truth. And the message delivered by these means is never to be overly straightforward. Therefore, while being fooled or enjoying fooling, we are constantly encountering folly's traditional trademarks of suspended rationality and heightened theatricality.

Yet, the dominant discourse will always strive for there being a time and space designated for folly. The foolish arrangement loses some of its edge in situations where fools do not enjoy a privileged position. An early modern fool was granted a licence for folly, in a similar way in which festivities were sanctioned and the time for briefly abandoning labour was justified. In different cultures for different reasons, the status of folly began to change in the dying light of the Renaissance. As Kaiser contemplates the changing status of folly in the first decades of the 17th century, he concludes that

> [t]he tradition of the fool, which turned things upside down, has been turned upside down itself; but the fool has persisted, as he always will so long as man contemplates

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[45] Pfister, Manfred, ed., *A History of English Laughter: Laughter from Beowulf to Beckett and Beyond* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002) vi.

> the mystery and tragedy of life, because the laughter of the fool makes it possible for man to accept life by enabling him to accept himself.[46]

The resilience of the players of folly and the audiences' willingness to laugh at them and with them ensure their endurance and allow them to keep on holding their mirrors to up the somnambulant, unsuspecting majorities. How they have been praised and critically interpreted is what merits further discussion.

I.iii. Praisers of Folly

Praisers of folly are many and diverse. Folly has been perceived as an appealing topic of study and cataloguing for centuries, as the large bibliographical account *Fools and Jesters in Literature, Art, and History*,[47] edited by Vicki K. Janik in 1998 serves to illustrate. If there is one thing that all the works taking up folly as their topic[48] agree on, it is the sheer elusiveness of the concept. The fool is often taken up as a conceptual anchorage, seemingly undemanding to define. However, as soon as the first few brushstrokes would be laid down, various shades and complexities in the character of the fool would come into view. Such

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[46] Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly* 296.

[47] See Janik, Vicki K., ed, *Fools and Jesters in Literature, Art and History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998).

[48] This subchapter works with the studies that attempt to fathom folly in general terms. There are, however, several important books that deal with fools and folly in Shakespeare's texts specifically that should be mentioned. Robert Goldsmith's *Wise Fools in Shakespeare* elaborates on the connection between the traditional Vice character and the fool's language, contending that an Erasmian type of irony informs Shakespeare's jesters as a particular worldview (see Goldsmith, Robert, *Wise Fools in Shakespeare* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1955)). David Wiles' study, *Shakespeare's Clown*, provides a consideration of how stage conventions and particular players influenced the developmental trajectories of fools, clowns and folly in Shakespeare (see Wiles, David, *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987)). Indira Ghose's excellent *Shakespeare and Laughter: A Cultural History* focuses specifically on the multifaceted concept of laughter by examining various early modern discourses on it, showing how the semantics of laughter changed throughout history. She emphasizes the importance of the Erasmian wise fool for Shakespeare's plays and reads them in the light of laughter's changing valence in early modernity (see Ghose, Indira, *Shakespeare and Laughter: A Cultural History* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2008)). Robert Bell's *Shakespeare's Great Stage of Fools* analyses wise folly by solely looking at explicitly foolish characters, asserting folly can constitutes a sort of wisdom (see Bell, Robert, *Shakespeare's Great Stage of Fools* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011)).

complexities would then be accounted for by tracing out their emergence in various traditions and a linear, developmental existence of the phenomenon would be described.

Two general lines of approach can be discerned in the studies that take up folly as their central topic. The first one focuses on the universality of foolish characters in different time periods and across cultures. The general impulse behind such studies is the recognition of a common denominator in folly, one that unifies various types of characters and accounts for their endurance over time and in different contexts. Such studies implicitly or explicitly follow the example set by Karl Friedrich Flögel's monumental *Geschichte des Grotesk-Komischen*,[49] enlarged by Friedrich W. Ebeling in 1862. It offers a systematic early exploration of folly's usual companions, the grotesque and the comic. It examines the function of the grotesque comic as a genre in art, theatre and literature and traces its influences in the development of different cultures, from Ancient Greece to Imperial China. This vast compendium of the occurrences of the grotesque comic element in culture laboriously collects deviations from aesthetic norms that celebrate bodily materiality. Whilst providing an early example of examining geographically and temporally distinct phenomena, it does not yet, however, precisely delineate folly as the subject of inquiry.

Where Flögel went towards the grotesque, Enid Welsford focused on folly in particular. Her 1935 pioneering volume, entitled simply *The Fool*,[50] provides a clear account of the rich history of the favourite among entertainers and with its comprehensive and erudite embrace of the subject remains, in its way, authoritative to this day. The major achievement of the book, and one that my own argument benefits from, is the emphasis on the complexity of the cultural tradition from which the character of the fool emerged—one that combined social, anthropological, literary, as well as economic elements. Her conclusions, likewise, inform my own reading of early modern folly. I agree, in particular, with her stance that

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[49] See Flögel, Karl Friedrich, *Geschichte des Grotesk-Komischen: ein Beiträge zur Geschichte der Menschheit*, ed. Max Bauer, 2 vols (Munich: Georg Müller, 1914 [1788]).
[50] See Welsford, Enid, *The Fool. His Social and Literary History* (Gloucester, MA: P. Smith, 1966 [1935]).

> [t]he genius of the Fool is manifested by his power of deluding us into the belief that he can draw the sting of pain; by his power of surrounding us with an atmosphere of make-believe, in which nothing is serious, nothing is solid, nothing has abiding consequences. Under the dissolvent influence of his personality the iron network of physical, social, and moral law, which enmeshes us from the cradle to the grave, seems—for the moment—negligible as a web of gossamer. The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law, he lures us into a region of the spirit where […] the writ does not run. Hence the Saturnalia and the Feast of Fools, hence the popularity of Falstaff and Eulenspiegel, of Punch and Bertie Wooster.[51]

My following chapters will support Welsford's thesis that the fool is capable of opening up a space where the audience is reminded that alternatives to the ostensibly sensible—but often constraining—worldviews *can* be postulated. Moreover, I argue that the early modern players of folly accomplish this without claims to rigid worldly wisdom, which makes them paradoxically wise. Where I shall part way slightly with Welsford is in my insistence that the singularity of early modernity requires more attention and that Falstaff and Eulenspiegel, given the contexts that produced them, are indeed far different from Punch and Bertie Wooster.

Other notable praisers of folly, namely William Willeford,[52] Beatrice K. Otto[53] and, most recently, Tim Prentki,[54] all continue with universalising treatments of folly. Willeford's *The Fool and His Scepter* examines the fool as an archetype and approaches the problem from a psychological standpoint. This is something my own work omits, placing more importance on the aesthetic value of the texts and the historicity of the material. Willeford's study is a compilation of examples ranging from Shakespeare to Harpo Marx, in a manner intended to draw attention to the underlying psychological motivations of foolish behaviour. He sees

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[51] Welsford 317.
[52] See Willeford, William, *The Fool and His Scepter* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1979).
[53] See Otto, Beatrice K., *Fools Are Everywhere: The Court Jester Around the World*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
[54] See Prentki, Tim, *The Fool in European Theatre: Stages of Folly* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

folly as a reciprocal force and takes the fool's audience into the equation, posing the questions of the widespread similarity of fools across cultures and people's age-old attraction to them. I am in full agreement with Walter Kaiser, who considers that Willeford's examples "provoke a certain shock of recognition; at the same time they cause a considerable amount of intellectual indigestion, interrupt sustained argument, and perhaps in the end provide less perspective than incongruity."[55] Moreover, this incongruity is extended in Willeford's usage of psychological jargon and methods that are often distinctly out of joint with the historical material he aims to study, even though his analyses exemplify the emergence of new discourses in the study of folly.

Otto's *Fools are Everywhere* perhaps most clearly illustrates the possible drawbacks of an all-embracing approach to folly. In this ambitious book, best characterized as a catalogue of anecdotes about fools and folly, Otto assembled a vast array of references, both factual and fictional, as well as a wealth of visual and textual material, literally taken from all corners of the globe and covering an enormous time span. As a result, major generalizations befall the material. Accounts of seemingly comparable instances of employing folly are threaded one after another without sufficient reflection upon the juxtapositions, often pasted together merely by short comments. My own insistence on a limited number of carefully contextualised examples wishes to move as far away as possible from claims that foolery is the same wherever and whenever used. Otto does draw significant attention to the hitherto untranslated Chinese jesters, which opens up various new possibilities for the discussion of folly in cultures not necessarily encompassed by the Western canon. It remains nevertheless questionable whether her working with Chinese sources is feasible, as authority and humour in China are widely different from the conditions in which Western fools operate.

Prentki's *The Fool in European Theatre: Stages of Folly* is yet another instance of foregrounding intercultural and trans-temporal similarities in theatrical practices involving folly. Where I agree with him is in his choice of closely reading a limited number of

[55] Kaiser, Walter, "*The Fool and His Scepter. A Study in Clowns and Jesters and Their Audience* by William Willeford. A Review," Shakespeare Quarterly 24, no. 2 (Baltimore, MA: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973: 228-229) 229.

individual fools. Yet, selecting examples from various historical periods can hardly be made without turning a blind eye to singularities of historical moments that bring concepts to particular peeks of intensity, as it happened with folly in the Renaissance. He illuminatingly points out that sees his examples are

> constantly placed in opposition to the dominant discourses of the historical moments in which they occur and yet express this opposition through devices that enable them to escape from the trap of a counter-discourse. In Foucauldian terms they are not seeking an authority for their position and therefore are not concerned with the discourses of power through which all human life is conducted.[56]

While Prentki raises interesting points, making connections across periods and genres, it nonetheless remains that a collation of disparate phenomena harms his otherwise valuable study.

Sandra Billington's *A Social History of the Fool*[57] brings many valuable insights for the study of folly in early modernity. As her study is geographically limited to England, her insights are especially valuable to my reading of Falstaff in one of the following chapters. Billington posits that the medieval fool in England, unlike on the continent, had been marginalized, or even silenced by the disapproval of church and presents various evidence of brief mentions of fools or allusions to them in order to support this thesis. In the English Renaissance, she locates the exceptional success of the early modern fools as stemming from the popularity of two theatrical stars: Queen Elizabeth's favourite clown and a successful performer on the pre-Shakespearean stage, Richard Tarlton, and the man for whom Shakespeare wrote many of his great comic roles, Robert Armin. Billington, however, does engage with later fools. After her discussion of the Renaissance, her account is based on characteristic professional entertainers known as Jack Pudding, Zany or Merry Andrew, and

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[56] Prentki 1.
[57] See Billington, Sandra, *A Social History of the Fool* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984).

gives way to a more generalizing impulse that seeks to prove a point by providing a number of examples.

To a certain extent, my work agrees that it indeed is reasonable to question the perennial appeal of fools. My example of Žižek shrewdly utilising folly testifies to that, while my readings of fools' histories of reception will take this perenniality into account. However, I will maintain that historical and cultural contexts are paramount insofar as they help to describe singularity. If a stable, rooted notion of folly is assumed somewhere far back in the history of each of the individual occurrences, it is not difficult to imagine how, in the same vein, each individual occurrence is supposed to be directly related to the core of the original. What happens with a study, then, is that it develops a heightened sensitivity to the sameness in the different and locates its justification in that very fact, disregarding the potential incongruities of the phenomena. Nevertheless, such studies retain value when it comes to illustrating the extent of the material and serving as maps for the vast territory of folly. However, they are unfortunately often characterised by instances of terminological confusion, equating disparate phenomena, and, on the whole, foregrounding similarities at the cost of blurring the differences.

The second approach in studying folly I discern, which is closer to my intentions in this thesis, foregrounds the early modernity as the heyday of folly. Here belong Barbara Swain's[58] early study, Walter Kaiser's aforementioned one and Robert Hornback's[59] recent work. For different reasons, they all argue that the early modern period was a time that saw a peculiar agency behind the uses of folly, one sharply differentiated from many similar historical occurrences. Swain's work concludes that at the end of the Renaissance the tradition of folly withered and her concluding chapter is entitled "The Fool Exhausted". Kaiser frames his view of folly's golden age by positing Erasmus' Stultitia as the predecessor of all wise fools, while in Don Quixote he saw the last fool. The finale of Hornback's study

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[58] See Swain, Barbara, *Fools and Folly during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932).
[59] Hornback, Robert, *The English Clown Tradition from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2013 [2009]).

of theatrical clowning in England expounds on a revoked licence for folly and the great age of Renaissance clowning reaching its conclusion at the end of the Jacobean era. He also rightly points out that "[c]lose analyses of stage clowns in myriad historic contexts will ultimately prove more productive than ahistoric applications of sweeping, universalizing, generic, and thereby limited and limiting models."[60]

Swain and Kaiser take similar approaches in singling out major works they choose as pivots in the development of folly in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. While Swain looks at Sebastian Brandt's *Ship of Fools* as a major medieval influence on subsequent imaginings of folly, they both share a close focus on Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*. I strongly support the momentousness of Erasmus' ironic mock encomium for the way in which we understand Renaissance players of folly. In it, Folly's irony is used with a dazzling complexity on both a structural and thematic level, and it informs my readings presented in the following chapters. Far from implying that the opposite of the stated proposition is true, Folly's irony negates the assertion it makes, without asserting truths at all.

Swain combines her close analyses with a wealth of valuable historical material and presents archival evidence of medieval and Renaissance fools, historical as well as literary, opting all along to remain focused on a canonized geographical area of Western Europe, namely France and England. Kaiser, on the other hand, organises his book into a handful of case studies that in his opinion epitomise the Renaissance notion of folly. Apart from *Praise of Folly*, he delivers close readings and careful contextualizations of Rabelais' *Tiers Livre*, and Shakespeare's *1* and *2 Henry IV*, closing his circle with a reading of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* in an Epilogue. While Kaiser's approach is outwardly similar to the one I employ here, he remains rather elitist in his choices, implicitly supporting the view that the Western European Renaissance alone merits close study.

When justifying his choice of literary works he places under scrutiny, Kaiser uses a language most superlative in tone: the authors in question are "three of the greatest artists of

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[60] Hornback 203.

the sixteenth century", their characters are "among the most representative of their epoch", missing in their company only Ariosto's Orlando, as it is pointed out in the next paragraph, while the literary works they inhabit count as "classics of the imagination."[61] A similar view of European cultures is applied when commenting on the geographical path the study follows: Italy (as a country that, in Kaiser's blinkered view, produced the *Praise of Folly*), France and England, to which Spain is appended, are singled out as the countries that form the axis of European Renaissance that brought forth the European literary canon. My study re-envisages what this canon would look like when one incorporates comparative readings of comic works from hitherto marginalised cultures—Ragusan and Bohemian, that is—that nevertheless left a significant mark on the literary landscape of folly in Renaissance Europe.

Hornback's excellent *The English Clown Tradition from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare* clearly sets the parameters for its material. He argues for an approach he deems "literary archaeology" that draws on religious, political and theatre history, combining them with various methods of historicist and literary research that look at evidence from various discourses in order to re-examine "supposedly long familiar comic figures."[62] It brings forth important issues concerning early theatrical traditions in England and posits professional clowns and the roles they played as actors of verifiable political significance. What is particularly pertinent for my purposes in this thesis is the fact that Hornback successfully reconfigured the status of the comic in the Renaissance. He points out reductive and dismissive attitudes derived from a long history of misconceptions that shoehorned early modern comedy and folly into an easy category of "comic relief," a concept that, as Hornback reminds through a simple use of *OED*, originated as late as 1825. His study provides "a different vocabulary—and less anachronistic conceptions—[that] account for the comic in Shakespeare and in the Renaissance more generally."[63]

My own study follows Hornback's lead and lists four close analyses of characters representative for their particular utilisation of folly and nestles them in their specific

[61] All quotations in Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly* 14.
[62] Hornback 20.
[63] Hornback 13.

contextual environments. It nevertheless acknowledges the survival and changeability of these figures, their ability to produce offshoots, as an important factor in their portrayals. Such an approach deepens our understanding of the proleptic nature of the past, its texts and culture, which enables it to contain possible future interpretations already tacit within itself. This requires a particular methodology that modifies preceding approaches and accounts for complex connections that are formed between various discourses, bearing in mind the often unpredictable and non-linear nature of these connections.

I.iv. Rhizomatic Folly

Various influential studies have attempted to fathom the presence of a concept as multifarious as folly in either literary history or in the works of specific writers. While undeniably valuable, they share an approach characterised by a cast of mind that views specific representations of folly from the top down, subsuming particular instances under a general concept. In other words, seeing, for instance, how Shakespeare's use of folly in *King Lear* corresponds with existing conceptualisations of it: be they holy folly, stage clowning, or a Montaignian scepticism about the wisdom of human knowledge. My study, however, seeks to create a different methodology. It aims to not merely invert this bottom up paradigm by examining particularities to reach general conclusions, but to start from the middle, as it were, by foregrounding singular examples in all their complexities. This way, historical phenomena such as folly can be understood without forgetting what we cannot understand about them, what is irreducible, recondite, unclassifiable.

In order to understand the nature of early modern folly and better grasp the shifting realities it operates in—realities meant to always remain just somewhat out of reach—certain tools will help. A useful heuristic device can be found in the "nomad thought" advocated by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari throughout their jointly written works, which implicitly continue Deleuze's own philosophy. Nomad thought is a freewheeling impetus that affirms differences; a non-linear movement of thinking that cuts across boundaries, with an aim to

create; at times creating through struggle and resistance. It is, in principle, an alternative to "State philosophy", or representationalist, analogical thinking that establishes identities and rational foundations for order and seeks to discipline nomad thought. As Claire Colebrook puts it,

> Deleuze […] rejects the idea that a principle, or a power or tendency to think, should be limited by some notion of common sense and sound distribution. Nomadicism allows the maximum extension of principles and powers; if something can be thought, then no law outside thinking, no containment of thought within the mind of man should limit thinking's power.[64]

In other words, nomad thought would allow for many divergent readings of a text, just like the discourse of folly in early modernity postulates alternatives without pretensions to certainty or its own wisdom. Both equally question "the classical image of thought, and the striating of the mental space it affects, [that] aspires to universality,"[65] by remaining within the smooth space characterised by "[t]he variability, the polyvocality of directions."[66]

In its affirmative view of contingency, nomad thought flows parallel with Bakhtin's carnivalesque putting into play open, interconnected bodies, and his concept of heteroglossia characterising social and historical world as a terrain of discursive struggle. Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque body, is, however, based on an idealisation of time as unified: the grotesque body is a corporeal reality in which time and earth intersect and "human life and nature are perceived in the same categories."[67] Bakhtin idealises the pre-historic collective existence of humanity, assuming the absolute unity of time in which "everyday life and consumption are

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[64] Colebrook, Claire, "Nomadicism" in Parr, Adrian, ed. *The Deleuze Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) 181.
[65] Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 2004 [1980]) 418.
[66] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 421.
[67] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 208.

not isolated from the labour and the production process."[68] For him, unity and centrality that existed in this utopian past are at the basis of his reading of the grotesque body.

In contrast to this, Deleuze and Guattari stress the multiplicity of events and of movement of fragments at different speeds. Their rhizomatic[69] understanding of growth, life and being rejects a centre that would coordinate this movement. For them, the rhizome, a pivotal concept for the understanding of nomad thought, "operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots."[70] These events of irregular, rhizomatic growth exemplify "a model that is perpetually in construction or collapsing, and […] a process that is perpetually prolonging itself, breaking off and starting up again."[71] Therefore time, for Deleuze and Guattari, cannot presuppose a unity and centrality and might also be called "rhizomatic."

I wish to contend that the early modern discourse of folly was a form of nomad thought that reached a plateau in the period: that is, it reached a "continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end."[72] Or rather, specific utilisations of folly in early modernity, to which the four I present belong, found themselves in a plateau state of most clearly expressing various potentialities of the phenomenon of folly. This thesis does not aim to write a history of folly, not even with the aforementioned Derridean proviso of history necessarily being an act of reason. It aims to utilise a Nomadology as one of its methodological tools. A Nomadology

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[68] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 206.

[69] In Deleuze and Guattari's vocabulary, a "rhizome" is an alternative to "arborescent" being. By calling their rhizomatic way of understanding "a process that challenges [arborescent] all models" (Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thosuand Plateaus* 22) they wish to establish an alternative way of looking at knowledge. An arborescent model of knowledge shows a tendency to look for origins and trace out chronologies of things. It pertains to hierarchical organisations and establishing beginnings and conclusions—it grows like a tree would, from root to the smallest leaf. Conversely, rhizomatic knowledge seeks to "ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" (Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 7). Rhizomes resist chronology and organization, they are distinguished by multitudes of offshoots and movements in various directions. In their own words: "[a] rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo.* The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb "to be," but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, "and…and…and…" (Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 25).

[70] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thosuand Plateaus* 23.

[71] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thosuand Plateaus* 22.

[72] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 24.

that is, as Deleuze and Guattari have it, "opposite to history," because "[h]istory is always written from the sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus."[73] The four plateaus of early modern folly, concentrated in the four characters of the subsequent four chapters, "communicate with one another across microfissures, as in a brain,"[74] forming together a rhizome.

Early modern folly, if considered nomadically, has a rhizomatic existence. A rhizome is a way of thinking and being that is alternative to the linear, arborescent "system of thought [that] has never reached an understanding of multiplicity: in order to arrive at two following a spiritual method it must assume a strong principal unity."[75] It is precisely an arborescent conception of culture that governs the studies outlined before, and this arborescent model of understanding has been particularly perennial in the history of ideas. It has at its basis an insistence on order, symmetry, unity and hierarchy. These notions early modern folly does not simply invert: it provides a way out of them. A rhizome subverts the arborescent assumption, namely that all growth means establishing some hierarchy. This is parallel to the subversive function of the early modern fool. Eulenspiegel enters into hierarchical relationships of apprenticeship only to unsettle them and cause mayhem; Pomet resists hierarchy by taking things into his own hands and assuming the role of the orchestrator of the action in the play; Paleček, for whom everyone is "brother"—even the King, the sublime pinnacle of hierarchy—strives for constructing a rhizomatic web of individuals based on the egalitarianism of Pauline Christianity; and Falstaff in his foolish subversiveness and his domicile "out of all order, out of all compass" (*1 Henry IV*, III.iii.19-20)[76] perpetuates the play of folly until law is employed to restrain him, but even then his influence remains inscribed in the new structures that seek to re-establish a firm hierarchy.

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[73] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 25.
[74] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 24.
[75] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 5.
[76] All quotations of *1 Henry IV* are taken from Shakespeare, William, *King Henry IV: Part 1*, ed. David Scott Kastan (London: Arden Shakespeare, 3rd series, 2002), all subsequent references follow the text of this edition; act, scene and line numbers are in parentheses in the text.

A rhizome likewise puts an emphasis on singularities and their connections, not necessarily stemming from a stable, grounded centre that then branches out into varieties. Deleuze and Guattari[77] see it as primarily characterised by principles of connectivity and heterogeneity, that is, by perpetually establishing links between different systems of signification, thus forming a multidimensional network rather than branching out from a central trunk. Different instances of folly seen as offshoots of a rhizome can, therefore, be said to exist within such multidimensional networks in history, in complex ways connected to various discourses, circumstances, organizations of power and other rhizomes. Eulenspiegel, for instance, feeds off high humanist culture, but remains closely connected to the popular; Pomet displays an understanding of political opportunism that is parodically Machiavellian; Paleček communicates with the tradition of court jesting while delivering a profoundly Christian message; while Falstaff is as informed by Lollardy as he is by the Vice tradition, among other things.

One of the most important statements about the rhizome points out that it "is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion."[78] Dramatic and theatrical functions of the early modern players of folly can be analysed on this basis. For one, their discourse is polyvalent so that it momentarily pauses action and directs the audience towards a circumlocutory space of jest. Eulenspiegel's incessant turns to superficial meanings of speech belong here. Falstaff and Pomet are both prone to using monologues: the fat knight's unproductive digressions and his gratuitous enjoyment in play are parallel to the comical reappraisals of dramatic action Držić's witty hero intimately shares with the audience. Paleček, motivated by wanting to remind everyone around him of Godly wisdom, turns to feigning unreason and succeeds to instruct through jest.

In addition to this, players of folly are capable of opening up different ways from which the action can proceed. In their antics they find and make us see the lines of flight or deterritorializations "according to which [multiplicities] change in nature and connect with

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[77] For the original discussion of the concept of the rhizome, see Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 7-15.
[78] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 23.

other multiplicities,"[79] or "the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis."[80] A line of flight is a path that actualizes tacit connections between bodies, one that releases the power of potentiality. Deterritorialization is a process that, broadly speaking, decontextualises fixed relations. By employing shrewd folly and manipulation of hapless comic characters, Pomet will, for instance, deterritorialise a deadlock in the plot and steer the course of the comedy in a different direction.[81] The same is true of Paleček's capacity to recognise the potential for salvation for every single character he meets: be that the Queen herself who is in need of Christian guidance, or a lowly criminal caught in a heinous act. Eulenspiegel's clever pranks will anger some he interacts with, like his numerous employers. Yet those who will see how his folly has affected them in a positive way and made them reassess their beliefs will perhaps outnumber the angry ones. And Falstaff will hardly ever fail to try and turn things to his comical advantage—up until his final failure to win over Hal's heart—since his jesting consists in nimble changes of topics, in delivering unexpected turnarounds. "By the Lord, I knew ye as well as he that made ye," (*1HIV*, II.iv.259-260) he will finish off his long parade of lies as soon as he discovers Hal and Poins are perfectly aware nothing he reported of the Gadshill robbery is true.

In using these processes, early modern players of folly become akin to Deleuze and Guattari's "conceptual personae," authors like Kafka, Artaud and Lawrence, the half- and more-than-philosophers. "They are hybrid geniuses who neither erase nor cover over differences in kind but, on the contrary, use all the resources of their 'athleticism' to install themselves within this very difference, like acrobats torn apart in a perpetual show of strength."[82] The "athleticism" of the fools is found in their capability to traverse order, reason, madness and mayhem by the means of discovering new directions in motion, by offering lines of flight.

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[79] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 10.
[80] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 23.
[81] This example has, in a way, come to constitute a pure deterritorialization: it is not followed by a complementary process of reterritorialization because the ending of the comedy is lost.
[82] Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (London; New York: Verso, 1994 [1991]) 67.

A further principle governing a rhizome is one of multiplicity, and once multiplicity is acknowledged, there is no longer any need for the one central entity that originates all possible transmutations. When studying texts of folly, therefore, their teleology stops being crucial; tracing out clear lines of inheritance to predecessors and perhaps even to some mythical urtext of folly proves a futile task—what matters are the connections. The text as a multiplicity is situated inside what Deleuze and Guattari call a plane of consistency, where all possible connections are formed between other multiplicities. Thinking in terms of multiplicities helps to un-think teleologies. Eulenspiegel, Pomet, Paleček and Falstaff can all be seen as multiplicities in their own right, and their nature of multiplicity operates on several levels. First, they are all products of intersecting discourses: popular, humanist, religious, political and so on. Second, their functions in the texts assume many dimensions: Eulenspiegel is a champion of this, the one who continuously reinvents himself, but the other three players of folly can likewise willingly adapt to circumstances in order to change relations within the play. And third, their nature of multiplicity also becomes apparent when they are examined in vertical cultural transfer: new cultural contexts appropriate them, always foregrounding another of their dimensions.

A rhizome in its existence may encounter a signifying rupture, namely, if it happens that it is broken, its parts will continue to form new connections and persevere in a different part of the plane of consistency. Similarly, when a player of folly is transplanted into an environment different than the one he originated in, he will form a new rhizome with its new environment, not merely remaining linearly connected with his previous incarnation, but growing again in all directions. Thus Eulenspiegel will, among many other media, enter the arena of classical music; Pomet will be substituted to his author in bibliographical accounts; Paleček will entertain children that know little of his Brethren Christian calling; and Falstaff will become a symbol of drunken merriment in opera as much as in comic books.

The final principle that distinguishes a rhizome is its insusceptibility to any kind of structural or generative models that would establish for it a genetic axis along which then successive stages of development could be traced out. A rhizome in general defies any kind of

tracing, what it favours is mapping. Its final principle is one of cartography. Mapping is a dynamic process, unlike tracing that presupposes its object to be static. The map is the work to be done: "a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight."[83] A map is an apt reproduction of the connections between rhizomes because it is as open and unfinished as they are. It can be divided into parts, reversed and endlessly modified. Because rhizomes themselves always have multiple entryways, one can read their map from different directions and thus elude the constrictions of linearity. By employing the technique of mapping, my following chapters will open up different pathways through which each of the players of folly will be approachable. These paths will lead through history, through different instances of reception and appropriation but, most importantly, through the texts themselves.

If we were to imagine a vast map of folly, the density of connections between its plateaus would prove perhaps greatest during the early modern period. Folly arguably shone its brightest, when it not merely provided a ritualized outlet for suppressed sentiments in society, but when it lived as a way of thinking, as an alternative expression of the world. It lived like "the madness whose voices the Renaissance […] liberated."[84] The ubiquity of literary, theatrical and philosophical works that employ folly during the period tells the same story. Erasmian folly flew across Europe on the wings of the printing press, beguiling readerships with its silenic nature, which, as Philip Sidney remarked of it, has "another foundation then the superficial part would promise."[85] For, as Folly of the *Praise* judged herself, indulging in paradoxes, "[a]ll humaine thynges are lyke the Silenes or double images of Alcibiades, have two faces much vnlyke and dissemble that outwardly seemed death, yet

[83] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 23.
[84] Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 35.
[85] Sidney, Philip, *An Apology for Poetry or the Defence of Poesy*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd, rev. and exp. R. W Maslen (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1965, rprt. 2002) 101.

looking within ye shoulde fynde it lyfe and on the other side what seemed lyfe, to be death […]."[86]

An understanding of the slippery quality of knowledge and certainty permeated the period that nonetheless put great faith into learning. New discoveries fostered a curiosity in the learned, and Montaigne's contention that "it is a stupid presumption to go about despising and condemning as false anything that seems to us improbable; this is a common fault in those who think they have more intelligence than the crowd"[87] is but one reflection of this. In such an atmosphere folly could thrive—both the foolish folly of ignorant intelligence, but even more so the folly that uses wit to unmask the foolishness of the world—because its nomad thought allowed for indeterminacies, hidden truths and ambiguities that were all around. The centrality of folly in Shakespeare is a matter to be discussed at great length elsewhere; suffice it to say it is not reserved only for explicitly foolish characters. When Hamlet, theatrically renouncing theatrical pretences, claims to "have that within which passes show" (*Hamlet*, I.ii.85) it is melancholy, a hidden bodily cosmos, but also folly: the methodical madness that is "his own pointed, artful appropriation of fooling as a stalking-horse."[88] Renaissance folly, as Foucault sees it, is "the object of argument, it contends itself against itself; it is denounced and defends itself by claiming that it is closer to happiness and truth than reason, that it is closer to reason than reason itself."[89] Such folly was found in literatures produced in many corners of Europe, most clearly expressed in comic characters that reached into various discourses and managed to transform them through their cunning and wit. They were the fellows of infinite jest. What remains is to meet the four I have selected.

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[86] Erasmus, *The Praise of Folie* 257.
[87] "That it is folly to measure truth and error by our own capacity" in Montaigne, Michel de, *Essays*, trans. J.M. Cohen (Harmondsworth; Baltimore, ML: Penguin Books, 1958, rprt. 1982) 87.
[88] Hornback 11.
[89] Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 12.

I.v. The Fellows

This thesis is a fourpartite travelogue of a circuitous journey with folly across Europe. Europe in early modernity, as much as Europe today, for we find the two in a paradoxical relationship, virtually silenic in nature: the image of the past is shaped by the present, while the present, at its core, still guards the past. A regular travelogue, however, seems a system that is much too closed for a pursuit of folly, especially if taken rhizomatically. A regular travelogue might presuppose a beginning, central developments, and an end. This text does not assume any kind of teleological completion; the first player of folly presented is no less complex than the one that comes final. It begins with Eulenspiegel's triple Christening, and approaches the ending with Falstaff's two deaths, one feigned in in *1 Henry IV* and one reported in *Henry V*, but this is merely a fortuitous thing. Each of the chapters is a map to a fluid character. Pasted together, they invite to travels from various points of departure and speak of the singularity attributed to each of the works. Paths toward the characters lead through various discourses: historical, biographical, the discourse of theory, of literary analysis and history of reception. These discourses are made to work together like parts of a machine, approaching Deleuze and Guattari's contention that "reading a text is never a scholarly exercise in search of what is signified, still less a highly textual exercise in search of a signifier. Rather, it is a productive use of the literary machine […] that extracts from the text its revolutionary force."[90] The revolutionary force extracted from the texts will be early modern folly in its many shapes.

Uses of folly are innumerable and the motivational energy of fooling is always very different, and each of the following chapters concerns itself specifically with the main outcomes of folly's employment. The choice of characters in the thesis—mirrored in my own doctoral journey that saw each of the countries—was guided by the intention to present as great diversity as possible. Thus the German jester Eulenspiegel, to whom Chapter Two belongs, presents an embodied folly, that is, folly that fuses body and mind, both of which

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[90] Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London: Continuum, 2004 [1972]) 116.

become instruments for foolery. Marin Držić's Pomet Trpeza of Chapter Three, through his upstart actions, reckless ambition and Machiavellian manipulations, uncovers the folly of politics as it was invented in the Republic of Ragusa. Chapter Four speaks of the Bohemian Brother Jan Paleček, one of the rare pure instances of Christian folly inspired directly by Scripture and *stultitia Dei*. And, finally, Shakespeare's Falstaff in Chapter Five embodies the folly of play: as a great thespian, he breaks and bends all the rules in order to exist by entertaining his audience within the play, but is also granted so much space within the play as to attract the actual audience into the theatre. The four fellows are thus connected to some of the discourses that shaped the early modernity: the discourse of body, of politics, of faith and of theatre. How they themselves are shaped by folly is the topic of subsequent chapters.

This thesis is, quite obviously, comparative and the comparative method adds to its cohesion. The fate of comparative literature and, in turn, literary history, is a matter of much recent debate.[91] Comparative literature, that not long ago entailed the practice of close reading of Anglo-American and Western European texts, with the addition of the classics and the canonical works of the countries where it was carried out, has seen an influx of previously neglected literatures. This brought about a pronounced awareness of an implied hegemony plaguing the field. My mix may be said to follow this trend of inclusion, even though it remains within the borders of Europe. By juxtaposing two major cultures, Renaissance English and German, with two cultures hitherto under-represented in English-language scholarship, early modern Bohemian and Ragusan, now encompassed within Croatian culture, this study aims to offer a polyphonous take on the concept of folly in the period in which ideas, just like people and objects, were on the move.

The texts the four fellows of this thesis emerge from are generically disparate, which illustrates how adaptable early modern folly was to different contexts and contributes further to the polyphony the thesis strives to achieve. They are all, however, in many ways the most

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[91] See Culler, Jonathan D., "Whither Comparative Literature," *Comparative Critical Studies* 3, no. 1 (Penn State University Press, 2006: 85–97); Damrosch, David, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Comparative Literature/World Literature," *Comparative Literature Studies* 48, no. 4 (Penn State University Press, 2011: 455–85).

impactful fools each of the cultures produced in early modernity. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht sees such big, canonical texts as the ones I am discussing, as the "black holes[92] of meaning,"[93] texts that have sucked up and now carry within them centuries of interpretations and histories of reception. Gumbrecht questions the very probability that the usual practice of writing histories of literature would continue, given the new orientation in historicizing, setting literature within the physical world it was produced in and the one it describes. He refers to the concrete aesthetic dimension of literature that has the capacity of invoking for the reader a bygone world in its physicality, and an urge, present in the historicizing of literature under today's epistemological conditions, to describe the material world.

The contextual parts of the following chapters have a similar aim, but one that is nonetheless divergent: to present the past taking into account its elusive, nomadic quality. This is very far from what the early, arborescent histories of literature tried to achieve and subsequent ones perpetuated, namely to contribute to the developing concept of a nation. My four fellows of infinite jest, each embedded in his own culture, have on occasion been treated as national treasures. This places them within narratives of national identity. Yet, the Renaissance players of folly, when allowed to speak for themselves, might challenge the notion of specific, man-made national identities. In the quietly satirical but merry song of Ben Jonson's Mosca, in which Kaiser sees the "versified translation of Stultitia's words,"[94] no nation whatsoever merits one's respect. That is, unless that nation is a nation of folly.

Fools, they are the only nation
Worth men's envy or admiration,
Free from care or sorrow-taking,

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[92] For Deleuze and Guattari, black holes are negative endings at which the failed lines of flight arrive, "occlusions striving to seize whatever comes within their reach," they are not simply accumulative spaces as Gumbrecht sees them, but forces of annihilation. (Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 45). In both usages the concept has been sourced from contemporary physics and has connotations of inescapability: Gumbrecht's texts as black holes cannot escape the layers of commentary, while the fate of a line of flight caught in a black hole is irreversible.

[93] Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich, "Shall We Continue to Write Histories of Literature?" (*New Literary History* 39, no. 3–4, 2009) 530.

[94] Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly* 296.

Selves and others merry making;
All they speak or do is sterling.
Your fool, he is your great man's dearling,
And your lady's sport and pleasure;
Tongue and bauble are his treasure.
E'en his face begetteth laughter,
And he speaks truth free from slaughter.
He's the grace of every feast,
And sometimes the chiefest guest,
Hath his trencher and his stool,
When wit waits upon the fool.
Oh, who would not be
He, he, he? (*Volpone* I.ii.66-81)[95]

[95] Jonson, Ben, *Volpone*, ed. Brian Parker and David Bevington (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1999) 56-57.

II. Eulenspiegel and Embodied Folly

> "Dear Lord God," said Eulenspiegel, "isn't it a great wonder? I do everything I'm told—and still earn gratitude nowhere! I'm not deceived—I was born in an unlucky hour."[96]
>
> *Till Eulenspiegel*, Tale 63

II.i. Introduction: Folly as a Line of Flight

Gallivanting from place to place, in the manner of Deleuze and Guattari's favoured "schizophrenic out for a walk,"[97] the (anti)hero of the stories I analyse, finds himself in Magdeburg, one of the cities of the affluent Hanseatic League, which is also rich in comic potential. We are in a fairly early stage of his journey, the fourteenth of the ninety-five tales, and what follows is a somewhat atypical adventure. Having earned a reputation of an all-around wisecracker, he smugly accepts the challenge of the town-folk to provide them with his unique entertainment. Ever the thespian, who reaps validation from centre-stage performances—not unlike Shakespeare's Falstaff to whom I shall turn later—he spreads the preposterous rumour that he would be flying off Magdeburg's Town Hall. As the onlookers dutifully gather, he does not turn to supernatural phenomena, even though he does pretend to flap his arms for a while as though that exactly might follow. In the moment when the citizens of Magdeburg, with their mouths agape, are prepared to swallow his lie, he calls the people out on their folly:

> I believed there was no greater fool or buffoon in the world than I. But I now see clearly enough that this whole city's utterly full of fools. If you'd all told me that you planned to do some flying, I wouldn't have believed it—and you think I'm a fool. How am I supposed to fly? I'm after all neither goose nor bird. After all, I've got no

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[96] Oppenheimer, Paul, ed, *Till Eulenspiegel. His Adventures* (New York: Routledge, 2001) 132. All English quotations are taken from this critical edition. In the original: "'Lieber Hergot,' sprach Ulenspiegel, 'ist daz nit ein groß Wunder? Ich thu alles, daz man mich heißt, noch kan ich niergen Danck verdienen.'" In Lindow, Wolfgang, ed, *Ein kurtzweilig Lesen von Dil Ulenspiegel nach dem Druck von 1515* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1966) 184-5. This and all subsequent original quotations are taken from this edition.

[97] Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 2.

> feathers, and without feathers or plumes nobody can fly. So you can see very well it's all been a lie.[98]

As often happens when folly is employed, the episode divides the audience in the story: the haters stand next to the amused. One half is left enraged at the preposterous behaviour of the supposed fool, while the other chuckles, admitting to having been duped by a charlatan who was, nevertheless, telling them a truth of sorts. But all of them walk away with the realisation that it was they who are fools.

Willing, as always, to use his body as an instrument of folly, the fool toys with the gullibility of his foolish audience, raising their expectations only to deflate or subvert them. The text thus communicates with social and intellectual concerns of its times: the feat the fool promises, in itself folly, had been promised seriously and ventured by others before him. Imitating Icarus, those primitive aviators practiced what is known as "tower jumping", a foolhardy aspiration popular in medieval Europe that belongs to the technological prehistory of human flight[99]. The tale thereby offers a *reductio ad absurdum* of man's desire to surpass his bounds. Three strands of folly—the drollery of the fool, the credulity of the spectators and the madcap perseverance of the flightless humans in history—intersect at the point of highest intensity of the unconquered desire for flight, both as a physical feat and as a performative act of folly. And this point of highest intensity is where the creative potential of folly is released and where, if not physically soaring, the fool finds a "line of flight"[100]—that is, a path of experimentation where existing conditions reach a stage where it becomes possible for them to form new connections and combinations, a concept created by Deleuze and Guattari.

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[98] Oppenheimer 26. The original reads: "Ich meinte, es wär kein Thor oder Nar mer in der Welt dann ich. So sih ich wol, daz hie schier die gantz Stat vol Thoren ist. Und wann ihr mir alle sagten, daz ihr fliegen wolten, ich glaubt es nit. Ich bin doch weder Ganß noch Fogel, so hon ich kein Fettich, und on Fettich oder Federn kan nieman fliegen. Nun sehen ihr offenbar, daz es erlogen ist." Lindow 41.

[99] For a discussion and contextualization of medieval tower jumping, see Wragg, David W., *Flight before Flying*, (New York: F. Fell Publishers, 1974) 8-26.

[100] See Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, esp. 4, 10, 15, 98, 298, 466-467, 561-562.

The equivocal play of perspectives presented in the tale—whereby the fool fools the naïve burghers of Magdeburg and uncovers the folly to be their own—is here, as elsewhere in the work, not structured as a mere reversal of the "folly vs. common sense" binary. Faced with an unsolvable situation of an "either-or" nature, all too familiar to the problem-solving Bohemian jester, whose chapter will soon follow, the fool atop of the tower in this tale mobilises folly to dismantle conventional ways of thinking and unsettle stale dualisms. For a moment, he manages to broaden the horizons of both the burghers of Magdeburg and the reader by drawing on their shared desire for openness and possibilities. Any result may ensue, when folly takes off on a line of flight. What the fool will choose to do, though, is modify the process of reasoning and judgement into a practical joke: in many ways his preferred type of folly that relies heavily on a performative dimension. The same structural principle is often followed in the jest-book that I consider in this chapter.

What makes this particular episode somewhat extraordinary is the explicit enunciation of the workings of folly. Uncharacteristically for his usual practice, the witty fool turns around and explains the location of his wit. For a brief moment, he illuminates the eye-opening impulse otherwise hidden between the lines of the hilarious prose that contains him. The passage is charged with bodily potential, but also with linguistic manoeuvres employed in the service of both folly and truth—two concepts that witty fools often exploit in their humorous escapades. The issue of apparent truth emerging from practical jokes touched upon here will keep cropping up throughout the book and I shall deal with it in more detail further along in the chapter. The pronounced openness of this episode that celebrates the mastery of fooling and the callousness that accompanies it makes it speak for the work in its entirety. The paradoxical interplay of fooling and getting fooled that unfolds therein; the subtle coexistence of laughing at and laughing with; as well as ridiculing and being ridiculed, are essential mechanisms in the machinery of an early modern *Schwankbuch* centred on a character who has, over the years of his long existence, become what is perhaps *the*

quintessential German jester. His is the first face of folly to present itself before me on this fanciful journey and it belongs, of course, to Till Eulenspiegel.[101]

Till Eulenspiegel, the pivot of the *Schwankbuch*, is a wayfaring peasant prankster: from birth to his deathbed, distinguished by constant motion and productivity. Like a Deleuzean "schizo",[102] who operates according to the principle of connectivity, of the endless flow of desiring-production, Eulenspiegel moves geographically, allowing for his tales to exhibit horizontal connectivity that characterises nomadic thinking. He enters into endless encounters that enable him to quite virtuously "labour in his vocation", as Falstaff puts it (*1 Henry IV*, I.ii.101), his vocation, naturally, being the practice of folly. He likewise moves conceptually, rearranging his own parts, appropriating his environment and reinventing himself for every subsequent situation. He employs folly democratically, remorselessly tricking and exploiting the naiveté and a lack of wit of virtually any social stratum. Because he is in constant flux, moving about and wearing many masks, he implicitly preconceives of what Deleuze and Guattari were to explicitly describe as an identification-defying schizo. As a subject, Eulenspiegel is the ballast of a powerful desire for alternatives, of the Deleuzean desiring-machine. This subject is conceived in *Anti-Oedipus* as a "subject [which] itself is not at the center, which is occupied by the machine, but on the periphery, with no fixed identity, forever decentered, *defined* by the states through which it passes."[103] Considering this de-centeredness is one of the aims of this chapter.

The popularity of Eulenspiegel's misadventures secured the character an iconic status, which surpasses his fixity in the written form. Even though it comes from a time long before Germany has become a discernable reality and its inhabitants even considered themselves German, the name of Till Eulenspiegel will today almost certainly be known to anyone acquainted with German culture. That is, high as well as low culture, for Till transcends

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[101] More will be said about the variations of Eulenspiegel's name further along, but throughout the chapter I shall follow the conventional practice of referring to the character by the High German variant of his name.
[102] For a full elucidation of Deleuze and Guattari's use of the figure of the "joyful schizo," see *Anti-Oedipus*, esp. 1-9.
[103] Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 22.

these boundaries and separations. One of the reasons for this being his sheer reproducibility, the fact that his numerous incarnations have long been springing up in various contexts. He not only shares this quality with the Bohemian fool, Jan Paleček whose fame is, not nearly as far-reaching, but also with Falstaff, who is known to freely depart from his original context and become assimilated into cultural products, both high and lowbrow. Unlike that of the other examples in this study, the commitment of Eulenspiegel's tales to a multifarious employment folly is primarily geared towards popular laughter, to its production and perpetuation.

First published around 1512, but in gestation for far longer, the tales of Eulenspiegel originated in an age that did not know national prides or legacies—and yet over the centuries they have become associated with precisely that. Both the character and the narrative traverse the territories of pre-national German popular taste, accumulating an impressive array of themes, associations and offshoots. The narrative employs a bifocal vision, commenting simultaneously on the time of its own past and on the social relations of the early modernity. The tales claim to speak about a century prior to the time of their composition and Eulenspiegel moves through medieval territories quite freely, not swearing allegiance to any master for very long, and staying true only to folly. The early modern narrative he inhabits communicates with the medieval tradition of *facetiae*: compiled anecdotes of humorous vein that punctuated the stream of more serious literary production and had a general, albeit somewhat ambivalent, aim to delight through laughter and instruct through underlying didactic messages.

This chapter embarks on a threefold exploration. First, it presents the set of circumstances that surround the creation of Eulenspiegel as a dynamic concept, still in becoming, that originated in an early modern narrative, and later departed from it. Second, this description of Eulenspiegel's contextual environment and connections with other discourses is followed by a textual exploration, marked, in turn, by two most prominent aspects of the *Kurtzweilig Lesen* and of the character. For one, there is the inescapable *corporeality* that conditions the tactics of the practical jokes presented in the text and opens it up to a specific kind of grotesque humour. In addition to the body—and very much

emerging from it—is the sheer *productive potential* of Eulenspiegel. He produces himself as decentred, differentiated but still repeated in every tale. He likewise produces an abundance of language and an abundance of excrement. And in its desire to keep this production perpetual, the culture keeps producing him too. Finally, the third strand of the chapter's exploration moves from this productivity and looks at a few (out of a multitude) representative *Eulenspiegel* adaptations and the character's transformations in various genres. Eulenspiegel will thus emerge in all his complexities as a polyvalent construction capable of rhizomatic off-shoots in different discourses and different media. The conclusion will show Eulenspiegel as an embodiment of folly, a concept that resists fixity and enables one to see various perspectives simultaneously and unlock the creative potential of the text, or to find Deleuze and Guattari's lines of fight.

II.ii. Till in the World

For a chapbook hero, Till Eulenspiegel is in many ways the stuff of legends, even if verifiable mentions of him that predate the early modern text are few.[104] The character remains marked by a sentimental notion of once having belonged to reality that emerges from his rootedness in oral culture. Eulenspiegel has a veritable genealogy and the world still celebrates his place in culture and his memory, however fictional. The legend would wish us believe he was born at the very beginning of the 14th century in the Lower Saxon village of Kneitlingen that takes pride in remembering him as one of its famous sons, and he is supposed to have died of the Black Death in 1350 in Mölln. There, a tombstone that reads, in Low German, "Anno 1350 is dusse steen upgehauvn de Ulenspigel ligt hir under begraven market wol un denket dran

[104] As Oppenheimer establishes, "[a]s far as an Eulenspiegel legend is concerned, references to one abound. All but two references, however, date from well after Grüninger's editions. […] The two prior references to an Eulenspiegel legend are also surprisingly inconclusive. Neither of them is directly contemporary with Eulenspiegel's 'life' in the fourteenth century or with his 'death' in 1350." (Oppenheimer xxx) Oppenheimer quotes the first of the references that predate the early modern text as a brief mention in two letters from 1411 of an "Ullenspeygel" text in connection with works of Socrates and Cicero. Hermann Heimpel discovered this reference in 1932. The other one comes from Hermann Bote's manuscript chronicle, composed around 1493, where he lists the death of an "Ulleynspeygel" under the events of 1350.

wer ick gewest si up erden alle de hir voröver gan moten mi glick werden"[105] has been known since the early 16th century,[106] telling the tale of the long remembrance of Eulenspiegel.

Scattered across Europe, but concentrated mostly in the German lands, Eulenspiegel's adventures are topographically very precise and easily traced on the map—almost every tale has its location clearly indicated—and indeed many of the places still celebrate their association with the famous witty rogue, while a commemorative Eulenspiegel path links some of the German sites. One of the most curious places that boasts its connection with the character is the eponymous Eulenspiegelturm in Bernburg in Saxony-Anhalt: the tower where Eulenspiegel was supposedly employed by the Count of Anhalt.[107] The seductive power of establishing the character's historicity[108] is not a concern of recent scholarship, even if one opines some unnamed medieval rogues or vagabonds could have inspired his misadventures. The text of *Eulenspiegel* presents the character as a product of various intersecting discourses. Doubtlessly emerging from an oral tradition, the character is

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[105] Freely translated, the inscription reads: "Underneath this stone, erected in 1350, lies Eulenspiegel. Remember and reflect who I was on earth. All who pass by here will be the same to me." The stone is now built into the outer wall of St. Nicholas church in Mölln, Germany. The tombstone inscription, in somewhat different form, also appears in an Epitaph that constitutes the 95th tale of Eulenspiegel's adventures. The inscription states: "Dissen Stein sol niemans erhaben—Ulenspiegel stat hie begraben" (Lindow 266). Translated by Oppenheimer as: "Don't move this stone: let that be clear—Eulenspiegel's buried here" (Oppenheimer 191).

[106] Dieter Arendt lists two early German references to Eulenspiegel's tombstone, one by the Wismar town clerk Jordan Höppener dated 1536, and another from the time around the year 1550 by one Johannes Lithodius, a doctor from Dusseldorf (Arendt, Dieter, *Eulenspiegel, ein Narrenspiegel der Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1978) 49). The tombstone is also described by the English traveller Fynes Moryson in his *Itinerary*, published in 1617: "[W]e lodged in a Village called Millen, where a famous Jester Oulenspiegell (whom we call Owly-glasse) hath a Monument erected: hee died in the yeere 1350. […] The Towns-men yearly keepe a feast for his memory, and yet shew the apparel he was wont to weare." See Moryson, Fynes, *An Itinerary* (New York: Macmillan Co, 1907 [1617]) 9. The latter reference also speaks of Eulenspiegel's early-established international popularity.

[107] The story of Eulenspiegel's misbehaviour in the service of the Count of Anhalt, identified as most probably Bernhard II of Anhalt (Oppenheimer 198), has him fail to sound the warning from the tower when the enemy appears, and sound it when there is no enemy – all as a retribution to the Count for failing to feed him. This tale, numbered 22, is also one of the examples of Eulenspiegel's mistreatment of high social classes and his liberal utilization of folly.

[108] One such recent attempt arrived from Bernd Ulrich Hucker who provides information of a Brunswick legal register that records the arrest of one Till van Cletlinge (Till from Kneitlingen), along with four accomplices, for a highway robbery in the year 1339. See Hucker, Bernd Ulrich, *Till Eulenspiegel: Beiträge zur Forschung und Katalog der Ausstellung vom 6. Oktober 1980 bis 30. Januar 1981* (Braunschweig: Stadtarchiv und Stadtbibliothek, 1980) 10.

nevertheless marked by a level of stylisation, a fact that enabled scholars to speculate about single authorship. Moreover, the connection of Eulenspiegel with practical jokes does not make him a purely literary or verbal construct, and the performative dimension of this character's antics adds a further level of paradox.

Enid Welsford recognizes a mythical buffoon in Eulenspiegel and clearly separates him from various fools and professional buffoons—making a case against mingling clowns and clowns, as it were, those real and imaginary—while rightly refuting his basis in reality, divorcing him from any possible portrayal of a historical person. She continues:

> [r]egard Eulenspiegel as a real man, dealing with real men capable of feeling pain, and he becomes a purely odious figure. Buffoons can only flourish, jest-books can only be written, in a society where the general level of sensitiveness and sympathy is not very high. Nevertheless, although a certain amount of callousness must be assured if the book is to be enjoyed at all, yet the remarkable quality in Eulenspiegel is not his power of causing trouble, but his skill in evading consequences. To identify oneself with Eulenspiegel is to feel for a moment invulnerable.[109]

This appeal of buffoonish abandon may well be one of the aspects of the attractiveness of folly-figures in general and one of the causes for their long survival in culture. The full enjoyment of Eulenspiegel's antics certainly requires a suspension of social sensitivity, as Welsford indicates. Till's somewhat brutal and scatological behaviour is attested to by some of his outrageous antics: he tricks a priest into defecating in a church (Tale 11), outrageously pretends to help a constipated child (Tale 16) and sells his own faeces as truth-telling berries for a steep price (Tale 35). All of these shenanigans compare to a certain extent to Falstaff's occasionally wicked treatments of hapless characters as mistress Quickly or Justice Shallow, although scatology is absent from the misdemeanours of Shakespeare's fat knight. Playing a fool has the potential to make a character become an avatar of supressed unruliness. The licence for folly may, therefore, appear a liberating

[109] Welsford 51.

element of a seemingly universal appeal, its significance reaching even into matters of national identity. However, Eulenspiegel's overall cultural importance emerges not so much from his enduring aptness for invoking readers' subversive identification, as Welsford would have it, but rather from the text's complex dealings with the paradoxical nature of folly. The character changes while staying the same, shocks as well as delights, entices profound insights and appeals to base humorous universalities, while owing to his variability and ubiquity he remains present in registers both high and low.

The *Eulenspiegel* book was originally embedded in the historical context of a pre-national Germany fragmentized into powerful but squabbling duchies under the loose rule of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I. The King is remembered as a great westernizer of the lands, introducing modern warfare to his estates and establishing advanced methods of governance.[110] A vast country—the largest kingdom in the Western Christendom until the formation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1569—the Germany of the time was a heterogeneous assembly of lands whose people spoke variants of the German tongue. Their consciousness would have been inscribed with a kind of multiplicity, an awareness of sharp distinctions and an encompassing collectivity. That they would all celebrate and welcome tales of a traveller who criss-crosses their territories indulging in folly comes as no surprise. To Eulenspiegel, they are all the same be they from Brunswick, Bremen, or Berlin—worth laughing at and exploiting, as soon as he deems them gullible or in any way despicable. Like Eulenspiegel's tales themselves, it was a time that married the old and the new, living both simultaneously. It had not yet forgotten the old feudal ways, but did begin to foster innovation and an appetite for change. As Thomas Brady fittingly describes it, such Germany belonged to "an age of no longer and not yet, a time when social patterns and customs began to assume their early modern forms."[111] And as if to exemplify the times as well as possible, many facets of Eulenspiegel as a character fit within this liminality of "no longer and not yet."

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[110] For a detailed discussion of Maximilian's reformatory efforts, see Brady, Thomas A. Jr, *German Histories in the Age of Reformations, 1400-1650*, (Cambridge University Press, 2009) esp. 107-129.
[111] Brady 12.

The time in question also saw a great influence of Christian Humanism upon literature and learning, and especially encouraged creation in the vernacular—N's authorial admission of not being versed in Latin in the Foreword of *Eulenspiegel* communicates with this very tradition. Printing, although a relatively new practice, had already gained considerable momentum. Northern Germany was its native environment and *Eulenspiegel*, as one of the works popular enough to go through a number of editions and reach a wide audience, had far better luck in that respect than Držić's comedies that had no press in Ragusa to be printed on, or Paleček's narrative that hardly saw print for complex political reasons. But print had a larger role to fulfil than just to aid a book of a wanderer do its own wandering. An atmosphere of invigorated intellectual production in the German lands opened up the opportunity for growing murmurs of unease to gain strength and resound finally in the greatest religious upheaval of the age. *Eulenspiegel*, taking specific shape in the early years of the 16th century, narrowly predates the Reformation, but remains largely apolitical. It promotes none of the reformatory sentiments of the age—one of its chapters even explicitly singles out Hussites as heretics. Namely, Eulenspiegel goes to Prague, at the time when "good Christians were still living there—before the days when Wyckliffe brought his heresy from England to Bohemia and it was spread further by John Huss." [112]

Eulenspiegel and Paleček, the latter being deeply embedded in the culture emerging from the Hussite revolution, were obviously not meant for similar-minded audiences. However, popular dissatisfaction with the clergy, the social group so often smeared with mockery, is very much present in Eulenspiegel's tales. It is mirrored in numerous episodes where gullible, stingy, or morally altogether dubious monks get their due. These unfortunate simpletons are regularly the object of laughter and ridicule in the tales, they are often falling victims to their own material greed or gluttony, and Eulenspiegel customarily shows no mercy for their caricatured humanity. Only, unlike Paleček who differentiates between those he mocks, he cares not whether they also represent any kind of a reform, or how earnest they may be in implementing it.

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[112] Oppenheimer 54. Original text says: "[w]oneten daselbest noch gut Cristen, zu der Zeit, als Wicklieb uß Egelland die Ketzerei in Behemen thete und durch Johannes Hussen geweitert" (Lindow 81).

When the absence of a reformatory impulse in the tales is coupled with the fact that the largely heterogeneous assembly of the victims of Eulenspiegel's derision includes only a few members of landed nobility, the social satire employed in the *Schwankbuch* is revealed as somewhat sceptical about innovations and revolutions. Eulenspiegel comes out as a restless character nestled in a seemingly stable world that has not yet started to articulate the upcoming change, or is not yet willing to participate in its articulation. However, Eulenspiegel does possess the potential to be fitted in the moulds opposite to such latent conservatism, which would see him as a representative of a single social class, and be hailed as the voice of the popular. Albrecht Classen, who, in Eulenspiegel, reads a universalist committed to laughter, observes that reducing Eulenspiegel to

> a catalyst of social change, to the representative of the impoverished lower classes, and to the spokesperson of those who have fallen out of the social net and are forced to lead life at the margin of society, deprives us of much more productive interpretations that would explain the popularity of these *Histori* both in the Middle Ages and far beyond.[113]

Conservative or revolutionary, the character obviously outgrew the text, his potentialities luring interpreters into seeing him as an answer to their own specific agenda.

Eulenspiegel of the text belongs to a particular social group recognized all too well in the societies of early modernity: he is a vagabond, an aimless wanderer tied to no trades, known for a propensity to trick and dupe people left and right. The popularity of the anonymous *Liber Vagatorum: Der Bettler Orden*, published in Augsburg in 1509 (and translated into English in the 19th century by J.C. Hotten as *The Book of Vagabonds and Beggars*)[114] speaks of the public interest in the subculture. As though it sets out to reveal the most alien of species, this early study of vagrancy categorizes its subject matter for the reader,

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[113] Classen, Albrecht, "Laughter as the Ultimate Epistemological Vehicle in the Hands of Till Eulenspiegel" *Neophilologus* 92, no. 3 (July 1, 2008: 471–489) 475.
[114] See *Book of Vagabonds and Beggars, with a Vocabulary of Their Language*, ed. Martin Luther, trans. John Camden Hotten (London: John Camden Hotten, Picadilly, 1860 [1528]).

presents the methodologies of cheating and fooling the naïve, and aims to instruct in the language various vagabonds and beggars use. It is cautionary in character and strives to thoroughly unmask the parasitic elements of society. In the year 1523, eighteen editions into its existence, the *Liber Vagatorum* came to the attention of Martin Luther, who went on to edit and preface it. Luther—who was himself infamously given to scatological vulgarity and only on those grounds comparable to Eulenspiegel—in his preface admits to having been "cheated and befooled by such tramps and liars more than [he would] wish to confess."[115] The solemnity of his tone leaves no room for doubt that *Liber Vagatorum* was no laughing matter; its subjects were to be scorned and avoided at all costs. Its readership would have approached this material for reasons quite different than those interested in *Eulenspiegel*. However, a certain amount of recognition would have been involved if anyone had been acquainted with both works. The beggars of the *Liber Vagatorum*, anecdotally presented with a claim to refer to reality, are certainly devious, resorting to elaborate trickery such as feigning madness, sickness, or religious zeal in order to extort money from unsuspecting passers-by—Eulenspiegel could well have been schooled by the very same masters.

The tales of the vagabond fool Eulenspiegel, conversely, are hardly cautionary. His vagrant adventures are entertaining and clearly fictional, despite a certain pretence to reality and even though their contemporaries recognized fiction in terms quite different from the modern reader. Eulenspiegel's shenanigans multiply steadily, not showing any sign of ever reaching a peripeteia that would steer the course of the stories toward a different outcome, or ask of the audience anything other than their compliance and laughter. Even when the sinister shadow of the gallows threatens him around the middle of the book—in Tale 57, where Eulenspiegel will take up the challenge of a haughty, proud man who claimed himself too wise to be tricked by fools, and cheat him out of his wine, thereby deserving the punishment of hanging—a moralizing perspective does not necessarily show its holier-than-thou face. Eulenspiegel will get out of the predicament as quickly as he found himself in it: he will diplomatically assure that if his accusers would not agree to kiss his arse for three

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[115] *Book of Vagabonds and Beggars* 4.

consecutive days after he is hanged, they cannot hang him at all. In the end, the audience's allegiance remains as safe with him as it ever was.

The vagabonds and beggars of the *Liber Vagatorum* are distantly related to the coney-catchers, the con artists of Elizabethan England, likewise known for thieving through trickery. Their reputation was, however, framed in terms more humorous when in 1592 Robert Greene took them up as a topic in his social pamphlets and clothed them in a veil of fictionality, whereby they gained literary currency. His *Defence of Conny-catching*[116] professes to vindicate the disreputable London thieves claiming far worse deeds were habitually committed by the more reputable members of society, unmasking the comically ill behaviours of usurers, millers, butchers, lawyers and tailors—something the *Eulenspiegel* book is equally engaged with. Greene followed this with *A Disputation betweene a Hee Conny-catcher and a Shee Conny-catcher*,[117] a debate discussing the gendered practices and their perks. Told in a voice of a repentant rascal retelling the insider tales of his biography, Greene's coney-catching pamphlets played an important role in establishing the myth of the author's notoriety, his almost Falstaffian image in later criticism.

Even the character of Falstaff is not far from a portrait of a professional coney-catcher, and indeed in his incarnation in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is accused of association with such characters by the upright young Slender, as he shrieks: "Marry, sir, I have matter in my head against you; and against your cony-catching rascals, Bardolph, Nym, and Pistol" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, I.i.116-118). This same Falstaff of *Merry Wives* will adopt the label for himself, when a few scenes later in preparation to set his grand scheme into motion, he tells Pistol: "There is no remedy, I must cony-catch, I must shift" (I.iii.30-31). Purposefully divorced from moralising, overt or disguised, Greene, Falstaff and Eulenspiegel all operate with folly that requires openness and favours conceptual agility.

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[116] See Greene, Robert, *The Defence of Conny Catching. Or A Confutation of Those Two Iniurious Pamphlets Published by R.G. against the Practitioners of Many Nimble-Witted and Mysticall Sciences. By Cuthbert Cunny-Catcher, Licentiate in Whittington Colledge* (London: Thomas Gubbins, 1592).
[117] Greene, Robert, *The Third & Last Part of Conny-Catching a Disputation Betweene a Hee Conny-Catcher and a Shee Conny-Catcher* (New York: Barnes & Nobles, 1966).

Even the name of this chapter's primary rascal—Dyl Ulenspegel in Low Saxon and Owlglass (or Owly-glasse) in English—evokes various images, not perhaps as politically charged as the act of Falstaff's naming was, but suggesting multiplicities nonetheless. The most simplistic of the name's untanglings, a juxtaposition of an owl and a mirror, is represented already in Hans Baldung Grien's titular woodcut, where Eulenspiegel as a young man rides a horse and proudly displays, high above his head, the two emblems that make up his family name, an owl in his right hand and a mirror in his left. Tale 40 has Eulenspiegel mischievously leave this "Schalckß Wappen,"[118] that is, his "fool's coat of arms:"[119] an owl and a mirror drawn on the door of a wicked blacksmith, with an inscription *hic fuit.* Owls are in western culture conventionally related to wisdom, quite possibly ever since the ancient Greeks correlated the nocturnal birds with Athena, the goddess of wisdom. Dieter Arendt[120] suggests that the combination of an owl and a mirror might point to the practice of enlightening the audience of the chapbook, indicating also that the owl of the culturally translated Roman Minerva became a symbol of the new craft of printing. The readers would, thus, presumably use the book as a mirror and recognize their own folly in Eulenspiegel's examples, fixing its meaning in didacticism.

Owls were, however, not always associated with qualities as noble as wisdom, and were considered also to be birds of ill omen. T.F. Thiselton Dyer refers to Pliny, Virgil and Ovid as his sources in discerning the "dread attached to this unfortunate bird […] associated with calamities and deeds of darkness"[121] wherefore the sinister nature of the owl could invoke darker interpretations of *Eulenspiegel*. Indeed, the character is, at times, called a devil by the unfortunate victims of his folly; and on one occasion, he is associated with devilish practices. In Tale 64 he is reported as practicing black magic in order to trick a merchant into buying his horse. However, given that the tales lack explicitly moralizing overtones and the text itself does not seem to be a warning against a specific type of behavior (although

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[118] Lindow 123.
[119] Oppenheimer 85.
[120] Arendt 55.
[121] Dyer, T. F. Thiselton, *Folklore of Shakespeare* (London: Griffith & Farran; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1883) 131.

such readings exist), Eulenspiegel is perhaps not necessarily best described as straightforwardly connected with the devil. References to him as being demonic do not, after all, abound in the book.

Alternatively, the mirror in the prankster's name, could be a self-conscious nod to the medieval genre of *speculum* literature, which had the encyclopaedic mission of encompassing all the knowledge on a certain topic and bringing with it moral instruction. The *speculum* genre was immensely popular: it catalogued information on fields as various as alchemy, astronomy, salvation, or even wives. Perhaps the most notable examples, however, were the *specula principum*—textbooks of political writing instructing princes how to rule, or delineating representative images of rulers as either positive or negative examples. Folly was not an uncommon topic in the Middle Ages; it found itself in the mirror-books as well: the c. 1180 *Speculum Stultorum,* that is, the *Mirror of Fools*, a work by Nigel de Longchamps, is a satire in Latin elegiac verse, exposing the corruption of the medieval clergy. The titular mirror present throughout the genre had, as Ritamary Bradley showed in her discussion of the *speculum* theme in medieval literature, "the double function of showing the world what it is and what it should become" as well as "the aim of seeing all things in their degree and the motif of the instability of fortune."[122] There is certain sense, of course, in describing Eulenspiegel's *Spiegel* as one that reflects the follies of the world, but that leads him again into the realm of sombre morality, one substantially removed from the lightheartedness the tales exhibit.

Another sense hidden behind the name of Eulenspiegel has been suggested, a somewhat cruder one that would quite possibly ring truer to his original audience. In his book on the specificities of German humour, Gert Raeithel presents the meaning in a very straightforward fashion: "The mirror in the hunter jargon signifies the backside. The *Uhle* is a feather duster, made from the wing of an owl. *Uhl'n Speegel* therefore means something like

[122] Bradley, Ritamary, "Backgrounds of the Title Speculum in Mediaeval Literature." *Speculum* 29, no. 1 (January 1, 1954: 100–115) 101.

'Wipe the arse.'"[123] Transferred into contemporary slang, this remark would correspond to an audacious demand to having one's arse kissed—an image indeed fitting for the likes of Eulenspiegel. Considering the multitude of scatological tales and allusions in *Eulenspiegel*, this last interpretation of his name seems fitting. It remains, though, only one of semantic layers presented before the reader. Quite like the scatological tales themselves, that cheekily appear in the narrative at approximately regular intervals almost as if to remind the reader folly can be sublimely bodily and exceptionally grotesque, the arse-wiping that whispers behind Eulenspiegel's name points to the bold utilization of bodily humour and anticipates what Oppenheimer suggests is the chapbook's "peculiar and unusual 'excremental vision' of humanity."[124]

One of the most enduring questions in Eulenspiegel studies is concerned with who wrote the famous chapbook. The tales open with a Foreword, a seemingly conventional[125] liminal device that is supposed to give the readership information on how to frame the text and govern their readings. What it accomplishes, however, is to blur the issue of authorship, manipulating readerly expectations into building an image of the book being a commissioned compilation assembled by an unimportant individual whose only trace is to be the initial "N."[126] Presumably standing for *nemo* or nobody, the mask of "N" has its tongue in its cheek, skilfully slithering out of interpreter's grip, very much like the Necromancer: another "N" who shall be speaking the polysemous Prologue to Marin Držić's *Dundo Maroje*. At this textual threshold, the only part of the work written in first person, the "N" of *Eulenspiegel* proclaims to possess "slight understanding", to be "unfamiliar with Latin" and a

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[123] Raeithel, Gert, *Die Deutschen und ihr Humor: von Till Eulenspiegel bis Harald Schmidt* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005) 18. My translation. In original: "Der Spiegel steht in der Jägersprache für das Hinterteil. Die Uhle ist ein Federwisch, gefertigt aus dem Flügel einer Eule. *Uhl'n Speegel* heißt demnach so viel wie 'Feg mit den Hintern.'"

[124] Oppenheimer xxxii.

[125] Conventionality of "N's" Foreword is especially evident when compared to two other forewords that can almost certainly be numbered among the work's sources and textual influences. The first is the Foreword to *Wigoleis vom Rade*, a prose romance printed in the late 15th century, that John L. Flood identified as a direct source for *Eulenspiegel's* paratext based on rhetorical comparison. Acknowledging this source, and supporting an extension of the argument based on the same reasoning, Paul Oppenheimer singles out the foreword to the tales of Pfaffe vom Kalenberg in the Introduction to his translation of *Eulenspiegel* (Oppenheimer, l).

[126] "N"—"Nemo" was an important figure in early modern theatre. On the topic, see Wilson, Luke, *Theaters of Intention: Drama and the Law in Early Modern England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

"simple layman"[127] who urges the readership to improve upon his writing so that no one would disapprove of it. This purported humility was proscribed and expected, but also mildly paradoxical, given the obvious fact of the Foreword being followed by an impressive collection of tales, printed and adorned with woodcuts. It beckons the reader, promising pastime and playfully annulling any potential subversion. The very opening of the *Eulenspiegel* book, therefore, subtly follows the inherent contradictory principles of folly, where intentions are obscured and interpretations multiply. Generally attuned to complexities surrounding the authorship issue of a jest-book where the compiler quite possibly went to great lengths to stay unconnected to the work, scholarship has nevertheless regularly been turning to grappling with the identity of "N."

The question of *Eulenspiegel's* authorship is further complicated by the fact that multiple disparate early editions are in circulation, some of which were not discovered before late 20th century. The earliest available complete version of the text is a 1515 quarto edition from the workshop of Johannes Grüninger, a Strassburg master printer who produced over two hundred major works in various genres. The interest of a major printer suggests that commercial value of the tales was recognized early on, but also perhaps that the author had something of a reputation. Another full edition of *Eulenspiegel* comes from the same workshop, but is a significantly revamped one, exhibiting a series of considerable literary interventions. This 1519 version and its disparities have prompted some to suggest the author could have had a hand in its arrangement[128]—a well-founded conjecture, but a conjecture nonetheless.

The year 1971 saw the discovery of an earlier incomplete edition, again Grüninger's work. Peter Honegger, a Swiss lawyer and subsequently prominent Eulenspiegel scholar, unearthed a 16-page fragment most likely published in Strassburg in 1510-11, bound together with a Latin edition of *Reineke Fuchs*. Only four years after Honegger's discovery, another copy of the same edition cropped up in Hamburg. Historian Bernd Ulrich Hucker

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[127] All quotations listed here from Oppenheimer 3.
[128] See Oppenheimer, Introduction, lxxiii.

found there a near-complete text whose existence helped establish a trajectory of textual adjustments: it came to light that the 1519 version was a lot more similar to the oldest version than to the 1515 complete text.[129] Authorship was, however, still puzzling and the sender of the cryptic paratextual message and the supposed author of the roguish tales of Till have been sought by scholars for a long time. Centuries of uncertainty have done little to diminish the appeal of Eulenspiegel's appropriations of folly. The cultural significance of the text is anything but lost if the author remains unidentified, even if the context cannot be as specifically and accurately constructed as in the cases of straightforward authorship. Yet, relentless considerations of the problem have sifted out certain solutions.[130]

Considering a single, identifiable author, *Eulenspiegel* scholarship has over the years reached a precarious consensus that was upheld for a while, but that nevertheless does not remain uncontested. Following years of research and surmises, information emerged that the most likely candidate for the authorship of Eulenspiegel's adventures is a tax collector, a Hanseatic sympathizer and a minor author of chronicles and political pamphlets, a Hermann Bote from Brunswick. Christoph Walther first suggested this thesis in a work published in 1893, but it was Peter Honegger who fleshed out Walther's suggestions and presented his findings in 1971, publishing them two years later in the book *Ulenspiegel: Ein Beitrag zur Druckgeschichte und zur Verfasserfrage*.[131] As might seem fit for the supposed author of the Eulenspiegel tales and the aura of mischief that surrounds them, the clues to his identity were hidden (if they were there at all) in the text itself and Honegger performed a virtual detective-work in unveiling them. He sifted through etymologies of various expressions and examined the geography of the stories and came to a conclusion that the author must have

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[129] For a discussion of these discoveries, see Blamires, David, "Reflections on Some Recent 'Ulenspiegel' Studies" in *The Modern Language Review* (Vol. 77, No. 2, 1982: 351–60).

[130] The earliest serious scholarly consideration of *Eulenspiegel's* authorship came from J.M. Lappenberg in 1854, which is also the first critical edition of the 1519 version of the text. See Lappenberg, J.M., *Dr. Thomas Murners Ulenspiegel* (J.M. Leipzig: T.O. Weigel, 1854). As is evident from the title, Lappenberg holds Murner, a satirist, poet and translator, to be the author of the tales. This conclusion is overruled in scholarship on the grounds of lack of any conclusive evidence that would connect Murner to the text and the fact that the *Eulenspiegel* book is vastly different stylistically from any of Murner's other writings.

[131] See Honegger, Peter, *Ulenspiegel: Ein Beitrag zur Druckgeschichte und zur Verfasserfrage* (Neumünster: Wachholtz, 1973).

hailed from Brunswick. He dated the fragment he discovered by placing the artist who was commissioned to make the woodcuts, Hans Baldung Grien, in Strassburg in 1509, and listed a number of linguistic parallelisms within the fragment and other works attributed to Bote. Most interestingly, he postulated that the initial letters of the final six tales (90-95) formed an acrostic that hid the author's name: ERMANB.[132] An acrostic that is incomplete apparently because the tales were misarranged over centuries. This bundle of evidence unpacked a number of new issues in *Eulenspiegel* studies and enticed speculations about a clearer context and supposed social engagement of the chapbook.

Were it his, *Eulenspiegel* would have been a highly atypical work for Bote, as nothing attributed to him displays such a dose of playful humour or thematic irreverence. Not much is known about his life, and from the sparse detail available no grandiose political player can be constructed.[133] However, having *Eulenspiegel* numbered among Bote's works indicated that the *Schwankbuch* would best be understood as geared to an explicitly moralizing and didactic purpose. *Till Eulenspiegel* thus became frequently considered, as Werner Wunderlich puts it, a "jest-book on the life of a coarse, foul-mouthed and funny fool critical of

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[132] Honegger 94.

[133] Bote had gone through several clerical occupations and toward the end of his life worked as a foreman of a roof-tile factory. He spent most of his life in Brunswick, a commerce town in the Hanseatic League where artisans' and craftsmen's guilds enjoyed some political power. This power of the guilds Bote supposedly mocked, as in 1488 he was punished for doing so by being placed under house arrest and was dismissed from working at the customs office. A more dramatic fact that history remembers about Bote is that in 1513 he almost lost his life in an outburst of violence between the rebellious guilds and civil authorities, whose side Bote took. As an author, he clearly valued anonymity, like many who wrote in medieval or early Renaissance times, avoiding censorship or far more serious plights. There is still no consensus as to what constitutes Bote's oeuvre: some two dozen works of poetry, chronicles, and prose are usually listed as his, but there may have been misattributions. Detlev Schöttker and Werner Wunderlich propose a bibliography of Bote's works that numbers twenty-four titles, *Eulenspiegel* included (the bibliography is available in Wunderlich, Werner, and Blume, Herbert, eds, *Hermen Bote, Bilanz und Perspektiven der Forschung: Beiträge zum Hermen-Bote-Kolloquium vom 3. Oktober 1981 in Braunschweig : mit einer Bibliographie* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1982) 135-139). Scholars have recovered proof of his authorship from acrostical clues he was leaving in his works, which mainly included spelling out his name, as he did in *Dat boek van veleme rade* (*The Book of Wheels*, c. 1492), his long allegorical poem in rhyming couplets, profoundly didactic in tone. For a more detailed biography, see "Hermann Bote. An Introductory Essay" by George C. Schoolfield in Springer, Otto, and Stephen J. Kaplowitt, *Germanic Studies in Honor of Otto Springer* (Pittsburgh: K & S Enterprises, 1978) 281-303.

society."[134] By employing a figure of folly as grotesque and unruly as Eulenspiegel, Bote was thought to have been exposing potential dangers to society and its structure, as well as voicing an explicit warning against overindulgence in foolish behaviour. Using folly in similar contexts, where its primary meaning is contrary to its underlying message was not so uncommon: the masterful early modern employment of the concept, Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*, is at times simplified to a didactic subtext. Ultimately, though, whether the meaning of *Eulenspiegel* can be fixed into a moralizing mould or not, hinges on accepting Bote's[135] authorship, which is something that cannot be done without reservations.

One of those who reject Bote's authorship of *Eulenspiegel* is Paul Oppenheimer, who still provides a convincing argument that supports the singularity and idiosyncrasy of N's authorial accomplishment. He builds this thesis on a number of solid observations,

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[134] My translation. In original: "Schwankroman vom Leben des groben und unflätigen, witzigen und die Gesellschaft kritisierenden Narren." In Tenberg, Reinhard, *Die deutsche Till-Eulenspiegel-Rezeption bis zum Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1996) 11.

[135] Bote is not the only possible solution to the authorial puzzle of *Eulenspiegel*. Jürgen Schulz-Grobert's 1999 work *Das Strassburger Eulenspiegelbuch* explores different avenues of approach to the authorship issue. He rejects Honegger's thesis of Bote's authorship and suggests that the environment of early modern Strassburg played a much larger role in the origin of the chapbook. His proposition is that *Eulenspiegel* was a product of a group of the city's *literati* connected to Grüninger's press, collaborating on the compilation. Schulz-Grobert examines the lives and connections of Strassburg's famous humanists, namely Johann Geiler von Kaysersberg, Sebastian Brant, Jakob Wimpfeling, Heinrich Bebel, Johannes Pauli and Thomas Murner, but turns his attention especially to one of the lesser authors, Johannes Adelphus Muling. This assistant of Grüninger's is remembered as a translator (having translated, most notably, Erasmus' *Enchiridion militis christiani*) and an author of several minor geographical, religious and historical works, as well as a collection of *facetiæ*. Schulz-Grobert's main argument, however, revolves around the proposition that *Eulenspiegel* must have been a work of a learned group of individuals and this theory points out how the humanist practices could have been involved in the production of the *Eulenspiegel* book. This line of thinking interestingly communicates with the humanist streaks found in the book itself, such as the character's propensity for mobility, travel and exploration of different lands and layers of society. Furthermore, there is the international quality to the tales (a somewhat limited internationalism—apart from the German lands, Till travels to Denmark, Poland, Bohemia and Rome—but an internationalism that is present nonetheless) and the choice of the vernacular as the language of the book, together with the pronounced interest in the workings of language itself exemplified in Eulenspiegel continual concern with direct meaning of speech. Grobert's sweeping research provides a wealth of information on the contemporary context and the intellectual conditions in early modern Strassburg, drawing serious attention to the potentialities of a humanist reading of *Eulenspiegel*. His thesis is compelling, and a speculation that the tales were written by more than one person, or that the work is a product of a collective effort at gathering, retelling, and preserving of legendary material, is fair. It can, however, be called into question through textual analysis that singles out formal and aesthetic aspects of the text that safely support the supposition of a single authorial persona, anonymous or otherwise. See Schulz-Grobert, Jürgen, *Das Straßburger Eulenspiegelbuch: Studien zu entstehungsgeschichtlichen Voraussetzungen der ältesten Drucküberlieferung* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999).

examining the book on textual and aesthetic grounds and placing it in a comparative context with its sources and influences.[136] Namely, he singles out as slightly atypical the fact that the chapbook, in contrast to much of its source material, has a clearly defined single hero. Further, he points to the prominence of the concept of truth and the fact that the language in the tales is used in a highly idiosyncratic way. He warns that an unexpected point of view in the work comes from the fact that sexual topics are conspicuously absent, while scatological material is abundant. He then underlines a crucial fact that around 60% of the tales seem to be original: that is, they do not seem to be influenced by any recorded predecessors, and notices that the tales show a certain amount of interconnectivity, meaning the tales are not completely isolated, but do display interest in common subject matter. And finally, he suggests that a certain amount of structural symmetry can be observed in the organization of the tales indicating, supposedly, that an authorial voice is guiding the reader's sympathy with the hero: carefully timing the few defeats Eulenspiegel experiences.

One of the stumbling stones to Oppenheimer's largely cogent argument that seeks to construct an author-function for *Eulenspiegel*, however, is the fact that, for a single-hero narrative attributable to a single author, the *Eulenspiegel* book is more than slightly polyvocal. Disparity between the tales is at times very great, as is for example the case between the very brief Tale 5, that in several lines recounts Eulenspiegel's conversation with his mother in which he aphoristically announces to her that there is a time and place in life for fasting, as there is for indulgence,[137] and one of the elaborate stories of Eulenspiegel's complex endeavours inspired by the Pfaffe vom Kalenberg. A much firmer editing hand that might approach an authorial voice is discernable, for example, in the case of Paleček's likewise anonymous tales where consistency, uniformity and deliberateness are far more pronounced.

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[136] For the full explanation of Oppenheimer's thesis, see his Introduction in *Till Eulenspiegel: His Adventures* xxxii–xl.

[137] Incidentally, the same tale is one of the pieces of evidence supporting the claim of Hermann Bote's authorship. Eulenspiegel tells his mother that "wozu sich einer begibt, daz würt ihm sein Lebtag gnug" (Lindow 18), that is: "anything a man decides on will take care of him all his life", which parallels a statement found in Bote's work *Köker*: "Wo sik ein jederman to hol, des wart eme sin levedage genoch." The sentiment expressed in the two statements is quite general and likely formulaic (see Oppenheimer 195).

A provisional conclusion of the authorial puzzle is inevitably twofold: whoever compiled and worked on *Eulenspiegel* either gave their best to remain anonymous, or the time that placed no importance on such matters simply erased the memory of an author and history ensured the issue remains open. Reaching for Foucault's "What is an Author?" at this point is fairly obvious, but *Eulenspiegel* does come from a time when, as Foucault reminds us:

> [t]he texts we today call 'literary' (narratives, stories, epics, tragedies, comedies) were accepted, put into circulation, and valorised without any question about the identity of their author; their anonymity caused no difficulties since their ancientness, whether real or imagined, was regarded as a sufficient guarantee of their status.[138]

Moreover, dissociating oneself from a work of such a theme, scope and implication could easily have been an attempt at preserving one's reputation, a proposition backed by the fact that the *Eulenspiegel* book found itself on the index of forbidden literature that the Duke of Alba published for Emperor Philip II in 1569 in Antwerp.[139] Consequently, the open-ended question of the authorial voice not only blurs the contextual origins of the work, but also constitutes an additional layer of uncertainty in a text already steeped in ambiguity and *Eulenspiegel* should still be considered an anonymous work, which is likely what its phantom originator intended it to be in the first place. Ultimately, the uncertainty about who exactly wrote *Eulenspiegel*—although an issue of major importance in scholarship striving to reconstruct an author-function for a text that became important on the level of shaping a national identity—should not be a cause for too much concern. It simply enriches the tales, bursting with meanings anyway. Arguably, they might even be richer for not having an author.

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[138] Foucault, Michel. *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, translated by Robert Hurley et al. 2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 2000) 212.
[139] Honegger 57.

II.iii. Till in the Text

The *Eulenspiegel* stories, in their rudimentary, *staccato* fashion, form a compact narrative centred on a character who is, paradoxically, ever-changing and yet resistant to fundamental change and consistent in his motivations. A curse-cum-blessing, folly follows him wherever he goes. The minimal overarching narrative tells the tale of a foolish hero from cradle to grave, and all along that trajectory he basks in mischief, trickery and folly in general. This brings it formally close to the tales of Paleček, whose character-driven story likewise ends with the hero's death. Both collections foreground the fool as the primary focus of interest and treat episodic characters—with perhaps the only exception of Paleček's King George—as devices that merely serve as a background for the enactment of loosely related foolish escapades. In other words, folly is the central concern of these narratives, and not a layer in a more complex structure, as is the case in the other two examples, the plays that contain Pomet and Falstaff.

Eulenspiegel is, interestingly, the only narrative in my study that presents the birth of a hero. As a helpless babe in the first tale, he is already capable of causing mayhem, however inadvertently. He gets baptised three times: first by the priest, then by his tipsy godmother who drops him into a puddle where he nearly suffocates, and ultimately by the village women washing him in a kettle. The tale suggests what is to follow: inversions, soiling and the most peculiar logic whereby sense and nonsense are not merely transposed, but revealed as being made up of the same stuff. The christening, an initiatory event of regaining purity, is immediately followed by its parodic mockery performed in dirt, while the entire comic stunt is finalised in a profane cleansing that brings the trickster in the making back to life and opens up the possibility for folly. In other words, Eulenspiegel is at the very start of his foolish journey shown surviving the dichotomous reversals of wisdom and folly that are reconfigured into a line of flight: a *Schwankbuch* cataloguing a life of a witty fool.

The very next tale, in which "Eulenspiegel was old enough to walk and stand"[140] plays a similarly prophetic role in the construction of the character and shows his preferred tools clearly at use. This tale is the only one that prominently features his father, Claus Eulenspiegel, as yet another character who is to be duped by his son's peculiar wit. In an attempt to discipline his son, his father demands to know why all the neighbours keep complaining he was a rascal and a rogue. Young Eulenspiegel, already shrewder than his environment, challenges his father to ride with him through the village so he would prove to him the people's complaints are baseless. Mounted on his father's horse right behind him, "Eulenspiegel now lifted his behind with its hole, let all the people look into his arse, and sat back down."[141] The bystanders are predictably scandalised, while all his unsuspecting father is able to come up with is poising Eulenspiegel in front of him in the saddle and retrying the test. His bottom now concealed, the witty Eulenspiegel uses his head and resorts to communicating through a grimace, gaping his mouth widely and sticking out his tongue at the people who oppose his very existence. The father, still unable to comprehend how his son manages to offend without engaging in any demonstrable activity, capitulates and moves his family away from the jeering crowds of Kneitlingen to Magdeburg on the Saale, where he will soon after die.

By killing off the father, the minimum this early tale demonstrates is that no custom, rule, or seniority can curb Eulenspiegel's infinite jest. However, that is neither its single significance, nor can it be reduced to a simple Oedipal code, regardless of the automatic connection a contemporary reader raised on Freud might make. What the tale exposes are the bodily openings Eulenspiegel engages for production: his anus and his mouth. He thus approaches the famous Bakhtinian grotesque body: "a body in the act of becoming […] never finished, never completed; […] the body [that] swallows the world and is swallowed by the world."[142] Bakhtin designated the utmost importance in the grotesque to the human

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[140] Oppenheimer, 6. The tale takes place when Eulenspiegel was old enough "daz er gon und ston kunt" (Lindow 11).
[141] Oppenheimer 6. In original, we find "mit dem Loch und ließ die Lüt je in den Arß sehen und saß da wider nider" (Lindow 12).
[142] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 317.

mouth, as a gaping entryway into the fleshy abyss, "the open gate leading downward into the bodily underworld."[143] The anus is identified as the second in this grotesque hierarchy, and both orifices mark the connections through which the boundaries between the body and the world are overcome. However, given that Bakhtin insists on the centralized structure of the grotesque body, that is rooted in a unified, homogeneous time of an idealized pre-historic past,[144] I see another model as more pertinent for describing *Eulenspiegel's* preference of flux.

Eulenspiegel is primarily a producer: a producer of language, excrement, but also of tales of folly. Heralding the method of most of his jests, the second tale here described already uncovers his two productive orifices that will ceaselessly let out the flow of excrement and the flow of language, his main connections with the world. The tales themselves will equally gush out from that moment on, ninety-three more of them, likewise participating in Eulenspiegel's sheer productivity, making him a producer-product. He might thereby be likened to the joyful schizo of Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, their "universal producer."[145] This figure, Deleuze and Guattari maintain, cannot be described without relation to production. Their schizo is not understood as a diagnosis or a representational grounding, but as someone who "[f]ar from having lost who knows what contact with life" is, in fact, "closest to the beating heart of reality, to an intense point identical with the production of the real."[146] Eulenspiegel, being constantly generative on different levels, quite like this schizo, uses the conditions he finds himself in creatively. He plays with the reality or with language until they come undone; to a point where he decontextualises them by a positive desire for production. This view emerges from Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of life itself as a process of constant flows and reconnections. It does not accommodate unified subjects, but prefers alternative, creative experiences that avoid grounding and flattening out the process of desire. Eulenspiegel, the way I read him, is just such a chaotically creative subject that keeps going, flowing, producing.

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[143] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 325.
[144] See Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 206-210.
[145] Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 7.
[146] Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 96.

Eulenspiegel's childhood and young years end around Tale 9, when his mother—the only other recurring character in the narrative apart from him—disappears from the stories, only to show up again in Tale 89 when Till is already old and ill, and yet as unrelenting in his misdemeanours as ever. This sickness quickly leads to the hero's death, but like most of his other characteristics, Eulenspiegel's death is similarly generative. Unlike the death of Paleček that leads to sadness and a sense of meaninglessness for his King who likewise departs soon after, or, conversely, the death of Falstaff reported in *Henry V* to be a consequence of the fact that "the king has killed his heart" (II.i.88), the death of Eulenspiegel brings no value judgements, either positive or negative. It marks a feeble ending to his folly, a porous boundary: indeed, the jokes and stories even continue after he is no longer alive.

In the middle of the ninety-second tale it is unceremoniously announced "and Eulenspiegel died,"[147] and his death indicates simply a decisive move in the orchestration of a practical joke he is to play on the hypocritical mourners interested merely in his material legacy. He sets the stage while still alive, making sure he is given a proper funeral, promising in return a locked chest of his "possessions" to be divided among the priest, the Council and his friends. Blinded by their own greed and not comprehending the mechanism of Eulenspiegel's motivations, the credulous survivors are left not only empty-handed, but also bickering, as each thinks the other had stolen the goods. Their vengeful attempt of exhumation likewise ends in failure, as Eulenspiegel's dead body omits an odour that bars them from approaching it. The following two tales speak of further mishaps with the dead Eulenspiegel, both referring to the unusual manner in which he was buried—one reporting him facing downwards, and the other standing up in the ground—the gathered party concluding: "[l]et him stand. As he was odd while he lived, he ought to be odd in death too."[148]

In-between such peculiar birth and death, a flow of Eulenspiegel's misdemeanours is directed at unsuspecting individuals of all social strata. Farmers, various artisans that hire

[147] Oppenheimer 187. The original displays this simplicity with "und Ulenspiegel starb" (Lindow 262).
[148] Oppenheimer 189. In original: "Lassen ihn ston, wan er ist wunderlich gewesen in seinem Leben, wunderlich wil er auch sein in seinem Tod" (Lindow 265).

him out for work, the clergy, men and women of many walks of life, politicians, doctors, even certain members of nobility, they all get a taste of his sharp wit and logic informed by folly. In his tireless disdain for all stupidity, gullibility and ineptitude of all sorts and in any person, he is remotely comparable to Falstaff who is, in his thespian drive for winning laughter and appreciation, merciless toward poor beggars and war-waging nobility alike, or to Pomet for whom manipulating all other characters in the play comes as easy as moving figures on a chessboard. And yet Eulenspiegel assumes far more faces than any of the other cases. In order to approach such a multitude of episodic characters who are to be the victims of his foolish agenda, Eulenspiegel himself is constructed as infinitely variable, defying identification and remaining constantly in flux—again approaching the joyful schizo of the *Anti-Oedipus*. This schizo stems from the concept of desire, reconfigured as an active, affirmative force that produces reality, and Eulenspiegel can become whatever he wants to be, forming infinite connections with his surroundings. He is a priest's servant, a sacristan, a baker's boy, a tower bugler, a scholar, a preacher, a blacksmith's apprentice, a shoemaker's boy, etcetera, etcetera. In every episode of this flow of disjunctive synthesis, Eulenspiegel strives to reach the very extreme of deterritorialization, to reach a plateau of intensity in folly that shows the chaotic and creative potentialities of human experience.

If there is anything that is a constant throughout the tales, apart from them being centred on the eponymous hero, it is the preoccupation with linguistic entanglements that is based on the character's peculiar obsession with the apparent truth of speech. In the process of pursuing whichever misdemeanour he has at hand, in an overwhelming majority of cases, Eulenspiegel reaches for the literal meaning of the orders he is given and performs them directly, or he promises he would perform an action and subsequently transforms the exact words into deeds. Or, as Goethe succinctly put it, "[a]ll the major jokes of the book are based on everyone speaking figuratively, while Eulenspiegel takes it literally."[149]

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[149] My translation. Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, and Max F Hecker. *Goethe. Maximen und Reflexionen.* (Weimar: Goethe-Gesellschaft, 1907) 218. Original has it: "Alle Hauptspäße des Buches beruhen darauf, dass alle Menschen figürlich sprechen und Eulenspiegel es eigentlich nimmt."

It happens that in the nineteenth tale Eulenspiegel hires himself out as a baker's boy and in a fit of servility enquires as to what he should bake. Bothered by the very question, the baker dismisses him with: "[y]ou're a baker's boy and you ask what you're supposed to bake? What does one usually bake?—Owls and long-tailed monkeys!"[150] Naturally, Eulenspiegel calmly proceeds to produce elaborate bestial creations in dough. In the very next tale, he enacts his speciality thrice: when told to sift flour by moonlight and not to demand a night light, Eulenspiegel sifts where the moon shines—right into the courtyard; as an apology, he then offers to snatch the neighbour's dough, to which his boss responds that he could drag a thief from the gallows, for all he cares, which simply gives Eulenspiegel an idea. Finally, when the baker, exasperated with Eulenspiegel tells him he would be going to complain to the mayor and that he should just watch him, Eulenspiegel follows the baker to stare and distract him. Examples such as these abound. This behaviour is exceedingly characteristic of the German jester, even though Paleček will also use it, but to a far lesser degree and motivated singularly by a desire to change other character's behaviour so it would approach the ideal he represents himself, the Gospel-obeying Christian.

Even if it often makes him appear daft, Eulenspiegel's rampant penchant for literalness is hardly a sign of a dim mind. For him language is a tool, one he uses to unsettle the smooth flows of communication that produce a mere half-conscious survival, while the ruptures he causes form pockets of wild creativity in an otherwise dull everydayness. Like the text itself, formed by a juxtaposition of pragmatic, no-nonsense narration on the one hand and witty dialogues on the other, the unsuspecting world Eulenspiegel traverses is suddenly enriched by his presence, awoken into considering alternative visions of reality. He fabricates situations where sense and nonsense coexist and the unsuspecting bystanders are tricked into considering the tension between the habitual and the alternative, the other way of seeing things. He is no natural fool, this he performs consciously, relinquishing his place in an ordered, seemingly well-functioning system. His recurrent excuse—because this system,

[150] Oppenheimer 36. The original text has it: "Bist du ein Bäckknecht und fragst erst, waz du bachen solt? Waz pfligt man zu bachen? Eulen oder Merkatzen!" (Lindow 57).

intolerant of anomalies, demands an excuse—is ingenious in its simplicity, and acts as something of a refrain in the book: he claims only to be doing what he is told.

What Eulenspiegel claims to be doing, persisting in such performances of folly, is defending what he deems is the truth. In the thirtieth tale that takes him to Thüringen, where he washes pelts for the ladies, causing more harm than they were able to imagine, he proudly announces: "I'm not a journeyman. Instead I practice telling the truth,"[151] thus bringing folly and truth into perilous proximity. What the foolishness of the character is thereby conveying is not so much that the truth and folly are equal and indiscernible, but that the stale ways of the world and behaviours habitually considered reasonable or wise are easily dissolvable into folly; they are susceptible to manipulations that uncover alternative routes of cognition that should not necessarily be considered inferior if they are comic. Eulenspiegel's concern with truth unlocks a serious element of folly, one that is capable of seizing the creative potential of a dislocated vision and initiate change, however fleeting or foolish. Even though this is at the heart of many a witty fool, Pomet is especially close to Eulenspiegel in this aspect. His primary tool, however, is not the manipulation of truth, but of *fortuna*, the proverbial luck he sees as the motor of all human interaction, that allows for his display of intellectual superiority and, as is the case with Eulenspiegel, liberating alternatives, or opening the lines of flight.

Another prominent aspect of the *Eulenspiegel* book, one that might scandalize an unsuspecting modern reader expecting a character akin to the jolly prankster of the children's tales, is the abundant occurrence of scatological motifs.[152] If Eulenspiegel's first weapon of choice is the sharp blade of folly, and he does indeed reach for it in almost all episodes, and uses it successfully in an overwhelming number of cases, excrement is his very close second. Even the frequency of the word "shit" in the narrative—as prominent as in Rabelais' tales of

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[151] Oppenheimer 59. Original text: "Ich bin nicht ein Handtwercksgesell, sunder ich pfleg die Warheit zu sagen" (Lindow 88).

[152] The scatological tales form a considerably large part of the text—altogether 16 of the 95 tales contain explicit acts of defecation. (More precisely, the explicitly scatological tales, where faeces is used as the key motif are Tales 10, 12, 15, 16, 24, 35, 51, 68, 71, 76, 78, 80, 84, 87, 89, and 91, while allusions to the backside, the smell of faeces, or other excremental acts abound.)

the grotesque giants—and the appearance of the mischievous little heaps in the accompanying woodcuts remind the reader of this. In Tale 10 already, Eulenspiegel is told by a squire hemp should always be shat on, which he happily abides by. He subsequently plays a fool that cannot tell the difference between words *henep* and *senep* and fills a dish of the latter—that is, mustard—with his excrement, pretending the act was a precaution against the cook's vile behaviour. From then on, scatological tales follow in a steady line. The last one takes place at his deathbed, when a priest is brought in for Eulenspiegel's last confession and in his greed gets his hand soiled with Eulenspiegel's excrement hidden in a jug that was supposed to be filled with silver. Amidst these stories, Till will happily defecate in bed and elsewhere indoors, in front of an amused King, in the water at a bathing house, on top of an elegant folding dinner table belonging to a vicious innkeeper and in various other places.

In all scatological situations of the *Schwankbuch* the act of defecation is provoked by what Eulenspiegel recognizes as the folly of the world around him. Although he is the primary instigator of the use of excrement for folly, Eulenspiegel is not always the one who defecates in the stories—on a single occasion he cunningly tricks a sporadic character into doing the deed, as a peculiar form of punishment that follows the Eulenspiegelian logic, akin to all the punishments of the greedy, the pompous, or the stupid: it is a sexton who is punished thus in Tale 12 for thinking he can easily cheat Eulenspiegel out of a barrel of beer. Other than this, he is the source of all the scatology, and the characters that come into contact with him are outraged as a result. This happens, however, mainly because they get duped and are forced to acknowledge their own folly, but hardly ever are they too appalled by Eulenspiegel's earthy behaviour.

Early modernity and some of its literature dealt with the body and all its functions in a manner unmediated and unrestrained, bordering on the celebratory. Jeff Persels and Russel Ganim observe in their introduction to a recent collection of essays on the topic of excrement, wittily entitled *Fecal Matters*, that when

> [t]raced anthropologically, sociologically, culturally, and historically, the Early Moderns arguably shat differently (not to mention ate, drank, digested, pissed,

farted, vomited, and spat differently) as well as inherited and cultivated a different understanding of those paradoxically both natural and grotesque acts. Explorations, however tentative, of that difference should render Early Modern Europeans' less abashed use of scatology less ambiguous, less unsettling, more meaningful.[153]

The scatological aspects of *Eulenspiegel* are not incongruous with the *Schwankbuch's* overall design and they do not seem to be devised to shock or overwhelm the audience. In Tale 15 Eulenspiegel encounters a pompous doctor of philosophy at a Bishop's court; a self-professed enemy of folly and a person severely disliked by anyone he meets. Eulenspiegel plays his trick by making the pompous doctor he, Eulenspiegel, was a physician. Venturing to doctor the wise doctor, Eulenspiegel makes him even sicker by forcing him to sleep in a bed next to his own (Eulenspiegel's, naturally) excrement. Upon discovering the foolish prank, the gathered community reacts without any disapproval for the impropriety of the situation and no moralizing in the narrative is directed at the irreverent prank itself. The people of the court victoriously laugh in unison at the folly of the unfortunate wise man, but their own judgement is not far from serious: "[a]h, nobody's wise enough to recognize fools too. And if there were no fools, how would the wise be known?"[154] The doctor of the Tale embodies the conservative, authoritarian wisdom, mocked for its rigidity and one-sidedness, while Eulenspiegel's transgression is accepted as an alternative to that behaviour. As a character with pronounced traits of a witty fool, Eulenspiegel is the instrument of ambiguity and purposeful reversals while scatology in the text, as one of his tools, is geared to the purpose of producing that specific type of folly.

In fact, excremental jokes, deeds and language are so abundant in the *Eulenspiegel* tales that there is a danger that interpretations based on psychologising the character overshadow his historicity. Ulrich Erckenbrech,[155] who correctly insists upon the political

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[153] Persels, Jeff, and Russell Ganim, eds, *Fecal Matters in Early Modern Literature and Art: Studies in Scatology* (Aldershot; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004) xvii.
[154] (Oppenheimer, p. 29) "Und niemant ist so weiß, er sol Thoren auch kennen. Unnd wann niendert kein Nar wär, wabei wolt man dann die Weisen kennen" (Lindow 43).
[155] See Erckenbrecht, Ulrich, *Politische Sprache: Marx, Rossi-Landi, Agitation, Kindersprache, Eulenspiegel, Comics* (Giessen/Lollar: Achenbach, 1975) 111-137.

function of Till's corporeal and linguistic transgressions through which he challenges the oppressiveness of the world around him, does mention the character could be viewed as an *Analerotiker* who fails to ascend to genital sexuality.[156] Arendt likewise comments on Till's infantile preoccupation with excrement and compares him to a Freudian "*anal-erotischen Charakter*."[157] However, going further and employing fully Freud's observations on anal eroticism would reduce Eulenspiegel to no more than an attention-seeking, bed-wetting child whose peculiar use of language is also infantile, would thus be anachronistic and reductive. They would, in short, make the character lose connection with early modern expressions of the literature of folly. Such readings would disregard the historical moment that had no means of conceptualizing the mechanisms of human spirit that psychoanalysis puts into play and present a distorted account of the character, one that disregards contextual and cultural complexities of the work.

Eulenspiegel's body could almost be considered a machine for the production of excrement. It is a paradoxical body intensely fertile with faeces, an open machine and his connection with the grotesque tradition in literature. Compared to other witty fools of this study, Pomet does have an appetite that is certainly gargantuan, but is not nearly as grotesque, while Falstaff, the mountain of a man who "lards the lean earth as he walks along" (*1 Henry IV*, II.iii.17) certainly fits within the amorphous mass of grotesque characters in art and literature, even without as many scatological references as are found in *Eulenspiegel*.

Folly and the grotesque are two concepts that are never too far apart. As Geoffrey Galt Harpham writes about the grotesque, it "often arises in the clash between the 'virtuous' limitations of form and a rebellious content that refuses to be constrained."[158] Form and content are likewise often incongruous in the workings of folly in literature, almost as if one refuses to be subsumed into the other. The scatology of *Eulenspiegel*, directed toward folly, teases and taunts the readership, reminding them of their own humanity, their own

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[156] Erckenbrecht 134.
[157] Arendt 94.
[158] Harpham, Geoffrey Galt, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group Publishers, 2007) 7.

grotesque bodies. In his excremental escapades, much like in the rest of the narrative, Till questions the values of the "sensible" world, and indeed the very sensibility this world purports to set as standard. As Gabriel P. Weisberg concludes about scatology: "[b]ecause it focuses on basic instincts—as a metaphor for what is dirty or as a source of irreverent humor—scatology became a literary device that forced a gentrified audience to acknowledge hitherto ignored sections of society."[159] Possessing little but language and his bodily waste, Eulenspiegel is portrayed laying waste to the rigidity of the normativised society. Both words and faeces are ambiguous marks he leaves in the world. While this world is, in turn, transformed by them, touched by folly.

By choosing to introduce folly into the world, Eulenspiegel sets into motion a mechanism of change. He is particularly hostile toward what he deems dishonesty, wherein also falls his mistrust of the perceived dishonesty of everyday speech, and all the foul-tempered artisans, greedy priests and cheating inn-keepers that emerge defeated by Eulenspiegel's tricks and superior wit always seem to be meriting the punishment. But the book is far from straightforward in its condemnation of what could universally be perceived as human fraudulence and Eulenspiegel's follies are sometimes also painted in what a reader might today perceive as remarkably malicious colours. A rare example of such behaviour, where the victim seems especially gullible and undeserving of the "punishment" comes in the Tale 87. In it, a drunken Eulenspiegel rides on the cart belonging to an old and honest man—as the tale describes him—and defecates on the poor man's plums he is driving to the fair to sell. At first sight, there is hardly a lesson learned in the tale, except to be wary of rascals of Eulenspiegel's ilk, while the maliciousness of the tale might seem particularly gratuitous.

The duped man—who could rightly be enlisted into Falstaff's troops of ragamuffins—does emerge as a laughing stock in the end. He is brutally made to look like a fool, and the laughter this tale provokes, akin indeed to much of the Eulenspieglian laughter, strikes a chord with the superiority theory of the concept, known from antiquity, but

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[159] Weisberg, Gabriel P., "Scatological Art" in *Art Journal* 52, no. 3 (October 1, 1993: 18-19) 18.

advocated by Thomas Hobbes who asserted that "men laugh at the infirmities of others, by comparison wherewith their own abilities are set off and illustrated."[160] Hobbesian laughter that illuminates the "sudden glory" one feels as a result of superiority may be said to permeate the *Eulenspiegel* book, it lurks behind many of the anecdotes as the original audience presumably embraced laughter at the duped victims of Eulenspiegel's wit. If we look at Eulenspiegel's laughter in this light, it becomes clear how it departs from Bakhtin's conceptualisation of carnival laughter, that is

> a festive laughter. […] not an individual reaction to some isolated "comic" event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people […] universal in scope; it is directed to all and everyone, including the carnival's participants. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity. [T]his laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding.[161]

Eulenspiegel is a solitary figure in the text and even if the laughter the text provokes may approach the gay, mocking relativity of Bakhtin's carnival, the character nevertheless cannot be simplified into a representation of collectiviy.

Laughter is, of course, historically contingent, the only consistent thing about it being its changeability. As cultural affinities fluctuated and tastes changed, the *Eulenspiegel* book entered various phases of its existence where different aspects of it were foregrounded, either in its readerly or critical reception. The only thing he was, arguably, never dissociated from is the concept of laughter—and that fact emerges from the book's association with folly. Classen proposes a new way of looking at the purpose of this quality of the book, observing that

> much philological ink has been spilled to come to terms with this highly transgressive figure in a pedestrian, traditional fashion, whereas the rather obvious observation that

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[160] Morreall, John, ed. *Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986) 20.
[161] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* 11.

> Eulenspiegel laughs about the world so that the people learn how to laugh about themselves and the others has not yet been fully recognized.[162]

Eulenspiegel's survival in culture could also be warranted by the fact that his narrative is somehow utilitarian—it illustrates the perennial need for folly that is behind the popularity of all four figures dealt with in this study.

II.iv. An Array of Eulenspiegels

Enormous popularity and endurance of the legend ensured that Eulenspiegel would not be merely a character, but a concept larger than the text that contains him. Hailing from a German context, this player of folly nevertheless spilled over national and linguistic boundaries in numerous translations, as he came to symbolise a life-affirming force, one that unites wit and humour. His proleptic quality is paralleled in the fact that he was neither constructed in vacuum, nor bestowed upon the world in an act of a creative genius. That facetious literature, to which he belongs, thrives in transfer is a well-known fact. The *Eulenspiegel* book is a product of the age that knew no infringement of copyright. Moreover, literary borrowing from others was far from frowned upon. Like many of the stories of heroes that reach into folklore and national consciousness, *Till Eulenspiegel* has a convoluted background that remains a stimulating source of scholarship. Source criticism has identified several texts that clearly exhibit features that could have inspired some of the tales and examples exist in *Eulenspiegel* where clear transfer from various sources[163] can be identified. Most notably, two fictional medieval monks that have been tricking people before the

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[162] Classen 481.

[163] Clearest sources for a number of tales and inspiration for the general tone of the book are usually identified by scholars as these nine: Der Pffafe Amis; Der Pfaffe vom Kalenberg; the stories of the jester Gonella collected in the 1506 work *Facecie del Gonella composte per maestro Francesco*; Poggio Bracciolini's *Facetiæ*; the stories of *Le cento novelle antiche*; works of Heinrich Bebel and Girolamo Morlini; *Les repues franches*; and the prose novel *Wigoleis vom Rade*. Eduard Kadlec published comprehensive research of the interrelationship of these sources and *Eulenspiegel.* For a full discussion, see Kadlec, Eduard, *Untersuchungen zum Volksbuch von Ulenspiegel*, *Prager Deutsche Studien*, *26* (Prague: Koppe-Bellmann, 1916).

wayfaring prankster entered the popular imagination contributed to the creation of Till Eulenspiegel: Pfaffe Amis and Pfaffe vom Kalenberg. The two roguish priests even earned a paratextual mention in *Eulenspiegel's* Foreword that announces Till's adventures "along with various fables of Father Amis and Father vom Kalenberg."[164]

The influence of *Der Pfaffe Amis*, a c. 1240 Middle High German *Schwankroman* dealing with the adventures of a witty priest whose expertise is fooling people, is exhibited very clearly in several tales,[165] notably in the exceptionally clever ones—such as the Tale 27 in which Eulenspiegel professes to have painted a picture that only the legitimate-born could see, leaving the canvass deliberately blank. Apart from it being an obvious inspiration on the topical level, echoes of *Die Geschicht des Pfaffe vom Kalenberg*, a late-15th century collection of anecdotes in verse collected by Philipp Frankfurter, that chronicle the adventures of a shrewd monk can be heard in Tale 14, discussed in the Introduction to this chapter. The same is the case with Tale 23 in which Eulenspiegel has his horse shod in gold paid for by the King of Denmark.[166]

Pfaffe vom Kalenberg is itself in an exceptional relationship of transfer with a specific work of Poggio Bracciolini, the ingenious Italian humanist. His *Facetiæ* are thought to have influenced *Eulenspiegel*, if not directly, then certainly through *Pfaffe vom Kalenberg*. Cultural transfer of this sort testifies to the power of, in this instance, literature of folly when it comes to transcending language and cultural boundaries. It demonstrates the popularity of folly in the early modern era, one that functioned in terms of disruptions of stale uniformities of quotidian existence. Poggio's remark in the preface to his volume of humorous sayings elegantly summarizes this purpose of the concept, a purpose that is only one among many: "It is a proper and almost necessary thing, indeed commended by the wise, that our minds, oppressed with various concerns and troubles, be relieved on occasion from cares and be

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[164] Oppenheimer 3. "mit Zulegung etlicher Fabulen des Pfaff Amis und des Pfaffen von dem Kalenberg." (Lindow 7.)
[165] Oppenheimer lists Tales 17, 27, 28, 29 and 31 as directly inspired by episodes in *Der Pfaffe Amis.* (Oppenheimer l.)
[166] Kadlec 9.

diverted towards mirth and relaxation by sort of amusement."[167] The sentiment is echoed in N's Foreword to *Eulenspiegel*, wherein we learn that the book's purpose is "to create a happy feeling in hard times, so my readers and listeners may experience good, pleasant entertainment and fun."[168] If Poggio's *Facetiæ* celebrate folly on a level comparable to that of *Eulenspiegel*, they do not construct an agent of folly as rounded and as powerful as Eulenspiegel. They may have passed onto the *Schwankbuch* a fascination with wit, humour and the necessity for laughter, but a combination of these characteristics in a single character had to be taken over from other sources. Absolute originality was never expected of *Eulenspiegel*; the character's singularity comes form a particular combination of devices that make up his peculiar outlook, one that has attracted commentators, imitators and adapters for several centuries.

What made Eulenspiegel so productive of meaning, what exactly gave rise to all the *Eulenspiegelei*, is not easy to pinpoint. Discussing all the responses and subsequent incarnations of the character that the chapbook spurred over the centuries is a task that goes far beyond the scope of this chapter, and one that has been taken up seriously elsewhere. Georg Bollenbeck's seminal *Till Eulenspiegel, der dauerhafte Schwankheld*[169] (*Till Eulenspiegel, the Enduring Jester*) carefully contextualizes and examines the influence and importance of the figure by relying on the methodology of the history of reception. It shows the fluctuations of the *Volksbuch's* reception that already started in the 16th century. Giving rise to ambivalence from the very beginning, the traveling jester was at once accepted as a welcome distraction from the seriousness of daily affairs, and avoided for suspected bad influence he might exhort as a work-shunning troublemaker. Later times, Baroque and especially Enlightenment with its invigorated emphasis on the cultivation of virtue in man, also exhibited certain scepticism towards the book's openness towards scatological comic elements. A revaluation of its importance came during Romanticism and its interest in

[167] As quoted in Classen 474.
[168] Oppenheimer 3. The original states: "Nun allein umb ein frölich Gemüt zu machen in schweren Zeiten, und die Lesenden und Zuhörenden mögen gute kurtzweilige Fröden und Schwänck daruß fabulleren." (Lindow 7.)
[169] See Bollenbeck, Georg, *Till Eulenspiegel, der dauerhafte Schwankheld: zum Verhältnis von Produktions- und Rezeptionsgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1985).

idealising all things popular, especially after Johann Joseph von Görres, one of the leading members of the Heidelberg Romantics published *Die Teutschen Volksbücher*[170] (that is, *The Books of the German People*) in 1807. Critical reputation of the popular chapbook grew slowly, while Eulenspiegel was steadily being established in the popular imagination as a lovable character inscribed in the narrative of national identity. The perennial prankster was omnipresent, everyone seemingly knew about him, and he went everywhere: he traversed the disparate parts of Germany and united it in a book, making one and all laugh and equally laughable.

Eulenspiegel's influence reaches very far and the endurance of his stories and his legacy is astonishing, his popularity ensuring he became metamorphic and able to reach various audiences. Examples are many, Oppenheimer speaks of "literally thousands of cases of *Eulenspiegel's* influence on the arts,"[171] they shift between different media and modes of expression, but a few seem especially eloquent in expressing the perennial need for folly, reached for in curious contexts. One toned-down but momentous version of Eulenspiegel comes from Charles de Coster's *The Legend of Thyl Ulenspiegel and Lamme Goedzak*,[172] the 1867 novel that combines stories appropriated from the original chapbook with non-comic material employed in the service of a moralizing critique of Catholicism. In order to help build Flemish national consciousness in the latter 19th century, Coster's Thyl changes nationality, trades individualist folly for populist virtue, and becomes a Protestant hero of the time of the Dutch War of Independence and exemplifies one of several instances where folly is recruited to win over readership and spread a moralizing message. The virtuous ideas of Brother Jan Paleček and his connections to Christian discourses belong at least partly to a similar tradition.

Eulenspiegel's transmedial success reaches well into music, film and theatre, as well as other artistic forms. One of the best proofs that the character is at home in different media,

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[170] See Görres, Joseph von, *Die Teutschen Volksbücher* (Berlin: Contumax GmbH & Co. KG, 2010 [1807]).
[171] Oppenheimer lvii.
[172] See Coster, Charles de, *La legende et les aventures héroïques, joyeuses et glorieuses d'Ulenspiegel et de Lamme Goedzak au pays de Flandres et ailleurs*, ed. Joseph Hanse (Bruxelles: La Renaissance du livre, 1966 [1867]).

and indeed one of the most notable reimaginings of Eulenspiegel, is a brilliant rendition of the tales in music. In 1894 Eulenspiegel inspired Richard Strauss for one of his successful tone poems, *Till Eulenspiegel's lustige Streiche* (*Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks*), first performed in Cologne on 4 November the following year. At the peak of his early career, the composer was turning to topics where his experimentation with dramatic orchestral writing could come into fool bloom. First in the cycle, the 1888 *Don Juan*, propelled him to international fame and commenced a set of explorations of demanding and colourful characters he pursued in several of the symphonic poems: alongside Don Juan and Eulenspiegel, he painted expressive musical portraits of Nietzsche's "Übermensch" and Don Quixote.

Although not the foremost of his tone poems, *Lustige Streiche* was a major success. In 1896 he followed it by *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, juxtaposing Eulenspiegel with the superman and providing a uniquely paradoxical choice of German heroes.[173] Strauss ingeniously chooses the rondo form to represent the elusive nature of Till. The playful theme represents his exploits and the work meanders through encounters and clashes of melodies, reaching a bitter end in Till's capture and execution presented in a distortion of the main theme. Till's theme reappears at the very end of the piece, in an "enchanting epilogue with its subtle allusion to Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll*,"[174] one of the musical giants Strauss was complexly related to creatively, "the hero Richard Wagner"[175] as he deemed him. The recurrence of Till's theme symbolises an indestructible force Strauss read in the jester, but also perhaps the perennial nature of folly and the lasting appeal of laughter. *Lustige Streiche* enjoys a fate similar to its source and is still played in concert halls across the world.

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[173] A possible connection between *Eulenspiegel* and Zarathustra is discussed further along in the chapter.
[174] Kennedy, Michael, *Richard Strauss: Man, Musician, Enigma* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 84. In the same passage Kennedy notes that Strauss never acknowledged the allusion to the *Siegfried Idyll* himself. Rather than speculating on the reasons why that might be so, the vague presence of *Siegfried* might perhaps gesture towards a peculiar connection, based on different kinds of courage, between Wagner's tragic hero and the jester, who in Strauss' interpretation likewise meets a tragic end.
[175] As quoted in Kennedy 175.

The twentieth century saw Eulenspiegel dramatically change, as one of his best-known versions comes from clean and censored adaptations in children's literature. Stripped of all the scatology and occasional malice, this is the Eulenspiegel easily conjured up nowadays. The eminent author of children's books, Erich Kästner—a poet of astute satirical vision himself and an important figure in the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, the post-expressionist New Objectivity movement at the end of the Weimar Republic era, which employed a sobering and detached style to satirise contemporary society—took up *Eulenspiegel* as his material. In 1938 Kästner introduced Till into children's literature in his adaptation of twelve stories about the trickster, illustrated by his frequent collaborator Walter Trier.[176] Kästner's Till is a merry prankster, harmless and loveable; a childlike figure who had forsaken the serious world of adulthood. Written in times of severe censorship, after the books of the pacifist Kästner had already been burned in 1933,[177] it is likely Eulenspiegel was an obvious embodiment of joyous escape for the disillusioned author, a vessel for conveying shifts of vision and possibilities of change. However, the attitude of the Nazis towards *Eulenspiegel* was in general quite positive: they cherished the German *Volksbuch* in general for its *Volkstümlichkeit.* It provided therefore a kind of camouflage for the critique.

In Trier's illustrations Kästner's Eulenspiegel is clad in motley[178]—the traditional attire of professional buffoons and court jesters and the unmistakable visual sign of folly that we have come to associate with harmless witty fools. Various other illustrated, or even animated,[179] versions of Eulenspiegel for children follow a similar formula. Motley on Eulenspiegel—present in children's versions, but also in the general imaginings[180] of the

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[176] See Kästner, Erich, and Walter Trier, *Erich Kästner erzahlt Till Eulenspiegel: zwolf Geschichten mit Zeichnungen von Walter Trier* (Hamburg: Cecilie Dressler Verlag, 1991 [1938]).
[177] Glaubrecht, Martin, "Kästner, Erich." In: *Neue deutsche Biographie 10*. (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1974: 737-740) 737.
[178] Evidence of original fool's attire, the famous motley, abounds in visual art, but also in textual description. For a comprehensive evidence of the latter, see Welsford 339-340.
[179] Eberhard Junkersdorf in 2003, for example, directed *Jester Till*, a feature animation of Eulenspiegel's adventured loosely inspired by the character and bearing hardly any resemblance to the original tales. That same year, the film earned a nomination for an Academy Award in the category Best Animation.
[180] The famous statue in Mölln, one of the very many commemorating the jester in Germany and elsewhere, represents him in motley, as does, for example the commemorative stamp issued in Germany in 2011. The

character—is, however, something that the original never mentions in the text, nor does it represent him thus in the accompanying woodcuts. The motley itself, a visual indication of the fool character, has something of a normative function—it describes, but also grounds the jester, by definition an unruly element, in a frame that constantly signalizes the possibility of folly and guides our interpretation of the character. Ambiguous as most of the aspects dealing with folly, motley is at once the fool's armour, as it is his prison—it entitles him to a free use of folly, but also bounds him to a specific place in society, a pronouncedly marginal one. And cladding Eulenspiegel in motley could be read as a superficial attempt at toning him down and turning him into a tame, if slightly witty, pastime appropriate for audiences of all ages. Underneath it, though, Eulenspiegel remains Eulenspiegel—mischief in the making, however clad or bowdlerised.

Image 2: The Mölln Eulenspiegel[181]

Schoeppenstedt Till Eulenspiegel Museum holds numerous representations of the character wearing the same outfit.

[181] Source: < http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Till_Eulenspiegel_M%C3%B6lln.JPG>

That Eulenspiegel is even more of a concept than a character is witnessed in Bertolt Brecht's reaction to the legendary Werner Finck, one of the leading artists of the *Kabarett* culture—a quintessentially German form of entertainment steeped in political satire and peppered with gallows humour—who was performing during Nazi suppression. He co-founded the *Katakombe*[182] cabaret in Berlin in 1929, where he acted as a master of ceremonies. A remarkably talented comedian, Finck played an Eulenspigelian character and in fact *was* the Eulenspiegel of the Third Reich, nimbly resisting unavoidable authorities through ingenious verbal feats.

Upon the closing of the *Katakombe* in 1935, Finck and his fellow players were sent to the Esterwegen concentration camp for six weeks, where they continued to perform, using folly as a means of survival. His persecutions continued as the legend of him grew, but his endurance surpassed the constraints of the regime. He went on to have a long and successful career in popular entertainment, establishing himself as important cultural icon. Finck's resilience fuelled by folly inspired Brecht's appropriation of Eulenspiegel to symbolise him in a poem[183] dedicated to the comedian. Brecht—who subsequently wrote five anecdotes with

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[182] For a detailed historical discussion of the *Katakombe* era and the cultural significance of Werner Finck, see Heiber, Helmut, *Die Katakombe wird geschlossen* (München; Bern; Wien: Scherz, 1966).

[183] Brecht's poem, as quoted in Hörburger, Christian, *Nihilisten—Pazifisten—Nestbeschmutzer: gesichtete Zeit im Spiegel des Kabaretts* (Tübingen: Verein für Friedenspädag, 1993) 48, brings a comprehensive examination of the era.

"Eulenspiegel überlebt den Krieg—Werner Finck gewidmet"
Gleichend einer madigen Leich
Lag das dutzendjährige Reich
Als, fünfhundert Jahre alt
Eulenspiegel in Gestalt
Sich den Schweizern präsentierte
Und, für eine Mahlzeit, referierte
Wie, indem er Witze riß und bebte
Er die großen Zeiten überlebte.
Denn es war für Späßemacher
Die S.S. ein schlechter Lacher:
Eulenspieglein an der Wand,
Wer ist der Dümmste im ganzen Land?
Nun, da galt es mittlerweilen
Sich die Späße einzuteilen
Sich den Gürtel eng zu schnallen und gelassen
Grad nur so viel Witze zu verpassen
Als man unbedingt zum Leben brauchte

Eulenspiegel as a political agitator and a hero of the underdog, and was for a while considering basing a film on them[184]—composed "Eulenspiegel überlebt den Krieg" ("Eulenspiegel survives the war") after seeing Finck perform in Zurich in 1946.[185] He thus very aptly tied together two figures that in cultural imagination came to stand for the irrepressible force of folly, modifying in the process both their meanings. While Finck became associated with recognition on the level of national consciousness, Eulenspiegel was invested with perseverance through the time of precariousness.

Eulenspiegel's misadventures must have been so vivid in the cultural imagination at times that the influence of the plots that contain him likewise spread into works that have no Eulenspiegel character *per se*, quite like *Eulenspiegel* once took over from other sources. Plots being transferred into other works stand out in two examples so far removed from each other that it may seem unlikely they could communicate at all, and yet they are connected through *Eulenspiegel*. The spirit behind these two appropriations is very different, as one appears in children's literature, while the other comes from philosophy. Such echoes of Eulenspieglian folly attest to its vividness and malleability, but are merely a small piece of evidence that speaks for the stature of this seemingly unsophisticated early modern *Schwankbuch*.

The first appropriation appears in Wilhelm Busch's 1865 verse classic for children, *Max und Moritz: eine Bubengeschichte in sieben Streichen* (*Max and Moritz: A Story of Seven*

Daß die Bestie höchstens fauchte
Doch nicht biß.
Und als der große Gütevolle,
würdenlose Späßevogel diese knappe
Zeit beschrieb, da war's, als klappe
Geisterhaft ihm manche tote
Hand noch Beifall. Von dem Aufgebote
Derer unter Schutt und Aschehügel.
Und es war, als wüchsen Flügel
Diesem ungelenken Gaste
Der in großer Zeit nicht paßte
Und indem er witzig war und bebte
Wie das niedre Volk sie überlebte.

[184] Brecht, Bertolt and Elisabeth Hauptmann, *Gesammelte Werke: (in 20 Bänden) Bd. 11* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967) 379-90.

[185] Hörburger 48.

Boyish Pranks).[186] The story recounts the mischievous escapades of the two titular characters who undoubtedly owe something of their propensity for folly to Eulenspiegel. In the first prank of the book, they lay a trap in the chicken yard of a Witwe Bolte, causing the chickens to become fatally entangled. The method of the chicken's entrapment is literally taken over from the Tale 8 of *Eulenspiegel*, in which the still boyish Till exercises revenge on a particularly stingy farmer who in the previous tale made him and other children sick with food.

Oppenheimer briefly points[187] to a connection between another instance where an *Eulenspiegel*-related plot possibly took root in a new context. Tale 4 of *Eulenspiegel* describes his dexterity at tightrope-walking. This feat, at least in part, turns up in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, [188] in which a jester in a similar role also appears. In his Prologue, Zarathustra tells the townsfolk, who gathered to observe a professional acrobat on a tightrope, that "[m]ankind is a rope fastened between animal and overman—a rope over an abyss."[189] They do not seem to comprehend him and greet his words with icy laughter. Suddenly, a jester appears on the tightrope and confuses the acrobat. The jester mocks his speed, jumps over him, making him plunge to his death. This Eulenspiegelian character—a jester darker than Eulenspiegel himself, displaying some *übermenschlisch* characteristics by handling the rope whose other end signifies superiority better than a professional—later turns to Zarathustra. With paradoxality characteristic of folly, he tells Zarathustra: "[i]t was your good fortune that they laughed at you: and really, you spoke like a jester."[190] How much of Eulenspiegel is in Nietzsche's tightrope jester is hard to tell, although a conclusion of Zarathustra's possibly echoes one of the darker subterranean thoughts in *Eulenspiegel*,

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[186] See Busch, Wilhelm, *Max und Moritz: eine Bubengeschichte in sieben Streichen* (München: Braun und Schneider, 1925 [1865]).
[187] Oppenheimer 195, note 3.
[188] Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, trans. Adrian Del Caro, ed. Robert B. Pippin and Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006 [1883]) 11-13.
[189] Nietzsche 7.
[190] Nietzsche 12.

hidden behind its pronounced liveliness. Namely, that "[u]ncanny is human existence and still without meaning: a jester can spell its doom."[191]

In *Eulenspiegel's* case, the richness of the book's background is even surpassed by its power to generate the *Eulenspiegelei*, that is, adaptations and new incarnations. Eulenspiegel to the Germans may be what Don Quijote is to the Spanish, or indeed Falstaff to the English—an immense source of inspiration, but also national pride and exceptionalism. As cultural creations springing from an elaborately described past, through deliberate repetition they are endowed with widespread recognisability, albeit one that usually goes no further than the surface of the character, and are reached for in various contexts when nationhood is a desirable or a convenient category. This perpetuates a sense of their universality and a perceived ability to represent a group of people as heterogeneous as those encompassed in a single nation. But these characters are more than just remarkable shells without substance and have the potential for generating multiple meanings already inscribed in their original environment—in the texts that contain them. In Eulenspiegel's case, the indeterminacies and ambiguities of his tales, enhanced by the appealing but likewise paradoxical nature of his folly that marries the verbal with the bodily, all ensured for his survival in culture. Thus the character, permeated with possibilities, touched different times and contexts and continues to excite cultural imagination to this day.

II.v. Conclusion: A Legacy of Folly

"Be careful, all you religious and worldly people, that you do not dirty your hands on legacies, as happened with Eulenspiegel's legacy."[192] Thus states the warning at the beginning of one of the tales describing the end of Eulenspiegel, one of his deathbed adventures. The religious and worldly people—designations encompassing the audience of the Eulenspiegel

[191] Nietzsche 12.
[192] Oppenheimer 185. The original text states: "Mercken geistlich und weltliche Persone, daz Ihr Euwer Händ nit verunreingen an Testamenten, als Ulenspiegels Testament gescha" (Lindow 259).

book, those who derive their wisdom from God and from culture, versed in the ways of the Word and the world—have thus far gone through ninety of his tales, followed him through his travels and transformations, and are now counselled to be wary of his hand-soiling legacy. A greed-driven monk in the tale will, predictably, stain his hands with Eulenspiegel's faeces, even though Eulenspiegel *told* him not to reach too far in the jug of coins that hid the foul surprise. Yet again, Eulenspiegel had done what he is best at: he produced the truth and he produced the excrement, orchestrating the event into a practical joke where nonsense is revealed to be of the same matter as sense, and folly liberates an alternative standpoint. His legacy, in the tale literally his excrement, is in fact the narrative that contains him, where production is the primary impetus and the ultimate consequence. This narrative is at once a warning against, a guide for and a catalogue of folly in all its ambiguous complexity.

The tales of a fool that holds up a *Spiegel* to society have ambiguity written into their very context. A product of an age on the cusp of major social, religious and political changes, the whimsical *Schwankbuch* retains connections to an oral tradition, participating simultaneously in novel artistic and intellectual developments, shown in the value it places on diversity and linguistic experimentation. Despite the fact that the text itself hardly supports such a position, it was thought that it could be hiding a moralizing message characteristic for its day, one that clearly constructs Eulenspiegel not merely as an antihero, but as a profoundly negative example. This idea came from the conviction that the author of the chapbook was either Hermann Bote or someone of his ilk, that it was the product of a worldview that saw folly as a hindrance to rationality and the betterment of the human soul, while the only reason for its use in literature would have been a cautionary one, that was to result in its ultimate suppression.

A converse standpoint on *Eulenspiegel* that emerges from the context sees it as a deliberately murky joke of a book that recounts adventures of a jester created by someone not taking their position too seriously. It may well be a product of a group of educated literati attempting to participate in the exciting new movements of its time. Seen in such a light, the book becomes a peculiar microcosm of an era sensitive to change, commenting not only on dynamics of contemporary social relations, issues of popular taste and sources of

laughter, but also playing a role in reshaping the intellectual landscape of the age. Another important aspect of these dynamics of change was the transition from an oral and manuscript culture to print culture, in which the Eulenspiegel book participates.

Examining the chapbook's relationship with folly of the age safely debunks *Eulenspiegel's* supposed moralism veiled into humour. Being at once a product of deliberate editing and shaping, comparable to Paleček's narrative to a certain extent, the *Eulenspiegel* book also belongs by default to the tradition of carnivalised popular literature and the character's unruly behaviour seems to bring holiday-esque disruptions into the world he inhabits, cancelling the sharp distinctions between the time to be serious and the time for jest. He thereby fits into the vast circle of legendary popular fools that were cropping up in various contexts across Europe. And some of those witty fools of late medieval and early modern times directly influenced the development of the *Eulenspiegel* book, entering with it in a complex relationship of rhizomatic influences where concepts and cultural artefacts acquire new meanings from the very connections they make.

The text that contains Eulenspiegel is as polymorphous and as ambiguous as the context that surrounds it; it shifts between tones and topics as quickly as the character changes faces and travels across early modern Europe. However, it does not lack consistencies and the most prominent of those are Eulenspiegel's fascination with language and his use of scatology, broadly understood as a specific interest in the body: open, grotesque and productive. This particular combination of interests foregrounded in the book—and their unique employment—constitutes Eulenspiegel's singularity in a group of comparable characters.

Given that a vast majority of tales celebrate his superior wit, he seems to be constructed as a clever character primarily—like the other three fellows of infinite jest gathered in this study, each gearing their wit to a different purpose. Eulenspiegel can talk himself into and out of trouble relying on an idiosyncratic manipulation of language that unmasks the constructed nature of reason and its proximity to folly. But these verbal outbursts of brilliance do not stand alone: they are punctuated by excremental exploits,

which show his body as undifferentiated from his mind. His legacy is the understanding of sense and nonsense articulated through an embodied folly, one that operates in a steady production of flows, unifying corporeal and verbal invention and laying the groundwork for a virtually inexhaustible system of varieties and reinventions.

III. Pomet and the Folly of Politics

> It needs patience to ride out the bad times and enjoy the good. Those are they who rule. And my pampered stomach deserves my faithful service.
>
> *Dundo Maroje* II.i.[193]

III.i. Introduction: Monumental Matters

Miroslav Krleža is one of the gargantuan names that cast a long shadow over the 20th century cultural and literary production in the space of former Yugoslavia. He was a prolific man of letters, writing prose, poetry and dramatic works, as well as embracing his contemporaneity in essays and cultural commentary. His personal influence reached the very top of governmental institutions. In 1948, at the zenith of his career and on the festive occasion of marking the fourth centennial of the publication of Marin Držić's comedy *Tirena*, Krleža turned to the Renaissance playwright. In an essay[194] that is a conscious attempt to revalorise Dalmatian early modern literature from a Marxist point of view, he hailed Držić as "the first markedly plebeian voice of our dramatic expression."[195] At the time when the position of Držić's work within the history of the South Slavic literatures had not yet been fully acknowledged, Krleža called for an urgent need to embed him within the narrative of literary history that showcases class struggle. The convoluted biography of Držić—as this chapter likewise exhibits—was an ideal example on which to politicise the realm of art and project present political struggles onto the hazy canvas of the past. Krleža wanted to monumentalise

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[193] Držić, Marin, Luko Paljetak, et al. *Dundo Maroje = Uncle Maroje = Zio Maroe = Doundo Maroïe = Vater Marojes Dukaten = Pappa Marojes Pengar = Dundo Maroje = Ukko Marojes Dukaatit = Dundo Maroe = Rzymska kurtyzana = Dundo Maroe = Dundo Maroje = Ujko Maroje = Nunc Maroje = Onklo Maroje* (Dubrovnik: Matica Hrvatska, Ogranak—Matrix Croatica, Branch: Dubrovačke ljetne igre, 2008) 202. I make use of Sonia Wild Bićanić's translation of *Dundo Maroje* published in this volume. It is an abridged version of the comedy and, when referring to text that does not appear in the translation, I provide the translation myself. Držić's original has it: "Trijeba je bit pacijent I ugodit zlu bremenu, da se pak dobro brijeme uživa. […] Ovaki ljudi renjaju!a merita moj profumani trbuh da mu služim!" (Držić, Marin, and Frano Čale, *Djela* (Zagreb: Liber, 1979) 392).

[194] See Krleža, Miroslav, "O našem dramskom répertoireu—povodom 400 godišnjice Držićeve 'Tirene'" (Zagreb: Djelo, no. 1. 1948: 34–40).

[195] Krleža 37. The original has it, "Držić je prvi izraziti pučanin u našoj dramatici."

Držić, his literary importance, but likewise his image. In his typically overstated prose, he claimed that

> [i]t often happens that certain names in literature, just by virtue of being the only ones, start to appear monumental to the future generations […] therefore, I think it would be good if […] Marin was erected a monument. It is our duty to honour him thus posthumously.[196]

As art is an arena where, apart from aesthetic tendencies, political trends often get their clear expression, a monument to Držić did eventually become a reality, although it did not follow Krleža's pleads immediately. The fate of this monument is a small-scale enactment of the shifting opinions that were forming around the great early modern writer of comedies. Just like his comedies, the reality that unravelled around the explicit and implicit reception of Držić had a peculiar taste for folly. What it on occasion lacked, however, was the capability, very present in Držić's comedies, to encompass the folly in shrewd reflection.

In 1957, as Držić's prominence grew, the organisation committee of the Dubrovnik Summer Festival—a cultural manifestation inaugurated in 1950 and going on until this day—invited another notable name to join in the discourse of canonising the playwright. Ivan Meštrović, the most celebrated sculptor in the region and an artist of world renown, was asked to consider immortalising Držić. Meštrović accepted the commission. Just how important the influence of Krleža on his decision was, cannot be confirmed, but it is speculated upon.[197] Krleža held complex views on the sculptor's work and its political engagement that wavered between enthusiastic appreciation and explicit critique.[198] Since nothing comparable to either a Chandos portrait, or a First Folio engraving exists from

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[196] My translation. Krleža 40. In original, that collates the urgency for both Držić and the 19th century Serbian playwright Jovan Sterija Popović to receive acknowledgement in sculpture, Krleža states that "[č]esto se tako zbiva u književnosti da se pojedina imena, iz perspektive budućih pokoljenja, pričinjaju spomenicima samo zato, jer su jedina. […] Mislim da bi bilo dobro da se načelno pokrenu stvari kako bi se […] Steriji i Marinu podigli spomenici. Da izvršimo tu posmrtnu počast, to nam je dužnost."

[197] Franić Tomić, Viktoria, *Tko je bio Marin Držić* (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 2011) 62.

[198] See Maroević, Tonko, "Krleža prema Meštroviću" in *Život umjetnosti* 78/79-2006 (Zagreb: Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 2006: 254-269).

Držić's time, Meštrović was free to imagine the playwright as he pleased. The sculpture, somewhat understated for Meštrović's regular expression that favour grand proportions, shows a seated figure, clad in a clerical costume, holding a book and a pen. The most captivating feature of the representation is the playwright's ambiguous facial expression. Fixed in a smile, virtually a smirk, perceptible only from one side of the bronze face, the expression bears an uncanny resemblance to the equally quizzical image Hans Holbein the Younger gave Erasmus in 1523.

Image 3: Ivan Meštrović's Marin Držić[199]

Image 4: Hans Holbein the Younger's Erasmus[200]

Even before it was executed, the Držić sculpture started causing controversy.[201] Envisaged to commemorate the 450th anniversary of his birth in 1958, the sculpture was going to be located in a prominent place within the Dubrovnik city walls. What prevented

[199] Source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marin_Drzic,_Dubrovnik.jpg>
[200] Source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Holbein-erasmus.jpg>
[201] For a consideration of this and other visual interpretations of Držić, together with a full elucidation of the Meštrović sculpture controversy, see the chapter "Ekskurs o ikonografskim tragovima" ("Excursus into iconographical traces") in Franić Tomić 54-68, esp. 61-65.

this from happening was the habit Držić was clad in, a thorn in the eye of the socialist officials organising the commemoration. The sculpture remained uncast until 1967, when the Society of Friends of Dubrovnik Antiques commissioned its realisation. Its sculptor had not lived to see it, having died five years prior. The unfortunate bronze Držić was then placed in the atrium of Dubrovnik's Gallery of Arts in Ploče, outside of the Old Town.[202] It remained there until 1979, when it was exhibited outdoors for the first time in the tourist complex Babin Kuk in Lapad, once again outside of the city walls. The square it was placed on was renamed after the playwright and the surrounding hotels were called after some of his most memorable characters.[203] It would take almost three further decades for Držić to get a place in the Old Town.

In 2008, the year that marked the fifth centennial of Držić's birth, Meštrović's sculpture was moved to the very centre of the city. It was placed on a square north of Rector's Palace, in the very same spot where the old Town Hall once stood, the building in which his most famous comedy was staged in 1550. Yet, even this festive occasion turned into a minor *cause célèbre*. Favourable opinions that saw the utmost necessity of a monument to Držić being prominently displayed were paralleled by decided rejections of his representation moving into the city whose liberty he once nearly jeopardised through his failed political schemes that sought to make the Republic of Ragusa a province ruled by Cosimo I de' Medici. This episode of the author's life is extensively discussed further along in this chapter. The views on Držić shifted as much as his statue was moved, constantly on the margins of political discourse. Now firmly located at the centre of Croatian literary canon, his portrait is far from fixed, as this chapter will show.

The choice to pause on my journey with folly in Croatian lands stems as much from my familiarity with the culture I hail from, as from the conviction that this culture's position within the contemporary international discourse of European Renaissance deserves a renegotiation. When the focus is set in the era of early modernity, a particular part of today's

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[202] Ljubić, Marina, "Ivan Meštrović" in Novak, Slobodan P. et al, eds., *Leksikon Marina Držića* (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2009) 498.
[203] Franić Tomić 64.

Croatia lends itself naturally to comparative research in a wider European context: the Republic of Ragusa in the Renaissance that produced Držić as an author. It is a geographical and historical entity that occupies a unique place in Croatian cultural memory. The associations Ragusa evokes are predominantly positive, inspiring a particular national vanity, which borders on a myth of sovereign existence that against all odds defied forces that significantly overpowered it. Ragusa accumulated cultural capital that, even when examined critically, remains undisputed to this day. Marin Držić is one of its most popular Renaissance products.

Popularity is a protean concept, and, rather than trying to define it, this chapter will map out the shifts and reconfigurations of certain aspects of popularity attributed to an early modern example and the relation of these aspects to elite practices. The focus in the chapter falls on *Dundo Maroje*, a comedy popular on different levels, written by a playwright and a poet popular in his times and as much, if not even more so, today. He wrote *Dundo Maroje* around 1550, the same year Pierre de Ronsard wrote his *Odes* and Giorgio Vasari published his *Vitae*. Francois Rabelais was yet to complete the fourth and fifth volume of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, and some forty years would pass before Shakespeare would start writing his early comedies. As one of Držić's latest Croatian editors, Frano Čale, sums up its popularity, *Dundo Maroje* is

> rightfully the most celebrated, most performed and most frequently published of Držić's comedies, a source of most complex laughter, [a play] with the greatest variety of characters and most original contaminations between the types of an older and a newer comedic tradition.[204]

Apart from being popular, *Dundo Maroje* portrays a comical microcosm that reflects the multiple political complexities of the early modern Ragusan society, observed through the prism of early modern folly.

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[204] My translation. Držić & Čale 94. The original quote states: "[z]asluženo je najslavnija i najviše prikazivana i objavljivana Držićeva komedija *Dundo Maroje*, izvor najobilnijeg smijeha, s najviše raznovrsnih likova, na originalan način oblikovanih kontaminacija između tipova starije i novije komediografske predaje."

Dundo Maroje is likewise pertinent for the research of folly since it features a character whose monologues resonate with a practical wit that by far surpasses the reasoning capacities of most of the other characters. This character is given the most space in the text, he is one of Držić's most complex comic personae, his foolish Hamlet even, and he is named Pomet Trpeza. *Dundo*, as it will be shown, is only superficially an offshoot of the *commedia erudita* tradition that typically showcases stock characters and where Pomet then assumes the role of the skilful, clever servant. This chapter argues that the character of Pomet should be read as a player of Renaissance folly: as a product of a subtle and often ambiguous logic defying sense with nonsense, such as Erasmus, Rabelais or Shakespeare championed. As my argument will show, a reading of Pomet's part—and, by extension, the entire comedy of *Dundo Maroje*—within the context of such folly will illuminate the political implications of putting conventional wisdom into the mouth of a self-made character such as Pomet. This reading will demonstrate where the performative qualities of folly fit within a society as highly theatricalized as that of early modern Ragusa. That is, a society that was deeply reliant on the perpetual staging of its internal order and hierarchy, of its processes of cultural and political othering and of reproducing the myth of its own legitimacy and identity.

III.ii. Ragusan Renaissance

Acutely aware of its position and history, Ragusa was in early modern times a city-state in the South-East Adriatic, predominantly populated by Slavs of Croatian descent and Roman Catholic denomination. What had been a commune at the early stages of its sovereign existence became a republic in the 14th century. It was centred on the city of Dubrovnik, occupying a relatively small southernmost region of today's Croatia. The small region nevertheless played a large role in the arrangement of political and economic forces in the space of the early modern Mediterranean and the Balkans. Along with Venice, it was a major trading port of the sixteenth century. As such, just like Venice, it had access to the full-fledged cultural polyphony of the early modern Mediterranean, located between West and East, where influences central and marginal were expressed.

Ragusa's fortunate geographic position and skilful diplomatic connections with the neighbouring power-players were determining factors in its fortunes that allowed the Republic to flourish both economically and culturally, and therefore to peek in a Renaissance. Its early modern literary culture was singular among Croatian lands, which included Dalmatia under Venetian, and the northern Croatian provinces under Habsburg rule. It was the only Croatian literary culture[205] to follow, absorb, and build upon aesthetic and poetic practices of Western European—predominantly Italian—literary models, thus constituting an organic part of the contemporary literary scene. This kind of historical and cultural entity, along with its pronounced patriotic libertarianism, proved highly generative of myth-like assumptions. Overly romanticized popular constructions of Ragusan history were seen especially in the 19th century when the Croatian national revival was striving to determine opinions that would take root and influence the national identity. During that time, the construction of the image of Ragusa either deliberately or accidentally remained uncritical towards some of the more ambiguous practices that assured the city-state's existence.

The political situation that propelled Ragusa to the height of its prosperity occurred while the pro-Ottoman orientation of its government was at its strongest, in the three decades between 1530 and 1570. Ever since 1458, Ragusa maintained a precarious position as a tributary of the Sultan, obliged to pay a yearly sum and to abide by regulations issued by the Porte. In turn, the Ottomans granted Ragusa a privileged position in Sultan's lands. It was authorised to trade and form relations with other countries, its ships were allowed to sail under the Ragusan flag and enter the Black Sea, otherwise closed to foreign fleets, while its traders were exempt from paying certain taxes. Ragusa became a significant locus on the Ottoman map, as a great part of the Ottoman's Mediterranean traffic and trade was carried out through its territory.

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[205] Fališevac, Dunja: *Dubrovnik – otvoreni i zatvoreni grad. Studije o dubrovačkoj književnoj kulturi* (Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, 2007) 7.

The West, primarily Italian lands that held the greatest interest in the territories, tolerated this allegiance. Reason for this was economic in nature. They wished to maintain a safe route towards Balkan resources of grain, skins, and wax that Ragusa could access directly during the period that came to be known as *Pax Ottomana*. Venetians in particular never fully relinquished their hopes of annexing the Ragusan territory. They had ruled over it for a century and a half, prior to losing it to the Hungarian crown that first granted Ragusa its independence in 1358. Such Venetian attitudes were far from popular in Ragusa and fostered processes of political othering of Venetians, regardless of their shared religious denomination and Ragusa's loyalty to the Papal crown. The Turks, on the other hand, were never conceived of as mere protectors. Ragusa at the time constituted the easternmost geographical point of early modern Christendom, with the Ottoman Empire casting a grave shadow over its political existence. It is nonetheless difficult to say with certainty what kind of sentiment towards the great imperial power pervaded in the Ragusan society.[206] To assure the Republic's prosperity and relative independence, the ruling elite defended the Ottoman allegiance, however disagreeable to the general public, by means of control and censorship.

Ragusa maintained a skilful, albeit precarious, sovereign existence for almost half a millennium. In 1358, the year of its liberation from Venetian rule, it will surrender to the French troops only in 1806, to be finally dissolved two years later. This time span makes it a political entity with the longest running historical existence in the south Slavic lands.[207] The city's motto—*Non bene pro toto libertas venditur auro*—illustrates a persistent propagating of a libertarian ideology. One of the reasons for Ragusan longevity lies in the fact that the Republic had a relatively stable social structure for the entire course of its existence. By the fifteenth century, it had become an aristocratic republic ruled exclusively by a deeply conservative and closed hereditary nobility. Through strict regulations, endogamy and

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[206] Zdenko Zlatar's *Between the Double Eagle and the Crescent* studies various historical accounts to contextualize the shift of allegiance in 1684, when the Ragusans chose the Habsburgs as their protectors, arguing that the governing elite was never unanimous, neither in its internal relationships, nor foreign policy. See: Zlatar, Zdenko, *Between the Double Eagle and the Crescent: The Republic of Dubrovnik and the Origins of the Eastern Question* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographies, 1992).

[207] Stulli, Bernard, *Povijest Dubrovačke Republike*. (Dubrovnik—Zagreb: Posebna izdanja "Arhivskog vjesnika" Arhiva Hrvatske, sv. 7, biblioteka "D"—Znanost, časopis "Dubrovnik", knj. 15, 1989) 14.

mythologizing of its own origin the Ragusan nobility maintained the *status quo*, prohibiting anyone of middle class or common background to attain aristocratic status and political power.[208] In Ragusa, the two were synonymous. Despite the mistrust of the Venetian power and influence, the government in Ragusa was modelled according to its example. Made up of two councils, governing and executive, and a senate, it was headed by a Rector who was elected for a month-long term in office from the twenty highest-ranking government officials, all members of the same aristocracy that was engaged in reproducing the image of a harmonious and idyllic state existence by controlling all public, popular, and cultural productions of meaning.

In his textual legacy, dramatic as well as documentary, Marin Držić shows a solid grasp of this complex political situation, and perhaps even a typically Ragusan awareness of how to skilfully coexist amidst different forces and in ambiguous circumstances. Enough is known about Držić, yet when it comes to documentary sources, few of those connected with his life are unambiguous, and his biography is full of lacunae that literary historians and his biographers sought to fill, sometimes inadvertently blurring fact and fiction.

A current narration of his life, taking into account recent research,[209] says that he was likely born in 1508, into a plebeian family in Ragusa. The Držićs had lost their noble title in the mid-14th century,[210] and much of their financial standing during Držić's own life. Singled out for priesthood early on in his life, Marin was at the age of thirty awarded a state scholarship for studies in Siena. There, apart from the study of literature, he got actively acquainted with theatrical production and performance. His popularity among the student body is read from his nomination and election as a rector of the *Casa della Sapienza* at the

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[208] The Ragusan patriciate believed itself to stem from four classical cultures: those of Epidaurus, Rome, Troy, and Salona. Their actual Slav and Roman origin was wrapped in a mythical story, which corroborated aristocratic ideology. See Zlatar 11-32.

[209] See the entry "Životopis" in Novak et al. 892-896. Franić Tomić's aforementioned excellent *Tko je bio Marin Držić* provides a valuable intertextual exploration of all hitherto known documents, as well as biographical accounts of the playwright's life and image.

[210] Two reasons are usually stated as leading to the loss of the title. The 1603 manuscript genealogy of the Držić family, compiled by Jeronim Držić, nephew of the author, records a mutual ancestor likewise named Marin Držić, who had left the Republic in plague time of 1348, despite the official ban. The more likely explanation is the same man's lack of a legitimate male offspring.

University of Siena for the year of 1541/2. The rectorial year of Držić's life abounds with archival recordings of his actions. Despite their fragmentariness, these were often the basis of biographical accounts bordering on caricature, depicting Držić as a gluttonous, skirt-chasing idler and merry-maker.[211]

Jeronim Držić, who wrote a genealogy of the Držić family in 1603, remembers a colourful moniker of his uncle: Vidra,[212] that is, the Otter. The same is repeated several times in Mavro Vetranović's poetic eulogy for the author upon his death in 1567. Either a nickname or a pseudonym from his theatrical days, the bestial designation triggered speculation on the character of an author thus linked to the animal traditionally perceived as cunning and adaptable. An otter is also inherently ambiguous, as Falstaff's classification of Mistress Quickly illustrates, albeit for different purposes. In a snappy banter with the hostess, who deemed his knighthood a mere façade for wicked knavery, Falstaff concludes she is an otter, because "she's neither fish nor flesh; a man knows not where to have her" (*1 Henry IV*, III.iii.126-127).

The ambiguous Držić-Vidra wore many hats. Another recorded fact is that Držić was a multi-instrumentalist, which justifies speculation about the employment of music in theatrical performances he conducted. Throughout his life he was no stranger to mobility and was, for a time, employed as a secretary/valet to an Austrian diplomat, count Christoph von Rogendorf, with whom he travelled extensively and who introduced him to the court life of Vienna and Constantinople. A parallelism that rarely escapes critics, and it is indeed far too compelling to be overlooked, is that Pomet in *Dundo Maroje* likewise has a German master. His Ugo Tudešak is Pomet's ticket to mobility, providing him with opportunities to exercise his wit, as well as capital to progress in the world.

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[211] See especially Rešetar, Milan, ed., *Djela Marina Držića* (Zagreb: Stari pisci hrvatski, VII, 1930) and Tadić, Jorjo, *Dubrovački portreti* (Beograd: Srpska književna zadruga, 1948).

[212] One of Zagreb's theatrical venues that specialises in satirical productions bears the name of Vidra, in honour to Držić.

Držić's most prolific period came after 1548 when he became a deacon in Dubrovnik. In the next decade he authored a series of lyrical poems, at least a dozen comedies and farces, including a single known tragedy, and played a major role in organizing the city's theatrical life. Innovations he had imported from Siena combined with his natural talent for dramatic form and expressiveness of language rejuvenated and further popularized theatrical performances in Ragusa. His literary opus in dramatic form is the basis of his subsequent fame and survival in discourse about the early modern theatre in Croatia and the wider region.

Držić was in many ways a true representative of early modernity. His works abound with contemporary ideas, such as hedonism as the principle of the sublime good, the affirmation of joy in life and love, travel and discovery of new worlds, wit and resourcefulness as guiding principles, even Machiavellian themes and concepts. The characters that populate his theatrical imagination, even if they are predominantly based on ancient or contemporary Italian prototypes, are often heralds of these very ideas, and highly progressive in the small Ragusan community. Ever mobile and accepting of change, Držić left his hometown for Venice around 1559, never to return and never to practice theatre again. Towards the end of this self-imposed exile, in the year before his death, the circumstances of which still remain a historical riddle, Držić spent some time in Florence. There, he wrote a series of conspiratorial letters to the Duke, Cosimo I de' Medici, documents whose discovery gained him notoriety in the 20th century and would equally become, what Zoran Kravar wittily termed, "his most famous non-fictional output."[213]

Ragusa had a relatively rich theatre history even before Držić's times. In the early 16th century, plays were performed in the environment of the city—at noble palaces and public squares—commemorating communal festivities such as carnival, or were, as was most often the case, staged as part of private celebrations of the elite. Troupes of amateur players gathered for the occasions, all strictly regulated by the authorities, as numerous official

[213] Kravar, Zoran "Dva kratka priloga o Marinu Držiću" in *Putovima kanonizacije: Zbornik radova o Marinu Držiću: 1508-2008*, Nikola Batušić and Dunja Fališevac, eds. (Zagreb: Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 2008: 860-865) 860.

permissions and denials issued to various companies testify from the archives. One of the recorded troupes of players bore the name of Pomet Company, thus confirming the centrality of the character of Pomet in Držić's work, as well as his popularity in Ragusan society on the whole.

A visual example of the Ragusan theatricality comes in the form of a remarkable illumination from a Gradual commissioned around 1518 by Rainaldo Graziani, the city's archbishop at the time. This recently re-discovered[214] image of an ideal Ragusan square is singled out to be, in all likelihood, the oldest illustration of Ragusan theatre depicting a well-established practice. The characters in the illumination—atypical for most other illustrations of ideal Renaissance cities—are neatly framed by imposing stone buildings and city walls, much like Ragusan reality would frame its obedient citizens. The city itself becomes a theatrical stage on which the play of a well-governed republic is performed, a veritable *theatrum mundi* in which men and women are merely players, directed by birth where to belong and how to behave. And this *theatrum mundi* Marin Držić dared to stir up with his innovative theatrical approaches. The Graziani illumination attests perhaps to more than just theatre performances in early modern Ragusa, portraying the histrionics of its everyday life. And, obviously, considering its date and its undisputed authenticity, it is possible to suggest Držić would have recognised in it a practice within which he actively participated.

Theatricality can, therefore, be said to have played an integral part of the Ragusan reality in the early modern times, and the theatrical understanding of reality implies an awareness of the need to embrace the ambiguities of performance. As Dunja Fališevac describes it,[215] Ragusa was a city-state that could simultaneously be celebrated as open, or regarded as closed. Situated at the intersection of many mercantile routes that exposed them

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[214] Interestingly, it was only very recently that Viktoria Tomić, a literary historian, rediscovered and properly interpreted this image. The Gradual remains in the possession of the county library of Bagnacavallo, near Ravenna, Italy. For a thorough critical interpretation that juxtaposes the illumination to other known illustrations of Renaissance ideal cities, such as the famous examples attributed to Luciano Laurana and Fra Carnevale, and to depictions of early modern theatre in Europe see Franić Tomić, Viktorija and Slobodan Prosperov Novak "Dubrovnik na najstarijoj hrvatskoj kazališnoj slici" (Dubrovnik: Anali 48, 2010: 213-241).
[215] Fališevac 7-39.

to the multicultural environment of the early modern Mediterranean, Ragusans were constantly witnessing religious, cultural, and ethnic difference. The consequence of such immersion in multiplicity was the construction of the Ragusan identity on the basis of negation: being Ragusan meant not being a native of neighbouring countries, not being Muslim, Protestant or Jewish, not being overtly occupied by an outside force. General prosperity in the city accounted for a relative harmony between loyal subjects and the self-fashioned good government, a harmony that allowed for cultural prosperity, yet one where all political leadership and power was monopolized by a ruling class that nourished a conservative ideology penetrating all aspects of public life.[216]

Receptive to major humanist and Renaissance inspirations from the neighbouring Italian lands, Ragusan culture produced an output of great generic diversity and aesthetic achievement. However, the main part of this impressive corpus is spoken by the voices of the privileged few, who at once had the license to participate in the cultural life of the Republic, and a duty to perpetuate its myth of legitimacy. The aforementioned generic diversity conspicuously lacks any kind of works that would problematize political affairs, or topics related to individuality. Namely, neither did fictional prose that would parallel corresponding forms in Italy start to develop, nor were any autobiographical, or similar, works produced that would emphasize personal trajectories. The only panegyrics were written to celebrate the city and its patron saint, St Blaise.

The character of Pomet may be said to stand out in the literary field of the time, with his individualism and pride in his own achievements. Yet, it is highly significant that he was created as a character in a comedy, therefore one with the license for folly, but also its perceived hindrance of triviality. Early modern dramatists in Ragusa produced no known original tragedies that would testify to the thriving of this genre in the otherwise vibrant Ragusan theatrical life. Držić's own *Hekuba* is an adaptation of Euripides acquired through Lodovico Dolce's source and is one of several exclusively translational Ragusan tragedies, the

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[216] Römer, Zdenka Janeković, *Okvir slobode: Dubrovačka vlastela između srednjovjekovlja i humanizma*. (Dubrovnik: Academia Scientiarum et Artium Croatica, 1999) 61.

rest of which were written by minor authors. *Hekuba* was given performance permission reluctantly. Prohibited on two occasions in 1558 for content that disturbed the authorities, it was finally staged the following year. One fact, above all, testifies to the controlling attitudes Ragusan authorities held towards the blossoming literary culture produced in the Republic: it was only on 20 November 1783 that the Senate allowed one Karlo Occhi to set up the first printing press in Ragusa. The license was not unconditional, and all books waiting to be printed were first required to obtain permission from a government-appointed censor.[217]

Complex internal conditions that depended on the enactment and confirmation of stability were nevertheless susceptible to antagonistic questionings, almost exclusively coming from commoners, or even clerics. Marin Držić—or at least the textual constructions of his supposed historical persona—through his life and writings seems the very epitome of such antagonism. Closer consideration of much of the twentieth century writings on Držić's life and works, largely still resonant today, reveals a particularly saturated intertextual point. Namely, three textual instances taken from Držić's life and works, if brought into dialogue, are meant to break the hermeneutic code of the author's historical identity and his viewpoints.[218] These three textual instances behave much like reflections of one and the same body in a hall of mirrors, where reflective surfaces can distort to the point of unrecognizability, yet the reflected object remains fundamentally the same. They are, as follows: the words put by the playwright in the mouth of Pomet; the words of the first prologue to *Dundo Maroje* spoken by the magician Long Nose; and lastly the words that Držić addressed to the Florentine duke Cosimo I de' Medici, that is, the words of Držić's conspiracy letters.

Such essentialist approach is right to point to comparable tendencies in the texts od Držić's legacy, but it remains questionable whether a core sameness indeed runs through different discursive formations. Mapping out the development of Pomet's meaning calls for

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[217] Fališevac 23.

[218] This interpretative tendency is noticeable in most of the authoritative critics of Držić's work in the second half of the 20th century. See, for example, Čale (1974), Prosperov Novak (1984), Košuta (1961), Fališevac (2007).

an unfolding of these three textual instances. I shall address the texts in reverse order, starting with the conspiracy letters: documents often endowed with historical significance given their supposed immediacy. An analysis of the letters and their reception prepares the context relevant for an understanding of Držić's politics of folly, one that informs his conceptualization of the folly of politics in his work. This opens up a specific entryway into the text of *Dundo Maroje*. Starting with the prologue of the Long Nose, usually viewed as an authorial mask, and arriving at Pomet, as Držić's comic character *par excellence*, at times understood as a tacit personification of author's life philosophy, *Dundo Maroje* in my reading manifests an understanding of the folly of politics.

III.iii. Florentine Folly

One particular event in Držić's life, often associated with the darker side of folly, cannot be overlooked when assessing the political implications of his comic characters, Pomet being his crowning accomplishment. In the summer of 1566, Držić authored a string of letters addressed to Cosimo I de' Medici, the Duke of Florence at the time and one of the most formidable political players in early modern Europe. In the notorious letters, Držić requested the Duke to consider his case against the current government in the Republic of Ragusa, incompetent and despotic in his view, and to aid him in a plot to overthrow it. This plot he carefully concocted and presented to the Duke at great length in his letters.

A highly controversial part of the author's legacy, the letters lay forgotten for over 300 years, before Jean Dayre, a French historian, discovered the first bundle in the depths of the Florentine State Archive in 1930. He revealed four letters, all written in Držić's hand, and that discovery forever altered the image of the author in the cultural imagination. From a jolly comedian whose life was traced from documents that evoked a restless spirit who travelled extensively and frequently found himself in financial dismay, Držić was suddenly connected with a deed as grave as an attempted conspiracy and high treason, and critics turned to his works with a newfound fervor. This revelation brewed for decades, specifically

until 2007 when Lovro Kunčević,[219] a Croatian historian, made another discovery in the very same archive, of a previously unknown letter, that radically changed the perspective on the conspiracy. Both discoveries play an important role in creating the popular image of Držić; they even guide the reception and inform interpretations of his works, making the prologue of the Long Nose and Pomet's monologues resonate with more political zeal than first meets the eye.

The 1930 discovery brought to light four of the letters dated between July 2 and August 28, 1566. At the time, Duke Cosimo was 47 and headed one of the most powerful political entities in early modern Europe. Having been the duke of Florence for almost three decades, in 1564 he entrusted his son, Francesco I de' Medici, with a share of political power. This move left Florence with a specific dual form of government, a fact that may very well have figured on the Medici side of the communication with Držić, and one that was unknown until only a couple of years ago. While Francesco was the regent responsible for the bulk of the domestic affairs, Cosimo retained his ducal title and supreme political control, particularly over foreign affairs. Both the father and the son are addressed by Držić and, along with two court secretaries, factored in the events surrounding the attempted plot.

The first of the discovered letters contains information of a previous one, now lost, that described the good points of the Ragusan Republic to the Duke. The letter we have speaks extensively of the ineptitudes of the Ragusan government and its cruelty to certain individuals. Perhaps most importantly, it proposes the plot for its overthrow, and sketches a suggested new administration for Ragusa. In minute detail, Držić outlines how this coup should be staged. He specifies the number of men that should arrive at Dubrovnik; envisages how they should be armed and attired; asks for a blacksmith and a manufacturer among them; and suggests they should pretend to be seeking employment in the city. As Trevor Laurence Jockims compellingly reasons, "the playwright instruct[s] the ruler in language

[219] On the recent discovery of the last letter and an illuminating discussion of the historical context and hitherto available research, see Kunčević, Lovro. "'No Harm in Hearing It All': Medicean Attitude to the Conspiracy of Marin Držić" in *Dubrovnik Anals 12* (Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti, 2007: 9–46).

directly reminiscent of the theatre's play-world."[220] This, indeed, is possible, but we should not forget how accustomed we are to think of Držić as primarily a playwright.

He proposes the overturn to occur peacefully and in secret, during the night, and the twenty government leaders be handed Papal excommunications, real or pretended, after which the people of Ragusa would willingly side with the Duke. That, at least, was the opinion of Držić the conspirator. As he writes in the first letter, hinting at his motives and revealing his fixation on the folly of politics:

> [o]ur aim is to settle this great mess in the most kind hearted manner possible. We will not eliminate barbarity with barbarity. This can be easily done, with the help of God and the good Fortuna of Cosimo Medici, the Duke of Florence and Siena. The stupidity of the men in government and their poor behaviour affords them a wide range of abuses, especially because they do not consider the threat from the plebs and think they are superior to rulers abroad.[221]

The second existing letter, much shorter, is an addendum to this one and merely reinforces Držić's position. The third existing one is effectively a short note to Francesco, pleading him to put in a good word for Držić with his father. And in the final existing letter uncovered in 1930, Držić cryptically announces that many difficulties had come in the way of his plans, that he was fearing for his life, and had better wait for a more appropriate time to complete them. He also declares he was going back to Ragusa, something that presumably never took place, as Držić died under mysterious circumstances in Venice the following year.

Almost immediately after their discovery, these four letters started perplexing the academic audience concerned with Držić, his works, and his public image. The letters had become texts that kept generating more and more text. The date of the famous discovery,

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[220] Jockims, Trevor Laurence, "Introduction to the First English Translation of the Držić's Conspiracy Letters to Cosimo I de' Medici" in Držić, Marin, *The Conspiracy Letters to Cosimo I de' Medici*, Slobodan Prosperov Novak, ed., Trevor Laurence Jockims trans. (Zagreb: Center for Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb, 2007: 4-9) 7.
[221] Držić, *The Conspiracy Letters to Cosimo I de' Medici* 19.

1930, happened to coincide with the year of preparation and publication of the first authoritative edition of Držić's collected works, edited by Milan Rešetar and accompanied by an extensive introduction.[222] The recently unearthed letters only just made it into this edition, still in their Italian original. Rešetar thus became the first biographer of Držić privy to this important information and responsible for the first public commentary of the letters. In a mildly patronizing tone, he deems Držić's plan ridiculous, naïve, and without any chance of completion, primarily because it was put into motion by a man unknown outside of Ragusa, and he characterizes Držić as a better playwright than politician.[223]

Along these lines runs the report of Jean Dayre,[224] the finder of the letters, published in French in 1930 and 8 years later in Croatian, in which he informs his audience of the contempt he felt towards the unrealistic ambitions of a man who thinks he can govern his own country, and concludes how that kind of plan could only have been born in the mind of a completely harmless man,[225] as he deems the writer of the letters to be. The year 1950 saw the publication of Živko Jeličić's[226] Marxist interpretation of Držić's life and his last political act, quite typical in its perspective for its time. In it, despite the fact that Držić opts for the Florentine regime, he is transformed into a latent revolutionary apparently channelling these aspirations into the letters. The first Croatian translator of the letters, Ivo Batistić,[227] concludes in the Afterword to his 1963 edition that the conspiracy was the consequence of an overwrought, possibly pathological state of the old poet's mind. Jorjo Tadić, a renowned historian of his time, in his book on Držić, assesses the plot as fantastical and ridiculous, and

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[222] The stated introduction appears in Rešetar, Milan, ed., *Djela Marina Držića* (Zagreb: JAZU, Stari pisci hrvatski, Book VII, 1930) i-cxlvii. For the transcript of the letters, see cxxxi- cxlvii; and for Rešetar's brief commentary, lxvi- lxxiv.
[223] Rešetar lxxiv.
[224] Dayre, Jean, "Marin Držić urotnik u Firenci" in *Dubrovačke studije* (Zagreb: Redovno izdanje Matice Hrvatske, 1938) 19-24.
[225] Dayre 22.
[226] Jeličić, Živko. *Marin Držić: pjesnik Dubrovačke sirotinje* (Zagreb: Novo pokoljenje, 1950) 26.
[227] Republished as Batistić, Ivo, "Zavjerenička pisma Marina Držića" in *Filologija*, no. 5, (Zagreb: Hrvatsko filološko društvo, 1967: 5-45).

Držić himself a peculiar man, moreover, not completely sane, and showing certain mental disabilities.[228]

Even though something akin to dementia cannot be ruled out on all grounds, however delicate the matter of madness in canonical authors may be, such commentary as noted above, comes dangerously close to what Foucault in "The Discourse on Language" says of the pre-19th century doctors and their view of those declared mad. As he writes, "[w]hatever a madman said, it was taken for mere noise; he was credited with words only in a symbolic sense, in the theatre, in which he stepped forward, unarmed and reconciled, playing his role: that of masked truth."[229] Theatricality thus once again comes into view, as Držić becomes a mute fool, one entirely constituted of text—made up of commentary, but acting always in words, always through language—yet incapable of any comprehension.

Držić becomes utterly theatrical in one of the most cited monographs of the more recent period, Slobodan Prosperov Novak's *Planeta Držić*. This "Planet Držić," as the title would translate into English, assumes a genuinely critical stance towards its material. Nevertheless, when it comes to the conspiracy episode, Novak reiterates the old image of Držić the natural fool, even explicitly (and quite wittily) linking the attempted conspiracy with the farcical outcry of Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, who wishes to roar for the duke.[230] Novak is one of the editors of the *Lexicon of Marin Držić*,[231] a large two-volume edition that was published during the remarkably productive and festive year commemorating the fifth centenary of Držić's birth. In the said lexicon, Novak explicitly connects *Dundo Maroje* with the conspiratorial letters. In his entry about the comedy, Novak calls the letters the prose sequel to *Dundo Maroje*, thus making an unfortunate equation of

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[228] Tadić, Jorjo, *Dubrovački portreti* (Beograd: Srpska književna zadruga, 1948) 91-125.
[229] Foucault, Michel, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith and Rupert Swyer (New York: Vintage, 1982 [1969]) 217.
[230] When demanding to play the lion, on top of all other characters he wants to play, Bottom proclaims: "I will roar,/that I will make the duke say,/'Let him roar again, let him roar again.'" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* I.ii.71-3).
[231] Novak et al, eds. *Leksikon Marina Držića* (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2008).

separate registers and blurring generic differences that may lead to erroneous identifications, or even "over-readings" of the comedy as a *pièce à clef*.

The one thing all the commentary thus far presented shares is the fact that none of it was taking into account the possibility that Držić's case *could* have been noticed. And this is precisely what the newly discovered letter proved. From its content, the secretarial notes attached to it, and the marginal inscriptions in Cosimo's own hand, it becomes clear that the perspective on Držić's Florentine episode needed to change. It could no longer be interpreted as a bewildering period spent in futile expectation of a response. The newly discovered letter contains to date unknown details of Držić's plan and his political position: he carefully manoeuvres his answers to questions he was, quite possibly, asked by the Duke's secretary in person, not revealing on whose behalf he actually acted, if there even was anyone such. The two most important notes Cosimo accompanied the letter with, state: "No harm in hearing it all," and "Mere vanities," and reveal that at least some kind of dialogue and not a miserable monologue had been taking place, and that the Medici attitude towards the attempted plot was not one of complete disregard. This discovery, however, still needs to gain momentum and to influence new interpretations of the conspiracy, as well as new narratives of Držić and his life.

Considering the earlier commentators' astonishment with the social leap Držić seemed to have taken in approaching the Florentine Duke, I would suggest reading it perhaps as an effort to enter the early modern patronage network, and an extension of the reading of his biography in terms of self-fashioning. As Mario Biagioli shows in his *Galileo, Courtier*,[232] patronage was practiced as a social institution throughout early modern Europe and was key to social status, especially in Florence where an absolute social hierarchy prevailed. Biagioli is writing on the scientific revolution and networks of scientists and patrons, however his insights can be expanded to include ambitious minor political players as well. As he writes,

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[232] Biagioli, Mario, *Galileo, Courtier: The Practice of Science in the Culture of Absolutism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

> it is by linking patronage to the social process of self-fashioning of the clients and patrons (rather than simply to their economic subsistence) that we can relate cultural production and social context. Rather than looking for paradigms, we may focus on the study of the client's identity in all its sociocultural dimensions, as well as on the scrutiny of the process through which such an identity is shaped.[233]

A career and social mobility were impossible if one was not involved in a network of patronage relationships, and all the social strata participated in its enactment. Even though the patronage Držić seeks is political and not artistic, as was most often the case, the concept may still be used as an explanation of his attempt.

Recent research quite persuasively places Držić within a wider web of historical figures that may have conspired together in a lengthy conflict that the historiographic workshops had not always explicitly recorded, namely in the antagonism of the two powerful Ragusan clans: the Bobaljić and the Gundulić.[234] Being a well-travelled man of the world (and theatre) and a self-made persona, and having authored the letters that, despite their apparently outlandish ambition, indeed show a grasp of the larger movements in the public arena of his age, Držić, sought to inscribe himself into a particular cultural system of meanings. His attempt, therefore, becomes less blatantly foolish or incompatible with political reality of Cosimo Medici's Florence, and more likely to be lost somewhere between abstract potential and historical realization.

Even though the attempt evidently failed miserably, the fact remains that an individual who was officially supposed to be relatively powerless in his own surroundings managed to reach and—however briefly—hold the attention of none other than the Duke of Florence. Mid-16th century Ragusan citizens, the class Držić belonged to, are remembered in history as a relatively stable group, at peace with their prescribed status. It is very possible the Ragusan authorities never found out about Držić's Florentine episode, as the secret council

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[233] Biagioli 14.

[234] See: Vekarić, Nenad, "Držićeva firentinska urotnička epizoda: dio plana Bobaljićeva klana da razvlasti Gundulićev klan" in Batušić & Fališevac 866-875.

records where an attempted treason would have been discussed do not mention him at all. There is, likewise, the question of his connections. Our inability to clearly trace the network he could have been involved in certainly doesn't prove that there wasn't one—but then again, neither does it disprove that he was acting alone. What we do have are these letters, so peculiarly disconnected from other historical proof, or from the received reconstructions of Držić's biography. It can be frustratingly difficult to guess what the powerless in the past thought, or how and if they saw any possibility for action. And even though Marin Držić is today anything but a forgotten and invisible person, in his historical context, and especially towards the end of his life, he was a man of no great importance, what the outcome of this episode also clearly confirms. But by acting through these letters, apparently against the odds and for a very brief moment, he must have believed he possessed political agency.

What of the connection between the conspiracy and Držić's dramatic art? How is Pomet tied to the political aspirations of his creator? As Lovro Kunčević correctly points out in his lexicon entry[235] about the attempted conspiracy, affirming that Držić had interwoven his art with political dissatisfactions explicitly voiced in the conspiratorial letters and peppered Pomet's and some other characters' moralizing monologues with them, assumes a long continuity of ideas in the author's life. Although that does indeed remain a possibility, it seems to be a highly simplified one, especially if we take into account that the period in-between creating the texts of the plays and the texts of the letters was ten to even fifteen years. Kunčević further reasons that another precarious assumption is that the conspiratorial letters are in any way a direct route to the private thoughts and attitudes of Marin Držić the man, mainly because conspiracy letters belong to a highly tendentious "genre."[236] What Držić was practicing in the letters was the art of persuasion and it is legitimate to assume he moulded reality to suit his goal: winning the Duke's consent. The importance of Držić's conspiracy episode for the study of his literary output lies primarily in illustrating his political views. As this chapter contends, these views were never far from the realisation that

[235] Kunčević, Lovro, "Urota" in Novak et al 837-846.
[236] Novak et al 844.

to act politically, one must allow oneself a dose of folly. Držić's understanding of this folly got its clearest expression in *Dundo Maroje*, and even more so in the character of Pomet.

III.iv. Pomet and Folly in *Dundo Maroje*

Before turning to Pomet, my focus will shift to the part of *Dundo Maroje* dispersed in a particularly intricate web of intertextual references. The very first *dramatis persona* to stand before the audience that gathered to see the comedy at the Ragusan Town Hall that carnival season in 1551, and the first mask to claim the stage in most of its subsequent performances to this day, is the Long Nose, the Magician of the Great Indies,[237] or the Necromancer, to use the term closer to the original. The name Long Nose, immediately evocative of a phallic carnival mask, almost certainly indicates that the actor wore a prosthetic part that was, in its grotesqueness, meant to provoke laughter. However, whether that was indeed the case, is not recorded. What is certain is that the character of the magician was well known in Držić's time and on the Renaissance stage, appearing, for instance, in Bernardo Dovizi's influential comedy *La Calandra* (c. 1507) and Ludovico Ariosto's *Il Negromante* (c. 1520). What is today considered innovative about Držić's own Necromancer is his appearance as the speaker of a prologue.[238]

The Necromancer stands out from the other *dramatis personae* of *Dundo Maroje*, and not merely because he belongs to a world far more fantastical than that of the other characters. In the function of the speaker of the prologue, he is the mediator between the spectators who observe the stage from the "real world," and the world of the play. He speaks directly to them from a liminal position while they silently suspend their disbelief and allow themselves to become spellbound by the spectacle of theatre. It is of course highly unlikely

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[237] Držić et al 179-252. Bićanić chooses to label the Long Nose a magician, rather than a necromancer, a choice I do not agree with. The English necromancer covers roughly the same semantic field the Croatian *negromant* does, it rings truer to the original and fits neatly with the description of necromancers as bringing grotesque puppets to life that appears in the text.
[238] Držić & Čale 17.

the very first spectators of *Dundo Maroje* would have reflected on their own role as an audience in this manner, yet we could allege a certain degree of astonishment with some of Držić's methods unfamiliar to Ragusan audience. The Necromancer's role will not simply be to introduce the play—the speaker of the second prologue, the leader of the Pomet Company and quite possibly the actor who played Pomet himself, will do that afterwards. This mysterious masked speaker is there to tell the audience a secret, one that would establish the interpretative framework of the comedy, and, as he claims, would be far more important than the comedy itself. This secret is often taken to be the key to the intended reading of *Dundo Maroje*, and a guideline for the construction of the meaning of Pomet as a character.

The Necromancer begins with a gender and class-conscious greeting to the audience: commencing with the aristocracy, but not forgetting the common people, both the *popolo grasso* and the *popolo minuto*, Ragusan stratified commoners, and proceeds to invoke a prior address in the form of a prologue, when he had already used his magic on the people. The Necromancer speaks of Ragusa and from Ragusa, as it is clear from his remark on the peaceful existence of the city. The Square he mentions, however, as historical evidence shows,[239] was likely to have been merely the planned location that was substituted for the interior of the Town Hall, a space coded on multiple levels even when not serving as a theatre venue. Given that the Town Hall allows for a gathering of a crowd far smaller than would have been possible in the Square, we may speculate that the spectators were especially privileged to see the comedy that day, and may have been more homogeneous than the speech suggests.

A carnival figure himself, the fantastical Necromancer declares he would literally turn reality upside down, as he had done three years before, during the performance of what the allusions scattered throughout the text, as well as the missing pages in the Rešetar manuscript, lead us to believe was the comedy named after Pomet. In this *Pomet* the

[239] The evidence comes from the only known manuscript of Držić's prose plays, excluding *Tirena*, *Hekuba*, and his poems, produced in mid-16th century, the "Rešetar Manuscript", as it is popularly known, for Milan Rešetar who provided its first scholarly description. The pages of *Dundo Maroje* record that the performance had taken place in the Town Hall.

audience had encountered much of the characters of *Dundo Maroje* for what may have been the first time. He alludes to this performance and his commemorated success for having put locks on "some evil tongues that take for evil that which appears to them good,"[240] demonstrates thus the power of theatre in correcting the world. Evil tongues were especially familiar to Držić himself, as the documentary sources show: he had been explicitly accused of plagiarizing Mavro Vertranović in his verse pastoral comedy *Tirena*, first performed in 1549. Vertranović himself repudiated the claims and cleared Držić's name in a poem dedicated to the playwright. However, whether or not the evil tongues the Necromancer speaks of actually suggest that very incident is not possible to ascertain.

Following this exordium, the Necromancer's speech turns to the secret itself, delivered in the form of a fantastical travelogue. This travelogue, according to the explication of Leo Košuta,[241] bears resemblance to ancient allegorical voyages around the world that contain a vision of Paradise, quests as different as their creators, from Homer, to Dante, to Rabelais, which are meant to result in initiation and the recognition of the supreme truth. The audience would have been familiar with such expression and, being aware that the spectacle they were about to enjoy would be a comedy, would perhaps even see it as a parody of the genre.

The whole text, however, is multiply encoded. The succession of lands the Necromancer toured—The Major, Minor, New, and Ancient Indies—translated from the legendary topography of the time, are often identified as India, Pakistan or Ethiopia, the New World, and lastly a fabled land in the far east, where the medieval maps traditionally located Heaven on Earth, and where Rabelais sent his Pantagruel. These lands are to the Necromancer reachable only with the help of magic. There, he encounters a utopian vision that will constitute a large portion of his argument, and become the stage of the first *agon* to be presented in the comedy: the one between the true, "*nazbilj*" people and the would-be

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[240] My translation. The original states: "i zahvaliste mi, i platu imah, što katance stavih na njeke zle jezike koji za zlo imaju ono što im se za dobro čini." Držić & Čale 342.
[241] Košuta, Leo "Pravi i obrnuti svijet u Držićevu *Dundu Maroju*", in Batušić & Fališevac 269.

people, or people "*nahvao*", the artificially created ones. Pomet, as it will soon become apparent, will exemplify a True Man in becoming.

Amidst the Necromancer's lyrical description of the paradisiacal environment of the Ancient Indies, where nature is generous and the weather mild, comes a brief but pointed refutation of avarice, the human weakness that will become one of the driving forces of the comedy. It is immediately followed by a sentence that may have been one of the stumbling-stones for materialist-minded critics, seeking proto-revolutionary sentiment in Držić's prose that would justify their view of him as the poet speaking for the subjugated classes:[242] "There is no 'mine' and 'thine', for all is everyone's, and everyone is the master of everything."[243] Absence of private property, as a characteristic of the Golden Age, is familiar from ancient, as well as pre-Renaissance documents, and Košuta points to Ovid and Hesiod, as well as medieval religious sources that sought to illustrate the innocence of the prelapsarian existence.[244] The "true" people of the Necromancer's description who inhabit this egalitarian Eden in the Ancient Indes, as harmonious in body as in mind, recall the blissful nude creatures in the green meadows of the first two panels in Hieronymus Bosch's triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights*.

The utopia in the Necromancer's account was interrupted by visits from other magicians who came to seek the wealth of the ancient lands and brought in return grotesque puppets of gargoyle-like countenances. The gesture resembles the act of the Necromancer himself, who is imposing his presence on the people of Ragusa and bringing them his own grotesque puppets—the comic actors. And just as Eve who, in the first panel of Bosch's masterpiece, had set into motion the glorious parade of carnal pleasures in the central painting, the women of the Ancient Indies requested that the magicians bring the puppets to life by magic.

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[242] See Krleža 35-36; Jelićić, Živko, "Marin Držić, pjesnik sirotinje XVI. vijeka" (Zagreb: Izvor, I. nr. 6, 1948: 305-316).
[243] Držić et al 181. Držić's original: "Tuj ne ima imena 'moje' i 'tvoje,' ma sve je općeno svijeh, i svak je gospodar svega." Držić & Čale 343.
[244] Košuta 278.

The genesis of the would-be people is thus explained as resulting from the sexual encounters of women of the Ancient Indies with the grotesque figures whose likes the Necromancer chants like a refrain throughout his account: "shaped like monkeys, parrots, giraffes and owls, people with heron legs and frog bodies, jesters, gluttons, actors, the dregs of human kind." This carnivalesque catalogue of creatures likewise sounds as though it might stem from the mystical central panel of Bosch's *Garden*, which, whether interpreted as a scene of sin leading logically into the hellish landscape of the right panel, or of the paradisiacal state of man before the Flood, focuses on earthly pleasures of the intertwined bodies mingling freely with plants and animals. Bosch's distinctive iconography is usually traced back to the motives appearing in the margins of illuminated medieval manuscripts, yet what he does is endow marginal images with centre-stage value.[245]

The hybridity of the creatures, iconographic as well as textual, comes from a medieval fascination with deformities in nature and human physique, which was, as Jacques Le Goff indicates in *The Medieval Imagination*[246] often linked to the fantastical, and by extension sinful and sexually deviant. These traditions survived in the carnivalesque creations of authors such as Francois Rabelais, but also in much older popular practices of masquerading during the controlled subversiveness of the carnival season. Associations produced by the carnivalesque imagery accompanied early actors as well, and the Necromancer observes that very tradition when he includes them in his catalogue of the would-be creatures.

The evil seed of the would-be people, the grotesque homunculi brought to life by magic that bred mongrels with curious true women, spread from the Ancient Indies into "our lands," the Necromancer further recounts, transporting his audience once again into the world they know, and there the perpetual antipodes became engaged in a never-ending battle

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[245] Jacobs, Lynn F., "The Triptychs of Hieronymus Bosch" in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University, 2000: 1009-1041) 1029.
[246] Goff, Jacques Le, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, [1985] 1992) 37-41.

for power with the true people. By formulating the "secret" in mythically layered language, the Necromancer calls for a specific reading of the comedy, one sensitive to the true nature of its characters, but also to the way reality itself is constructed.

One particular interpretation of the Necromancer's prologue has become extremely influential and it is virtually impossible not to take it into account when discussing the text. It was Živko Jeličić who first connected the Necromancer's speech with Držić's conspiratorial letters discovered almost two decades before he was writing, suggesting that the would-be people the Necromancer had given away in his prologue are none other than the twenty unarmed, worthless monsters Držić wants to overthrow in his plot, and even critics who do not agree with his reasoning come in the end to the same conclusion.[247] Držić's own comic deviousness would supposedly have been responsible for the success of this unmasking. Only by leading the aristocracy—and aristocracy presumably constituted a large majority of the audience—to believe that it was they the Necromancer's prologue is portraying in flattering terms as the true people, could he have gotten away with such a dangerous trick in a society as strictly controlled as the Ragusan. This interpretation, as intriguing as it may be, nevertheless demands a lot of reading into the original works. Not only is it next to impossible to uncover the exact authorial intention behind a text as far removed as the prologue in question, but reducing the interpretation down to a single possibility also hampers the richness of the text.

Creeping from the layers of the Necromancer's prologue, parading a grotesque grin of the jester, is the mask of early modern folly, such as Erasmus famously assumed when he took for his duty to compose its *Encomium*. The core of the Necromancer's secret—the fact that the world is populated by people who are good and those who are wicked—shares a similar irony with Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*. With this in mind, we have to ask ourselves, should the secret that the Necromancer, this carnival mask, a grotesque actor of all actors, is revealing to the Ragusans be taken as the truth? Or should we assume a knowledgeable stance

[247] The texts of Čale (1974), Prosperov Novak (1984), Košuta (1961), and Fališevac (2007), all critics highly influential in the field of Držić Studies, propagate this conclusion.

and read it as the truth's reverse? Is the Necromancer telling the Ragusans that they should know who the wicked among them are, or is he actually praising them for being the truest of all? And if so, what is the worth of his praise?

The answer to these questions should be sought in the fact that the Necromancer's prologue is a speech of folly, and as such it is governed precisely by the ambiguous logic of irony. Having critics decipher its hidden message as Držić-the-author's deep-rooted and lifelong resentment at the members of Ragusan nobility ignores a tradition of early modern folly. Držić's contemporaries would have been very familiar with it, from the rich history of staging carnival festivities, and comic theatrical performances alike. What the Necromancer is conjuring before them is the magic of theatre, that is, the theatre of folly that might have reminded them of the *theatrum mundi* of their everyday lives, coded in the strict structures of behaviour that kept the Republic alive. Playing well in this paradoxical *theatrum mundi* required special skill, the skill bestowed by the author on the self-proclaimed king of men, the foolosopher whose Machiavellian talent is no match for Fortuna, meek in his arms, and the master of action within the comedy: Pomet himself.

The plot of *Dundo Maroje* is far less hermetic than the first prologue, but no less skilful. In a nutshell, the central plot device of the comedy is a sum of money that the eponymous character (an old miser) is trying to recover from his skirt-chasing son Maro who is squandering it away in Rome on a courtesan named Laura. Apart from his father, Maro is pursued by his own fiancée Pera, another young Ragusan aristocrat and therefore his natural partner who disguised herself as a boy, and Ugo Tudešak, his economic and sexual rival for the attention of Laura, the courtesan. The location of the comedy is Rome, a space of otherness and unruly behaviour magically evoked by the Necromancer of the prologue, yet one that is predominantly populated by a host of characters either from Ragusa, or the neighbouring Croatian lands, most of whom behave as though they might have disembarked from Sebastian Brandt's *Ship of Fools*.

The comedy resulting from the interaction of these characters rests heavily on stereotypes geared towards comedy. The ensuing cacophony of voices is by far the most

popular aspect of the entire play, in many senses of this ubiquitous term. It mirrors Ragusan reality in which natives would have encountered people from the neighbouring Croatian lands, as well as a multitude of foreign merchants, officials and visitors daily. An obvious temptation would be to employ Bakhtin's concepts of polyphony and dialogism,[248] developed on the example of Dostoyevsky's novels and question yet again his exclusion of dramatic discourse from the potential for developing heteroglossic structures. This approach has been taken up before,[249] and it might indeed prove fruitful, especially given Bakhtin's foregrounding of "the plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses and the genuine polyphony of full-valued voices"[250] that is so easily applicable on Držić's dramatic work. What is more, when Bakhtin takes up heteroglossia, a related concept to polyphony and dialogism, his views seem especially pertinent for a reading of *Dundo Maroje* that incorporates, to a point "[t]he heteroglossia of the clown" that ridicules "all languages and dialects […] where there was no language-centre at all."[251]

My contention in this chapter, however, is different. Far from maintaining that *Dundo Maroje* presents a unified, monoglossic image of the world, I wish to point out that Držić's polyvocality as expressed in this comedy is not an end in itself. Pomet, I contend, is not a Bakhtinian hero of heteroglossic works. For Bakhtin, in these works "the important thing is not how the hero appears to the world, but, most importantly, how the world appears to the hero and how the hero appears to himself."[252] Držić's many voices in *Dundo Maroje*, with Pomet the most prominent one, serve precisely to illustrate the foolishness of the world—the world of the play, but also to remind the audience of the folly they

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[248] See Bakhtin, Mikahil Mikhailovich, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984 [1963]).
[249] See Flaker, Aleksandar, "Dundo Maroje kroz Bahtinov procjednik" in Pavlović, Cvijeta, ed., *Držić danas. Epoha i naslijeđe. Komparativna povijest hrvatske književnosti: zbornik radova XI* (Split: Književni krug, 2009) 289-296. See also Fališevac, Dunja "O dijalogu i dijalogičnosti u Držićevim komedijama" in *Marin Držić: 1508-2008. Zbornik radova s međunarodnoga znanstvenog skupa održanog 5-7. studenoga 2008. u Zagrebu*, eds. Nikola Batušić and Dunja Fališevac (Zagreb: Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 2010) 233-247.
[250] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 4.
[251] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Immagination* 273.
[252] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 38.

participate in. Therefore, Držić's polyvocality, as I read it, becomes an example of the babel of voices worshiping Folly at her shrine.

The polyvocality of folly in *Dundo Maroje* is structured by intermingling of voices from different ethnic and social backgrounds. Moreover, certain gender-based tensions can be detected as well. The wittiest female character, Laura's servant girl Milica, who fashioned herself Petrunjela in Rome, is an example of Držić's strong female character. Capable of keeping all of her many suitors at bay, Pomet included, she employs popular wit expressed in short rhymes. At once flirtatious and assertive, she adds a headstrong female voice into the world where male characters are granted foremost agency—and are also the foremost foolish characters.

The principal division between characters, and the one that is most easily discernible in language is the ethnic one. It is, for example, immediately recognisable in the characters' language who is the native of the Republic and who hails from the surrounding areas, rural and backward in the eyes of the Dubrovnik town folk. The stereotypes are, however, rarely straightforward, and while linguistic differences are exploited for comic effect, some of the more developed characters among the outsiders are far from bereft of wit.

The clearest case in point and a character who illustrates a certain degree of affirmative view of difference in *Dundo Maroje* is Tripčeta. A native of Kotor, a small port near Dubrovnik where Držić's ancestors came from, Tripčeta is the only "Kotoranin" in Držić's opus who is not ridiculed for a provincial lack of wit. This magnanimous and witty character speaks a prose that at times approaches Pomet's own foolosophy, and displays the same inclination for appropriating Latin proverbs as the central wit does. His seemingly bizarre monologue in III.x., in which he criticises the rigidity and inflexibility of human nature, relies on listing popular proverbs, one after another, to the point of absurdity. Tripčeta employs an entire bestiary to illustrate man's traits and flaws. He ends this peculiarly comic vision of humanity with a confirmation of his paradoxical wisdom:

"[i]ntendami, fraello, se poi, chè mi intendo molto ben mi."[253] Having rambled on in a manner most arcane, this remarkable episodic character will ironically comment on the possibility of communication and the nature of intelligibility that is accessible, perhaps, solely to the subject who speaks.

A minor and almost purely instrumental role in *Dundo Maroje* is given to Sadi, a Jewish merchant and moneylender, the first Jewish character introduced in Dubrovnik 16th century literature. Although Držić employs many of the stereotypes in his characterisation of Sadi—he is vexing and insistent when his money is concerned, and servile when he thinks an opportunity for profit might arise—he is nonetheless given space to express his own vexation with the folly of the world around him. As Fališevac contends, "in the rare soliloquies he is granted, it is clearly demonstrated that this is a character with firmly established opinions on the ways of those he comes in contact with, who borrow his money and refuse to pay him back."[254] Sadi is, therefore, yet another, albeit brief, instance of difference introduced for the sake of plurality and illustrating the polyvocality of the foolish world.

A foreigner whose comedy arises primarily from his speech is Pomet's blundering master, Ugo Tudešak. This embodiment of the folly of love, Ugo stumbles through his weak Italian almost completely bereft of grammatical structure. He distorts his speech with German lexical insertions pronounced in mock-Italian way, which, regardless of his noble status and riches often referred to by Pomet, make him appear as one of the most foolish characters on the scene. A typical exchange between him and his shrewd servant would go along the lines of:

> POMET: *Signor Ugo, che tanta desperazion pigliar? Star allegro, di bona voglia! Andiamo a far trink, la signora poi voler ben.*

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[253] Držić & Čale 448. Literally: "Understand me, brother, because I understand myself well." The line, as Čale points out, is a corruption of Petrarch's verse in the *Canzoniere* "Intendami chi può che m'intend' io" (CV, 17) that would have been widely recognisable to the audience at the time when Petrarch was often read.
[254] Fališevac 36. My translation. The original quote has it: "u rijetkim pak monolozima jasno se pokazuje da je riječ o čovjeku koji ima posve izgrađeno mišljenje o ljudima s kojima dolazi u dodir, koji od njega pozajmljuju novac, a ne žele ga vratiti."

UGO: *Antamo, fer Dio, bever malvagìa e fuggir dolor de cor. Segnora, foler non foler, mi štar vostro serfitor.*[255]

Apart from their linguistic polyphony, Pomet and Ugo exemplify a further stratification of voices in the comedy, namely the difference between nobles and commoners. Even though their relationship is slightly peculiar and overstated, given Ugo's forlorn incapacity to act and his utter dependence on Pomet's manoeuvres, the lower classes are generally given more prominence, both in the action itself and in the worldview they present. Pomet—the clearest example of this, and a character as "painted full of tongues" (*2HIV*, Induction, s.d.) almost as Shakespeare's Rumour—finds a language to communicate with everyone. To the audience, he speaks "our"[256] language confirming his foolish wisdom in mock-Latin appropriations; to Italian-speaking characters he responds in his broken, yet still nimble Italian; with Ugo he mixes in German expressions; and when Petrunjela coquettishly rhymes, he is ready to reciprocate.

The mastermind of *Dundo Maroje*, Pomet is a conspicuously *popular* character, whose attempts at elite expression, namely quoting Latin proverbs, regularly result in comical mispronunciations. However, his witty foolosophy has origins that are far from popular: it is based on a rather remarkable understanding of the concepts of *fortuna* and *virtù* from Niccolo Machiavelli's *Prince*, partially appropriated, turned upside-down and used for folly. Pomet will masterfully orchestrate the events of the plot, trick almost everyone and restore the play to a desirable and socially acceptable equilibrium.

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[255] Držić & Čale 368. Literally: "Mister Ugo, why so despair? You be happy, in good mood! Let us trink, lady love later," and "Let us go, by God, drink malvasia and chase away the heartache. Lady want or not want, I be your servant." (My translation.) It is immediately discernible that Ugo pronounces the consonants in *voler* and *servitor* in a German way. It takes some skill on the behalf of the actor to take advantage of the full potential of Ugo's phonetic humour, as he is best performed sounding as though he is speaking a fusion of German, Italian and the Dubrovnik variant of Croatian (*mi štar* being an illustration of this, pronounced in a way a speaker of Croatian would).

[256] Croatian-speaking characters are throughout the text of the comedy referred to as *našijenci*, Croatian as such is, naturally, not mentioned. *Našijenci* is a peculiarly colloquial backformation from the adjective *naš*, i.e. ours. Literally, *našijenci* would therefore be translated as "the ours," people form our lands.

Even the rough outlines of the plot suggest that *Dundo Maroje* is clearly influenced by the tradition of *commedia erudita*. Unlike its theatrical contemporary, the vernacular and improvisational *commedia dell'arte*, this 16th-century Italian dramatic form followed scripts written in Latin or Italian that were based on the scholarly works of earlier Italian and ancient Roman authors and may be characterized as an elite art form. Because the language used in the *commedia erudita* was not easily comprehensible to the general public, these plays were performed for the nobility, usually by the so-called *dilettanti*, troupes of nonprofessional actors. Sources for *commedia erudita* included the comedies of the Roman dramatists Plautus and Terence and *novelle* of the 14th-century Italian humanist Giovanni Boccaccio. Blueprints for most of Držić's characters in *Dundo Maroje* can be found in the Plautine universe (cunning trickery in *Bacchides*, avarice in *The Pot of Gold*, various themes from *Menaechmi*) and Plautus certainly inspired his plot technique, and various dramatic procedures, such as the development of comedy in dialogue and monologue.[257]

The plot of *Dundo Maroje* itself has several parallels with Boccaccio's tale of Salabaetto and Iancofiore,[258] the 10th tale of the 8th day in the *Decamerone* and it may even be loosely based on it. Yet the differences between the two works are overpowering, not merely because of the obvious generic switch. The richness and variety of language employed in *Dundo Maroje* and its embeddedness into a highly specific cultural and historical context not only distinguish Držić as an author in his own right, but are also instruments of transcending the overly elitist overtones his sources might have displayed. However, a proof that supports a reading of *Dundo Maroje* as much more than an offshoot of this tradition is the character of Pomet himself.

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[257] On the Plautine influences in Držić's comedies, see Senker, Boris, "Likovi u Držićevim plautovskim komedijama i renesansni sustav komičkih tipova," in *Umjetnost riječi 2-3*, (Zagreb: Hrvatsko filološko društvo, 1996: 179-194).

[258] See Boccaccio, Giovanni, *The Decameron*, trans. G.H. McWilliam (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) 632-643.

That Držić's Pomet is the single character of *Dundo Maroje* who most clearly embodies the characteristics of the True People that the Necromancer's Prologue laid out is indubitable. The Prologue defines the True People thus:

> [t]he people inhabiting that land are gentle people, quiet people, wise and reasonable people. Nature, that blessed them with intelligence, blessed them too with beauty, all are nobly fashioned, untroubled by envy, with no greed among them, they look out frankly, they do not mask their hearts, but mirror them in their eyes that all should see their thoughts; and, that I may not tire you with my telling, these people are those we may call true people.[259]

Although this description might at first sight better fit a player of folly such as Jan Paleček, the fool that is truly gentle of heart and an embodiment of Christian charity, Pomet belongs among the True simply because no one else in *Dundo Maroje* does. He is the perversion of this utopian ideal, a parody of a speech that is in itself a parody. The Necromancer's Prologue, as we have seen, is far from a straightforward text and the only true embodiment of the True Man within the world of comedy can come in the shape of Pomet, whose wisdom, intelligence and virtue are all shaped by folly. The gentleness of Pomet is not a social category; it comes from this very wisdom and intelligence that distinguish him from the other *dramatis personae*.

Pomet's monologues unmask his heart and make him the character closest to the audience; he conspires with his spectators so "that all should see [his] thoughts."[260] He is performing his wit within these moments when action is suspended and foolosophising is granted centre-stage prominence. Pomet stands in sharp contrast to the fairly tainted wits most of the other characters in the play possess, and the fact that he is granted the longest line count and the greatest number of monologues, which elucidate his particular philosophy

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[259] Držić et al 181-182. The play in original brings the following passage: "ljudi koji te strane uživaju ljudi su blazi, ljudi su tihi, ljudi mudra, ljudi razumni. Narav, kako ih je uresila pameti, tako ih je i ljepotom uljudila: svi općenito uzrasta su učinjena; njih ne smeta nenavidos, ni lakomos vlada; njih oči uprav gledaju, a srce im se ne maškarava; srce nose prid očima, da svak vidi njih dobre misli." In Držić & Čale 343-344.
[260] Držić et al 182. The original states: "da svak vidi njih dobre misli." In Držić & Čale 344.

of life, is but one example of his being privileged in the world of the play. On the surface, he is a representative of the Intelligence that triumphs over the stupidity of the world, but his intelligence is a specific amalgam that merits further elucidation. In the privileging of Pomet within the world of *Dundo Maroje*, he is constructed as a character who understands how to become True.[261] He accomplishes this by combining two very early modern tendencies of thought—namely that of political opportunism and virility expounded by Niccolò Machiavelli in his *Prince*, and the teaching of Epicureanism, rediscovered by Poggio Bracciolini in Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things*—with an expression of early modern folly.

What obscures complex readings of Pomet, on the one hand, is the fact that he is a comic character, and therefore marginalised as, for instance, one possessing not much more than a "cynical philosophy of a cunning rascal."[262] He is likewise often reduced to an albeit very successful, but nevertheless typical example of the competent servant of the *commedia erudita* tradition, explained in relation to Pomet by Boris Senker as "always a 'mirror' of the dramatic function embodied in his master […] without being a type himself."[263] On the other hand, the blurred critical vision may be due to the fact that Pomet is an explicit braggart, which bars deeper explorations of the layers of his character. His bragging is, however, differentiated from Falstaff's thespian singing of his own praises. Falstaff indulges in it, as here, for instance:

> I was as virtuously given as a gentleman need to be: virtuous enough; swore little; diced not—above seven times a week; went to a bawdy-house—not above once in a

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[261] This process of Pomet's "becoming True" is brought into relation with Stephen Greenblatt concept of Renaissance self-fashioning by Lada Čale Feldman. She recognises in Pomet a fashioned self capable also of of self-disintegration, a "playful, contingent entity, the self that continuously emerges as a shifting reflexion, an actor playing at the intersection of various vectors of desire that emerge from the bodies fooled into believing they possess autonomous, stable and permanent identities" (my translation). See Čale Feldman, Lada "Pomet—Greenblattov Jago? Samooblikovanje, improvizacija moći i kulturna tjeskoba u Držićevu *Dundu Maroju*" in Batušić & Fališevac, eds. 839-853, here 852. Feldman's original states: "zaigrani, kontingentni entitet, to jastvo neprekidno izniče u svojstvu promjenjive zrcalne refleksije, glumca koji pleše na presjecištu vektora žudnje što ishode iz tijela koja se varaju da tvore autonomne, stabilne i trajne osobnosti."

[262] Popović, Pavle, "Komedije Marina Držića" in Pantić, Miroslav, ed., *450 godina od rođenja Marina Držića, 1508-1958* (Beograd: Srpska književna zadruga, 1958) 231.

[263] My translation. Senker 190. The original states: "svagda 'zrcalo' one dramaturške funkcije koju utjelovljuje njegov gospodar […] te sluga (još) nije tip."

> quarter—of an hour; paid money that I borrowed—three or four times; lived well and in good compass. And now I live out of all order, out of all compass. (*1 Henry IV*, III.iii.12-17)

Falstaff's self-praise has the explicit aim of producing humorous incongruity; he is a character who skilfully utilises mendacity and excess to show off the folly of play. Conversely, Pomet's excursions into self-grandiosity are motivated by an urge to distinguish his wit from the world around him. They are as comical as Falstaff's, but are not as self-serving, because Pomet emerges as the central intelligence of the play, while Falstaff is slowly subsumed into a world that largely disregards him, and finally attempts to banish him completely. As Pomet expounds in Act Two,

> Does anyone in this world hold fortune on the palm of his hand as I do? Is anyone under the heavens a master of men as I am? No one can even pass without me, without me people can't even turn. Where there's no Pomet, nothing is done; without Pomet's advice things take a wrong turn.[264]

The comic universe of the play accepts this bragging as victorious. Until the play's near resolution in Act Five—when the stage is set for the closing, written on the last pages of the manuscript that were sadly lost—all of Pomet's anticipations become reality. His council and machinations indeed lead towards an equilibrium in which lovers are paired according to their social status and the political stability within the comedy is restored in a way that presents minimal threat to a successful State. However, we should bear in mind at all times that Pomet is speaking concealed by a mask of folly, and that neither his winning intelligence, nor the results of his manipulations are to be taken at face value.

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[264] My translation. Držić & Čale 419-420. The quoted text, as well as much of Pomet's monologising, has been cut out of Bićanić's English translation. Držić's original: "Je li čovjeku na svijetu srjeća u ruci kao što je meni? Je li itko pod nebom gospodar od ljudi kako sam ja? Bez mene se nitko ne može pasat, bez mene se ljudi ne umiju obrnut. Gdje nije Pometa tu nije ništa učinjeno; gdi nije Pometova konselja, tu svestvari naopako idu."

That Pomet's intelligence is based on a particular understanding of Machiavelli's doctrines has been extensively explained by Frano Čale.[265] Čale sees the comedy of *Dundo Maroje*, orchestrated by Pomet himself, as a comedic dramatization of *The Prince*. This reading rings true, but only to a certain extent. As Quentin Skinner explains, "Machiavelli invariably sees the world of politics as one in which the rational methods of the law-giver must be supplemented at all times with the ferocity of the lion and the cunning of the fox."[266] This ferocity and cunning paired with the rational methods that govern the world of politics may be said to have a humorous representation in Pomet's strivings and his success in governing the world of comedy. The character's incessant declarations of being a virtuous master of fortune likewise mirror an early modern mind frame. Skinner describes such tendencies by saying that "[t]he humanists had always acknowledged the extent of fortune's sway, but insisted at the same time that a man of *virtù* will always find the means to limit and subdue her tyranny."[267] Apart from deliberating at length on how his behaviour has influenced his fortunes, Pomet will eavesdrop, meddle, suggest and lead other characters into situations advantageous to his own cause: balancing of the micropolitics in the play, but balancing done with the help of folly. He will strive to become the master of fortune. Machiavelli himself is very clear in presenting his views on how one is to make fortune play to his own advantage:

> I hold strongly to this: that it is better to be impetuous than circumspect: because *fortune is a woman* and if she is to be submissive it is necessary to beat and coerce her. Experience shows that she is more often subdued by men who do this than by those who act coldly. Always, being a woman, she favours young men, because they are less circumspect and more ardent, and because they command her with greater audacity.[268] (My emphasis.)

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[265] See Držić & Čale 97-105, as well as his many notes accompanying the play, 339-524.
[266] Skinner, Quentin, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought. Vol.1, The Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) 186.
[267] Skinner 186.
[268] Machiavelli, Niccolò, *The Prince*, translated by George Bull (London; New York: Penguin Books, 1981) 133.

In explaining his Machiavellian reading of Pomet, Čale contends that the character is a "symbol of a new era, a prototype actualising the *dignitas hominis* of the Renaissance man, a *vjertuoz* [Pomet's own wording of 'virtuoso'], that is to say, a capable individual graced by virtue."[269] As such, he is constructed by an author who "consciously invests a protagonist of an artistic document that speaks of the people and society of contemporary Dubrovnik with Machiavellian thoughts."[270] The Machiavellian notion that fortune is a woman is repeated virtually verbatim by Pomet himself: "[m]ay the devil take good luck and bad. Fortune is not as woman shown for nothing, for she turns now this way, now that, now to fair times now to bad, at one moment caresses at the next suffocates you—'tis a womanish disposition."[271]

Pomet, however, does not share Machiavelli's strong opinions on how one is to rule over fortune. Instead of violent subjugation, what Pomet insists on is wildly different. What he does is opt to *caress* fortune: "[g]ood fortune is with me, as she'll be with a man: I know how to caress her, that's why she remains with me willingly."[272] This modified version of Machiavellian thought jeopardises Čale's contention that Držić dramatises what Machiavelli teaches. It also puts into question a straightforward reading of Pomet, unlocked by the key found in Machiavellianism. Milovan Tatarin solves this inconsistency by pointing out that "Pomet is a humane Machiavellian, his stance towards the said political scientist is ironic, given that some of his theses he endorses, but laughs at them at the same time, showing that it is possible to rule differently, without force and coercion."[273] What Tatarin reads as an ironic appropriation of Machiavelli, I tend to attribute to the fact that Pomet is a carefully constructed early modern player of folly.

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[269] Držić & Čale 99. The original text says: "Pomet je, dakle, simbol novog doba, prototip u kojemu se ostvaruje *dignitas hominis* renesansnog čovjeka, *vjeruoz*, a to će reći sposoban pojedinac obdaren vrlinom."
[270] My translation. Držić & Čale 100. In original: "svjesn[o] apliciranje Machiavellijevih misli na protagonista jednoga umjetničkog dokumenta o ljudima i društvu suvremenog Dubrovnika."
[271] Držić et al 236-237. Držić's original: "Vrag uzeo srjeću i nesrjeću. Fortunu pišu ženom ne zaman; i dobro čine tu joj čas činit, ako se obrće sad ovamo sad onamo, sad na zlu sad na dobru; sad te kareca, a sad te duši. […] Vražja njeka ženska narav!" (Držić & Čale 485).
[272] My translation. Držić & Čale 461. Držić's original: "Dobra srjeća sa mnom je, a š čovjekom je: umijem ju *karecat*, tako sa mnom dobrovoljno i stoji" (my emphasis).
[273] My translation. Tatarin, Milovan, "Pomet i Machiavelli. Nacrt za jedno čitanje Držićeva *makijavelizma*" in Batušić & Fališevac, eds. 819-838, here 835. The original states: "Pomet je humani makijavelist, ironičan spram spomenutoga politologa, budući da je neke njegove postavke preuzeo, ali im se istodobno nasmijao, pokazujući da je moguće i drukčije vladati, bez sile i prisile."

Ironizing, to be sure, is one of the modes in which folly works. However, explaining Pomet's foolery only in terms of conscious expressions of opposites geared towards comical effect, as implied in the term irony, disregards what is singularly early modern about his use of folly. As it is argued throughout this thesis, early modern folly postulated alternatives without making claims to its own wisdom. It would open what Deleuze and Guattari termed "lines of flight," creative potentialities that presented a way out of false certainties, the comic effect being merely its secondary aim. Like Eulenspiegel, whose play with language and his body ensures a vision of the world in which the serious is revealed to be just as trivial, as the trivial can be serious; or Jan Paleček, as the following chapter will show, whose jesting awakens the characters around him to the benefits of Christian mercy; or even Falstaff, remarkably capable of self-serving digressions, whose mastery over language fills the void in the nonsensical and ultimately tragic world of his own two plays; Pomet's foolery likewise clears the way for the lines of flight to be set into motion. He leads the virtually witless characters around him into a resolution they would never have reached if left to their own devices.

The other important feature of Pomet's *modus operandi* is his devotion to food. He is hungry, but not in the straightforward way in which Eulenspiegel is hungry, who at times finds himself in trouble so serious that food is scarce. Likewise, he is hardly represented as a grotesque body, as much as that would suit interpreters of the play with a Bakhtinian bent. He is not like Falstaff, a body of lard that sweats to death. Pomet's stomach is invoked in the play, it is the focal point of his enjoyment and the motivator of his actions, but this stomach is never referred to in the Falstaffian sense. Its proportions are never said to obscure his view of his lower body, as Hal's comment about Falstaff's stomach—"[h]ow long has it been, Jack, since you saw your own knee?" (*1HIV*, II.iv.318-319)—implies. Pomet's first long monologue that opens Act Two brings an almost aesthetic enjoyment in food. It is literally an example of culinary poetry, because Pomet is not shown eating, but evoking the sensual pleasures of food in language. Pomet is a gourmet, but he is hardly a glutton; he basks in the telling of the praise of food that neither has an outside motivation, nor does it in any way advance the action.

Hedonism is one of the main principles guiding the actions of many of the characters of *Dundo Maroje*: be it the lust that Maro and Ugo feel for Laura, or the desire to possess riches that have been placed out of reach, one that is present in characters as different from each other, as the old miser Maroje is from the young courtesan Laura. Pomet's hedonism, however, deserves to be treated differently.[274] In discussing Pomet and his Machiavellianism, Čale devotes a brief glance to the problem of Pomet's self-indulgence. As he writes, the interrupted feast described in Act Two is a signal of "Pomet's hedonism, the Epicurean enjoyment of 'real life,' a variant of the humanist 'voluptas' that was discussed already a century prior and that had been confirmed to symbolise equilibrium and harmony."[275] As Pomet is purposefully distinguished in the comedy by his intelligence, he is therefore, likewise distinguished by a different kind of hedonism, one that is implicitly Epicurean and, consequently, has to be taken into account when determining the singularity of *Dundo Maroje*.

Deleuze saw in Epicurus followed by Lucretius, the inception of a philosophy of naturalism in which a cosmos of the diverse is structured according to a conjunctive synthesis that avoids the totalising of its own elements. Interestingly invoking an image of folly, Deleuze writes of the Epicurean/Lucretian Nature as being a "Harlequin's cloak, made entirely of solid patches and empty spaces; she is made of plenitude and void, beings and nonbeings, with each one of the two posing itself as unlimited while limiting the other."[276] This parallels Držić's distinction between the True and the would-be people that structures the world of the play and reveals an Epicurean strand of his thought exemplified in the hedonist-cum-naturalist Pomet. This strand of Držić's thought can also be read as a

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[274] It is misguided to lump Pomet and his loquacious enjoyment in the wonders of food under hedonism as a general strategy within the play, one that simply reflects a contemporary worldview and plays no part in the construction of the character and his differentiation from his surroundings. For an example of such an approach, that in Pomet sees merely a culmination of the hedonistic tendencies within the play, see Bojović, Zlata, "Držićevi likovi kao nosioci ideja epohe" in Anđelković, Sava and Paul-Louis Thomas, eds., *Marin Držić—svjetionik dubrovačke renesanse* (Zagreb: Biblioteka Četvrti Zid, Disput, 2009) 11-22, esp. 19-20.

[275] Držić & Čale 101. The original is saying that the feast: "simbolizira Pometov hedonizam, epikurejsku nasladu za 'pravim životom,' varijantu one humanističke 'voluptas' o kojoj se razmatralo već stoljeće ranije i u njoj vidjelo znak ravnoteže i sklada."

[276] Deleuze, Gilles, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (London: Continuum, 2011 [1969]) 304.

commentary on the potentialities of the use of folly. Deleuze's conclusions about the Epicurean thought seem to suggest a line of thinking that early modern folly, and implicitly also Držić, likewise understood, namely that

> Lucretius established for a long time to come the implications of naturalism: the positivity of Nature; Naturalism as the philosophy of affirmation; pluralism linked with multiple affirmation; sensualism connected with the joy of the diverse; and the practical critique of all mystifications.[277]

At the very beginning of Act V, when Pomet finally has all the strings in his own hands, the strings he will pull and direct the comedy to its resolution, he customarily appears in front of the audience alone. Much like Falstaff at the beginning of *2 Henry IV*, he emerges in new attire, an outward symbol of his success. Unlike Falstaff, however, who in the moment of his transformation "might have moe diseases than he knew for" (*2 Henry IV*, I.ii.4),[278] Pomet will not become plagued by ailments and the rest of his play will stay away from an explicit imagery of death and decay that distinguishes the close of Shakespeare's second *Henriad.* Pomet is an upstart—as is Falstaff after his feigned success and cowardly survival in the Battle of Shrewsbury—but an upstart who is capable of reflecting on his social climbing. "*Honores mutant moribus*,"[279] he muses in his parodic appropriation of learned Latin, "and who sees me now that I have changed my clothing will say 'Pomet Banquet has run mad!', knowing not that now an *abate* am I, a count, a cavalier."[280] For Falstaff all hierarchy is meaningless and his new status a mere improvement in financial circumstances. He had long been downgrading Prince Hal to such a minimum of grace, "not so much as will serve to be prologue to an egg and butter" (*1HIV*, I.ii.19-20). While Pomet shares this

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[277] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* 315-316.
[278] All quotations of *2 Henry IV* are taken from Shakespeare, William, *King Henry IV: Part 2*, ed. A.R. Humphreyes (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2nd series, 1981), all subsequent references follow the text of this edition; act, scene and line numbers are in parentheses in the text.
[279] This Latin proverb is, as all Latin invoked by Pomet, slightly corrupted. *Honores mutant mores*, that is, honours change customs, is his typical way of resorting to common institutionalised wisdom only to dilute its meaning into folly.
[280] Držić et al 244. In original: "*Honores mutant moribus*, i tko me vidi da sam promijenio ovako haljine rijet će 'Pomet se je Trpeza pomamio!,' a ne zna er sam *abate* sada, kont sam, kavalijer sam." Držić & Čale 511-512.

snubbing of hierarchies, evident in his contempt for the folly of his hapless superiors, he becomes a cavalier, a count and an *abate*—an abbot, that is—in the sense of the nobility of the True People, those that recognise the foul ways of the would-be people. He becomes the "king among men"[281] that he anticipated in Act Two, because he had grasped that "we must adapt ourselves to the times; he who would rule in this world must be a virtuoso."[282]

Pomet's victory, brought about through his "virtuoso" use of Machiavellianism and a naturalistic hedonism, cannot, however, be discussed in isolation from his use of folly. Pomet is an early modern player of folly, first and foremost, and the fact remains that all the truths he delivers to his bemused audience are the truths of folly. As such, they do not establish positivist claims, no matter how persuasive Pomet may at times sound. They likewise have no claim to their own wisdom, because, like Erasmus' *Praise*, they are spoken by a fool. What Pomet's truths of folly do present, however, are alternative ways of vision. When viewed as such, the character of Pomet, and by extension, the world of *Dundo Maroje* over which he presides, are revealed as Držić's shrewd commentary on the instabilities of the seemingly stable arrangements that governed the society of early modern Ragusa. The equilibrium the play ultimately restores, therefore, becomes implicitly challenged by the fact that its wisest interpreter is none other than a fool. What Držić achieved in *Dundo Maroje* is an image of the world that could be capable of overcoming its own precariousness and the threats of political instability only through an acknowledgement of its own folly.

III.v. Conclusion: The Popular and the Political

After Držić's death in 1567, his work fell into oblivion, to be rediscovered only in the second part of the 19th century. *Dundo Maroje* was first published in 1866, appearing in the popular

[281] Držić et al 202. In original: "Kralj je čovjek od ljudi." Držić & Čale 329.
[282] Držić et al 201. In original: "Ma se je trijeba s bremenom akomodavat; trijeba je bit vjertuozu tko hoće renjat na svijetu." Držić & Čale 329.

supplement of a historical journal "Dubrovnik." Just under a decade later, a volume[283] of the collected works of Marin Držić saw the light of day in Zagreb in 1875, taken up by the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts. On his second emergence into discourse, it seems it took only nine years for Držić's potential cultural capital to be recognized and for him to make the transition from a local historical oddity to a publication chosen by a major transnational cultural institution. However, it was the second edition of the collected works, published again by the Academy in 1930 and edited and introduced by Milan Rešetar, that stirred due scholarly interest in the Ragusan dramatist and finally established him as a canonical author, and therefore one officially inscribed into the literary elite.

One of the greatest popular moments of the theatrical afterlife of *Dundo Maroje* came with the comedy's first modern staging. On October 27 1938, Marko Fotez directed it for the audience of the National Theatre in Zagreb, and the opening night turned, in his own words, supported by multiple reviews, into "a theatrical and cultural sensation."[284] Fotez, however, did not stage the integral version of the text—he did not even stage its approximate abbreviation—but a rather liberal adaptation that compressed the work into three acts, left out or collated half of its thirty-odd characters, and significantly simplified its archaic language. He sacrificed the prologue of the Long Nose, turning this potentially very hermetic text into a short intermezzo between acts two and three, spoken by Pomet. He had interwoven the story of the play with music and singing, making it thereby more attractive and entertaining—certainly more popular—but at the expense of a certain depth of humour, risking the disintegration of the original text, something scholars would later reproach him many a time.[285] Fotez's intention was, however, understandable and sincere. He aimed, as he records, to

[283] See Držić, Marin, *Djela Marina Držića*, ed. Franjo Petračić (Zagreb: L. Hartman, Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 1875).
[284] Fotez, Marko "O preradbi *Dunda Maroja*" in Batušić & Fališevac, eds. 191-208, here 201.
[285] The aforementioned Fotez's text is a vindication of his adaptation and lists many of its adversaries. See, Fotez 206-207.

> [m]ake Držić's view of his times and life, especially the joy that radiates from his characters and plots, accessible and close to a contemporary viewer. Not to a theatre scholar, a historian, a sociologist or whomever you will, that is, not only to them—but to the so-called average viewer, the common man, the one who seeks pleasure in theatrical experience.[286]

What Fotez also did was he *succeeded*; he made *Dundo Maroje* truly popular. After Zagreb, his adaptation (and its translations) saw the stages of almost twenty European and North American cities in the second half of the 20th century, and the text was subsequently published even in Esperanto. In more recent years, when practice is more often in some kind of a dialogue with theory, many Croatian directors have been choosing to stage the integral script, even though the case of the entire text being performed is still extremely rare. *Dundo Maroje* is in Croatian culture today certainly a ubiquitous phenomenon: there is hardly a schoolchild that has not been made to see it in one form or the other. And yet, at the same time it remains an acquired taste, studied in the predominantly elite environments of the university, mainly due to its arcane expression. Whether *Dundo Maroje* should be rightfully called popular or elite is very hard to determine, as popularity is far from a fixed category. Much like meaning, it is produced discursively and contextually. Lives of texts, and especially dramatic texts, are notoriously polymorphous and when we are dealing with historical texts it is not uncommon to realize they *know* far more than we are at first capable of grasping.

Much like other three players of folly presented in this thesis in their respective cultures and beyond, Držić and his works are in the imagination of his own culture swollen with interpretation. In Držić's case the abundance of interpretation was often outwardly politicised. The early modern playwright exists as a textual entity on the intertextual plane where multiple and opposing discursive practices meet and clash, and different cultural forces of society produced during a given historical period—all the texts, events, and stories about

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[286] My translation. Fotez 205-206. The original states: "da se Držićeva slika vremena i života, a nadasve životna radost koja izbija iz njegovih likova i radnje učine pristupačnima i bliskima današnjem gledaocu. Ne teatrologu, ne historičaru, sociologu ili kome hoćete, zapravo ne samo njima—nego takozvanom prosječnom gledaocu, običnom čovjeku, koji u teatru traži doživljaj koji će ga uzbuditi."

them—intertwine complexly. Držić does not stand as an unchanging monolith of older Croatian literature. His works and his historical persona alike keep absorbing the commentary produced by years of study. The accounts about him and his time equally speak about their own conditions of production and cultural context, politicising the realm of art. In the latest considerations and in instances of international promotion, Držić is posited as a rival to, Shakespeare and the rest of Renaissance drama, hence becoming a part of a new Croatian cultural self-fashioning.

The paramount context of the early modern Republic of Ragusa produced both Držić and his Pomet alike. This context was Držić's perennial preoccupation, he dramatised it in his works and was absorbed in it to the extent that he decided to intervene and attempt the ultimate political *faux pas*: a serious conspiracy. The seriousness of this attempt, was, however, paradoxically conditioned by his engagement with early modern folly. In utilising this approach, Držić likely became highly sensitised to the instabilities a seemingly well-ordained society had at its core. His characters, clamouring in a multitude of accents, languages or appropriated expressions, voice the polyphony that, in its wild diversity, could never have been subsumed under the straightforward and conservative designation "Ragusan." He was far from a revolutionary thinker, though, and the political plans he exhibited in his conspiracy letters could likewise be deemed as conservative. What they do bring—and this is the point where they converge with his theatrical output that has Pomet as its crowning point—is a step towards change, a realisation that an alternative is possible. In politics, as much as in his art, Držić knew how to recognise the reassurance of folly, but also how to deal with the folly of any assurance. As the second Prologue of his *Dundo Maroje* beckoned the viewers, Držić seems to beckon all his readers for the past five centuries: "put now your wits into the comedy!"[287]

[287] Držić et al 183. In original: "Ma oto vam Dunda Maroja, stav'te pamet na komediju i zbogom!" Držić & Čale 350.

IV. Paleček and the Folly of Christianity

> He that was of knightly order and life, very generous, dear to the King and respected by the good, while the world and his admirers considered him unwise, as he always had to speak the truth.
>
> From the title of the *Budapest Manuscript* of *Paleček*

IV.i. Introduction: A Fool from the Margin

Between the years 1910 and 1928, Alfons Mucha, a Czech visual artist who came to define the Art Nouveau movement, produced a series of twenty large canvases known as *Slovanská epopej*, that is, *The Slav Epic*. This series brought together the author's choice of key narratives of nation-building from the Slavonic (popular) history and various scenes depicting myths of the Slavs. While striving for glorification and cultural unity of this highly disparate group of peoples, the series is the author's self-proclaimed life's work of fine art. Unsurprisingly, the idea for the project was conceived in the intellectual climate of the late 19th century's unabashed nationalism. As grandiose as the canvases themselves, the intention of the work was, in Mucha's own words, to "help create and strengthen our sense of national awareness."[288] Intended not only for *us*, Mucha's compatriots and other Slavonic peoples, the large project was also intended to play a part in strengthening the fragile awareness the West had of Mucha's own country and Slavs in general. Created at the point in the author's career when he had already acquired the label of international celebrity, *The Slav Epic* is thus an example of an author using his own symbolic capital to fertilise perceptions and interpretations of a specific culture.

The Epic is stylistically and thematically different from the decorative art Mucha became known for in Paris of the *belle époque*. Dwarfing the viewer, the twenty imposing

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[288] Brabcová, Jana A. *Almanach Slovanské epopeje = The Slav Epic Almanac* (Prague: Sdružení výtvarných kritiků a teoretiků, Česká sekce AICA: Hlavní město Praha, 2013, translated by Helena Pecháčková) 6. The original text states the work "by pomáhala budovati a utužovati u nás cit národního uvědomění" (Brabcová 5).

canvases depict lavish and often eerie scenes that seem to overflow the physical boundaries of the frames. The author employed estranging strategies, such as including characters that break the invisible wall by gazing directly at the observer, that help create an affective impact of immersion. Around the time of its completion the collection was partly exhibited in the United States,[289] as well as in Mucha's home country, and it easily became a success with the audiences. However, the popular appeal of the cycle did not guarantee universal acclaim and contemporary critics, perhaps aware of the underlying folly in an endeavour of such scale, remained sceptical about its artistic merit.[290] What Mucha was performing with this ambitious project was primarily a consolidation of national narratives, but also the eclectic task of bringing together a choice of events—a task loosely related to that of a historiographer. In both cases the act of compiling is equally, if not even more so, self-reflexive, as it is expressive. There is significance in the very choice of particular events and, by extension, historical personae, to act as emblems of nationhood. Inclusion is a political act. The large canvases of the cycle depict hundreds of characters—historical, mythical, as well as anonymous—and among them, as an almost negligible footnote in history, space was found for none other than one fool, at odds with all these heroic personages of the national saga.

The fool in question appears in one particular canvas in *The Slav Epic*, entitled variably *Jiří z Poděbrad: král obojího lidu* (*George of Poděbrady: the King of Both People*), or *Husitský král Jiří z Poděbrad* (*The Hussite King George of Poděbrady*) and completed in 1923. The painting displays a mass of characters participating in a highly dramatic event, charged with symbolism. A large gothic window of a regal palace is pouring golden light on the protagonists of the scene, illuminating the crimson-clad Catholic cardinal whose diplomatic efforts seem to be bearing no fruit. The date of the event can be determined precisely: it is 13

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[289] One of the two major foreign exhibitions for Alfons Mucha, it showed five canvases of *The Slav Epic* in 1921 at the Art Institute in Chicago and the Brooklyn Museum in New York. Mucha presented all the canvases to the city of Prague, conditioning his gift with the city procuring a satisfactory exhibition ground for the collection, an effort that remains unresolved due to complex historical and practical circumstances. For a full discussion of Mucha's work and its context, see *Alfons Mucha Slovanská epopej*, 2011; especially the analysis of the painting here presented, "Husitský král Jiří z Poděbrad", 167-173.

[290] Brabcová 57.

August 1462. Onlookers are scattered around, but the real focus of the painting is the king of its title—George of Poděbrady, the first Hussite King of Bohemia. The King's exaggerated regal persona is dominating the court.

Image 5: Alfons Mucha: *George of Poděbrady: the King of Both People*.[291]

The King appears defiant and determined, poised in front of his throne. Next to him is an overturned stool, illustrating the tumultuousness of the situation. The cardinal, on a mission to negotiate between George and Pope Pius II, is Fantinus de Valle. He resigned as George's representative in Rome the previous year, and was sent by the Pope to urge George to renounce the chalice of Hussitism by relinquishing the ambition to rule equally over "the two peoples", the Utraquists and the Catholics, and to return to the rule of the Holy See.

[291] Source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:First_Hussite_King.JPG>

Deciding to defy and stay faithful to Hussitism, George broke the allegiance with Rome. "In this country, there is nobody to judge my conscience,"[292] he reportedly declared.

Recounting the events of the clash with Rome, historian Otakar Odložilík concludes that at this moment of conscious disobedience "George crossed his Rubicon."[293] This very moment is taken up as the subject matter of Mucha's painting and dramatized. The androgynous youth in the foreground of the painting, acting as a mediator directly communicating with the viewer, is conspicuously displaying an emblem of this event: a closed book, firmly shut even. This book is one of many floating around the scene, indicating learning, letters, connectedness, and yet it is the single marked one, with all others remaining nameless, nondescript. Inscribed with the word "Roma," it connotes cutting off the ties with the Roman Catholic doctrine.

The character that holds my attention is visibly detached from the drama of the scene, and easily overlooked if one's gaze is occupied by the factual overload of the painted moment. In the lower right-hand corner, where a signature of the painter is usually found, sits a jester. He is in full motley, for a modern viewer an unmistakeable sign of a fool. He is the only character positioned on the line behind the King, stressing perhaps his peculiar entitlement to the King's presence. He is pictured pensive, uncharacteristically so for a court jester, his arm resting on a stack of books that, paired with his garb, suggests him to be a person paradoxically invested with both wisdom and folly.

The fool of the court of George of Poděbrady was, as the stories go, Brother Jan Paleček, and this is one of the more popular visual representations of him, however marginal in the greater composition of Mucha's painting. His presence at the scene could, presumably, be traced to the sentence in the *Histories of Brother Jan Paleček* that informs us that "[t]his Brother Jan Paleček used to sit in the great hall and intently observe what the Czech estates

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[292] Brabcová 31. The original, quoted on the same page: "Na této zemi není nikoho, kdo je hoden soudit mé svědomí." It should state: "Nobody upon this earth is worthy to judge my conscience," as earth is here purposefully contrasted to heaven. My thanks to Martin Procházka for pointing this out.
[293] Odložilík, Otakar, "Problems of the Reign of George of Poděbrady" (*Slavonic Year-Book. American Series* 1, 1941, 206–22) 209.

advised the King, their lord."[294] He is famous in the history of Czech literature, as far as literary jesters go, but remains marginal if we are to judge from the amount of critical attention presently devoted to him.

Presumably on account of their relationship to folly, Paleček is often paired with Eulenspiegel in anthologies and discussions of late medieval and early modern popular literary production, even though his current popularity is far from Till's ubiquitous fame. Quite like his location in Mucha's painting, in literary and popular imagination Paleček has been paradoxically marginal and easily overlooked, but nevertheless unmistakably present. Thanks to the later incarnations and his appearance in children's literature—Jan Herben's version of the stories being the most frequently read one—and other media aimed at a young audience, Paleček remains a part of the cultural consciousness of the Czech people; their early modern fool *par excellence*. However, as this chapter sets out to display, he is deservedly notable as a character on the literary landscape of early modern folly. Albeit one hitherto not duly acknowledged.

The following pages will be concerned with contextualising and analysing the *Histories of Brother Jan Paleček*, a slim cycle of tales that contain the most prominent Bohemian witty fool of the early modernity, and a lesser-known text in the history of early modern literature. In a discussion of the contextual network that holds Paleček as a character, I shall examine the relevance of the persistent claim for Paleček's historicity that has coloured the critical reception of the character in a similar way in which Falstaff of *Henry IV* is inextricably bound to the historical persona of Sir John Oldcastle, the proto-Protestant martyr whose name he briefly bore.

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[294] My translation. Urbánek, Rudolf, and Josef Hrabák: *Příspěvky k dějinám starší české literatury*, (Prague: Československá akademie věd, 1958) 83. This and all subsequent quotations from the *Histories of Brother Jan Paleček* are taken from the same edition. The transcript follows *The Pest Manuscript* of the Paleček tales, their oldest known source. The original states the following: "[k]terýžto Bratr Jan Paleček měl obyčej v radě v světnici sedati a pílně pozorovati, co páni čeští králi, pánu svému, za radu dávají." All subsequent translations of the quotations taken form this edition are my own.

By allowing the context to open up a pathway into the text, I shall show that the connection of the textual Paleček to the potentially historical Paleček also points to a rarely discussed level of the text: that of the New Testament treatment of *stultitia Dei*, that is, the folly of God. Finally, in a description of Paleček's afterlife in the discourse perpetually connected to folly, the character's rhizomatic status that he shares with other characters discussed in this study shall become fully apparent.

IV.ii. Paleček's Contextual Entanglements

The twelve episodes of *Historie o Bratru Janu Palečkovi*, that is, *Histories of Brother Jan Paleček*, most likely have their sources in the oral tradition that told stories of famous persons from the recent past connected to the royal court of Bohemia. Jan Paleček shares his origins in oral culture with Eulenspiegel. But unlike Eulenspiegel's, Paleček's historicity is predominantly assumed to be true, a fact that has played a major influence on the reception and survival of Paleček as a character in Czech cultural imagination. The historical actor who might have served as a model for the fictional Paleček would have enjoyed great popular admiration, and would have been connected to the court of King George of Poděbrady who ruled Bohemia between 1458 and 1471, presumably as his court jester. He emerges out of a specific historical and intellectual context.

The times described in the text of the *Histories* were characterised by great zeal, political and religious plurality, and an omnipresent commitment to Christian causes. History has recorded George of Poděbrady as a capable ruler and a moderate Hussite king who, on the eve of Reformation in the rest of the continent, promoted religious tolerance among the Catholics and the new protestant confessions formed after the Hussite Revolution. In the latter part of the 16th century, the time when Paleček's tales were composed, King George's reign is likely to have been remembered by certain factions of Bohemian society with pride and nostalgia—sentiments that can be discerned in the narrative of Paleček, and certainly ones that facilitated the character's survival in culture.

One of George's main efforts that assured him a brilliant career and a positive afterlife was the attempted creation of a pan-European Christian League that was supposed to unite Christian states into a community based on religion and peaceful resolution of conflicts. He saw this effort as a possible pathway to his own reconciliation with Rome, ever doubtful of Bohemian religious practices. His delegates toured the territory of what we now conceive of as Europe and conducted negotiations at many a court. Despite that, George's strained relationship with pope Pius II weakened any chance of the League ever becoming reality. Simply by being connected to a king whose image was predominantly positive in the narratives of Bohemian history—albeit less so in the Catholic chronicles—for certain groups, Paleček became a character worthy of admiration and remembrance.

After George's reign, the Bohemian crown became closely linked to the strongly Roman Catholic neighbouring kingdoms of Poland and Hungary. In 1471 Bohemian nobles elected young Vladislav II, son of Casimir IV of Poland as their king. However, supported by the Pope and Bohemian Catholics, Hungarian king Matthias Corvinus breached the peace he had arranged with George and declared himself king. He remained on the throne from 1469 until 1490, while Vladislav was king until 1516. The time of transmittal and preservation of Paleček's narrative therefore witnessed the schism of having two rulers and a rise of renewed religious bigotry, compared to which the peaceful and prosperous time of George of Poděbrady must have appeared as quite a contrast.

The year 1457, roughly coinciding with the beginning of the reign of George of Poděbrady, witnessed the formation of the Unity of the Brethren—a small Christian confession whose views displayed pronounced reformatory propensities. The Brethren were inspired by the philosophy of the martyred Jan Hus and intellectually rooted in the teachings of Petr Chelčický and Brother Řehoř, religious and political leaders who promoted subtle pacifist ideas, bearing lineage with the old Táborite reformers. Despite periodical persecution, the group grew relatively quickly and established its own organisation,

independent of the reformatory Utraquists[295] on the one hand, and the Catholic Church on the other, and became known for its insistence on strict moral discipline. Following the Táborite examples, they reduced the number of sacraments, consecrated no religious feasts, worshiped no saints, and reduced the length of the service.

As one of their most enduring accomplishments, members of the Unity of Brethren translated the Bible into the vernacular during the second half of the 16th century, and that translation occupies a similar place in Czech culture as King James' Bible does in the English-speaking world; however, its status was on occasion far more precarious, it having been prohibited and even burned during the Catholic counter-reformation. The "Brother" preceding Paleček's name indicates his belonging to the Brethren, and the Brethren worldview permeates the *Histories*. Paleček's tie to the Brethren is another of his positive characteristics that ensured him being viewed as an important character, and one that equally contributed to the pervasive conceptualisation of him as an unmistakeably historical person.

The time when the *Histories* took their final shape falls within the era of Bohemian history marked by the integration of the Czech lands into the central European territory of the Habsburg Monarchy, coupled with a strong cultural policy of reconversion under Ferdinand I. Despite the strain put on the previously pluralistic environment, Western-European influences started to sift through, especially in the cultural encounters of travellers and translations of major texts of the period. Thanks to the presence of the royal court, Prague once again became one of the emerging cultural and intellectual centres of Europe. Not everyone thrived, however; in those times, the Brethren were no longer a common sight in the country, as co-existence of various confessions was fiercely disapproved. Many of their

[295] Utraquists, a moderate Hussite faction, respected the conviction that the Eucharist should be administered "in both kinds"—that is, both the bread and the wine—to the clergy and the laity alike. The name comes from the Latin *sub utraque specie* (literally, "in both kinds"). They were also known as the Calixtines, hence the chalice as their symbol. The Utraquists were the victorious party in the 1434 Battle of Lipany, where they defeated the more radical Taborites and Orphans. Following the Battle they become the dominant Hussite faction, while (Paleček's) George of Poděbrady successfully converted the town of Tábor, a stronghold of the radicals, to Utraquism. For a detailed historicist explanation of the events, see Šmahel, František, "The Hussite Revolution (1419-1471)" in Pánek, Jaroslav, and Oldřich Tůma, eds., *A History of the Czech Lands*, trans. Justin Quinn, Petra Key and Lea Bennis (Prague: Charles University, Karolinum Press, 2011) 149-172.

members were forced into exile, but their influence nevertheless remained palpable, in other forms of cultural transfer, as in preserving the Paleček tales. The Brethren became politically undesirable, strangers in their own land.

Besides his being a Brother, Paleček is designated as a court jester in the text of the *Histories*, a category that usually evokes positive associations and assures popular regard, even though Paleček is a rather atypical example of one, as shall soon become apparent. A figure of folly, a court jester is a character easily conjured up and one that has become highly stereotypical in popular imaginings of European medieval and early modern courts. Going by many names, such as joker, clown, fool, wit-cracker, or prankster, the court jester is usually imagined as a person of peculiar mirth and merit, employed to tell jokes and provide general entertainment. They surface in historiography, as much as in literature, and oftentimes blur the boundary between the two.

These colourful individuals were common in wealthy households, or more typically at the courts of Europe, and were in direct service to a monarch or a nobleman. Sometimes visually removed from the rest of the courtiers and the household by his or her attire,[296] the jester enjoyed a place of privilege and was generally regarded as a household pet or a mascot. This privilege involved a license to criticise the master and the noble guests, to utter what others perhaps dared not even think and serve as a constant foolish reminder of what is the underlying truth. The court jester, of course, exercised his or her rights within limitations, as at any given moment major transgressions would have been curbed by whipping or other forms of corporal punishment. Czech historian Josef Macek sums up jesters in Bohemian lands, calling attention to the Erasmian attitude to folly and its pervasiveness and inescapability, while using Paleček as a prime example of sanctioned, professionalised folly in the country's history:

[296] A motley and a hat with bells and donkey ears accompanied by a fool's sceptre constituted his typical "uniform" in popular imagination since the medieval times—although it had not been universally used.

> [t]he fools were present as well, as an important component of the ruling mechanism. A "fool" would be extraordinarily appreciated, expensively clad by the ruler, while his mediation paved the way to a king's favour.
>
> Erasmus observed that even the mightiest of the rulers could not do without fools and jesters and that they favoured them more highly than the serious, solemn philosophers. Fools would provide the one thing that the rulers yearned for – jest, practical jokes, laughter, and merriment. Rulers would be entertained by their fools, they would seek of them to tell the truth in their 'natural folly'. In the Czech lands, a fool of this type was the famous Paleček, a counsellor to King George, protector of the common folk, guardian of the radical reformation.[297]

Given folly's strong connections to the popular, characters associated with it likewise retain a sense of once being rooted in folkloric imagination, and at times even into historical reality. Falstaff's first appearances on stage and in text tie him to the historical Oldcastle, Držić's Pomet is often taken to be a comedic self-portrait of the author, and scholars have on occasion ventured into proving Eulenspiegel's authenticity. If anything, these ties, however, speak more of inspirations behind comic characters, of the multifarious connections they form with cultural types and discourses.

In Paleček's case, however, the imperative of authenticity is strangely persistent. That he must have lived and directly inspired the *Histories* is a strand in the Paleček commentary that attests to the power of folly's popularity. And yet, when it comes to the beloved Bohemian jester, no mention of Brother Jan Paleček has been recorded from the very time of George of Poděbrady, or at least none of those survive. If he had indeed ever lived, Paleček

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[297] My translation. Macek, Josef, *Jagellonský věk v českých zemích: 1471-1526*. Vol. 1, *Hospodářská základna a královská moc* (Prague: Academia, 1992) 236. The original text states: "Jsou tu však i šašci (blázni), důležitá součást vladařského mechanismu. Ačkoli byl "blázen" zároveň i neobyčejně ctěn, na jeho ošacení mnozí vladaři nešetřili peníze a bláznova přímluva otevírala často žadatelům brány královské přízně.
Erasmus si povšiml, že ani nejmocnější králové nemohou bez šašků a bláznů být a kladou je v hierarchii dvoru výše než vážné a ponuré filozofy. Blázni totiž vladařům poskytují to jediné, po čem panovníci všude a všemožně pasou, totiž vtipy, šprýmy, smích a veselou zábavu. Vladaři se s blázny baví, od šašků žádají, aby 've vrozené prostoduchosti' říkali pánům pravdu. V Čechách byl typem takového šaška proslavený Paleček, rádce krále Jiřího, ochránce drobných lidí, záštita radikální reformace."

had not made it into chronicles or stories of his own times that were to be preserved. That, however, does not mean later historical accounts are mute about him.

Two instances in historical documents that contain a reference to Brother Jan Paleček, known thus far, are generally taken to ground him in historical fact. The very first mention of a person that fits his description in the *Histories* occurs in the medieval legal document *Knihy devatery* (*The Nine Books*). It was composed by the humanist author and lawyer Viktorin Kornel ze Všehrd, the first version of the document being completed in 1497, and the second appearing in 1507, also in manuscript. A codification of Czech municipal law, it recounts several historical episodes and contains an anecdote of a Brother Paleček that does not appear in the twelve-tale cycle of the *Histories*. In the story Kornel tells, Paleček meets a thief who robs him of his cape and skirt, but fails to take his purse containing money. The resolution of the anecdote closely resembles the reasoning that governs the *Histories.* Paleček reacts in the manner of a true Christian and a good member of the Brethren that follows the Scripture closely: he runs after the thief, shouting he had forgotten to take his purse, displaying the New Testament doxa of loving one's enemies.

The Paleček tale that Kornel reports would comply with the teachings of the so-called Menší strana (The Lesser Party), that is, the radical segment of the Unity of Brethren, who propagated absolute adherence to the Scripture. Furthermore, since this quality is arguably even more pronounced in this anecdote than in the edited ones, its very existence can be taken as proof that more Paleček stories were in circulation, perhaps comprising an older and more radical version of the *Histories*. It is possible to speculate at this point that the tales as we have them now would then have been written by either a sympathiser, or even a member of the more moderate strand of the Brethren, those who would have followed the teachings of Brother Řehoř (that is, Gregory), one of the founders and principal theorists of the Unity. The more radical version, if ever there were one, would have been heavily censored and possibly destroyed in the counter-Reformation. The political climate in the country would easily explain the editing out of the more extremist tales of Paleček, while the cultural goings-on equally influenced their peculiar provenance. Aside from this, the Kornel

tale speaks of the fact that the character of Brother Jan Paleček is steeped in legend, far more than he is in what is normally accepted as history.

The second mention of Paleček that has a claim of historical authenticity occurs in the 1523 record *O původu Jednoty bratrské* (*On the Origin of the Unity of Brethren*). There, a certain Jan Paleček is referred to as a consoler of the ostracised Brethren, yet no clear reference that would indicate the timeframe is mentioned, apart from the fact that the same paragraph mentions one Křížovský who is recorded to have been active around 1450. This document served as a basis for the later history of the Brethren, *Akta Jednoty bratrské IV* (*The Acts of the Unity of Brethren IV*). *The Acts*, where the mention of Paleček recurs, were edited and augmented around 1547 by Jan Blahoslav. A versatile Bohemian humanist and a Brethren bishop, Blahoslav translated The New Testament from the Greek in 1564 and his translation was included into *Bible kralická* (*The Bible of Kralice*)—the first complete translation of the Bible from the original languages into Czech. This mention primarily foregrounds religious practices of a historical Paleček, a character whose name had become vaguely known in the history of the Brethren.

To these two occurrences of the historical character who was to become the Bohemian wise fool, an obscure one could potentially be added. A 1468-69 document entitled *Spis o dobrých a zlých kněžích* (*A Record of Priests Good and Bad*) does not mention Paleček by name, but there is indication that he could have been referred to nevertheless. The document brings an account of a prophecy for the Brethren that predicted a successful future for the order from the time of King Wenceslas IV. The prophecy needed to be conveyed to the Brethren by a person who was present at its pronouncement. It was Jan Blahoslav who had concluded this person must have been Paleček, supposedly a young courtier at the time.

Paleček, in the history of the creation of the character, had more sympathisers, one of them being Jan Łasicki, a Polish Calvinist and a historian and theologian by vocation, who took a keen interest in the Brethren. Łasicki came to Bohemia in 1567 with the intention of studying the history of the movement, and over the following years produced a multi-volume

account, *De origine et rebus gestis Fratrum Bohemorum*. The manuscript, supplemented by Jan Amos Komenský (John Comenius) in 1649, was a prized possession of the Brethren and contains a mention of a Jan Paleček. Łasicki deems him a "vir nobilis et perfacetus," pointing out that Paleček was, regardless of his severe criticism of the errors of the official Church, universally well liked.[298]

Łasicki's manuscript also contains another tale that does not appear in the *Histories*. It features Jan Rokycana, the conservative Hussite theologian and the Utraquist bishop whose sermons King George frequented when, as the ruler of both people, he would not be attending the mass at the Cathedral of St. Vitus. Rokycana, mildly mocked in the official version of the *Histories* for not accepting a very sick man into his hospital, was an unpopular figure among the more radical Brethren for what they saw as his lenient politics. Given Łasicki's connections with the Unity, it is possible he appropriated the story from a radical Paleček tradition, kept alive among the Brothers. The "Tale of the walnuts" has Paleček emerge from the encounter with the bishop as the wittier and revealing Rokycana's walnuts as rotten, thus metaphorically indicating insufficient engagement of the supposedly reformatory confession with prescribed doctrines.

In modern historiography, if he surfaces at all, Paleček is first and foremost remembered by his relation to the Unity of Brethren. Jan Herben, for example, in his early 20th century monograph on the history of Hussitism, provides a brief reference to him, stating that "[t]he only member of the community who was occasionally able to help them was that Brother Paleček who appeared, sometime later, at the court of King George as his court jester and 'Bohemian philosopher.'"[299] "Them" that Herben is referring to are the Moravian Brothers, stationed at Klatovy in the Šumava region of southwest Bohemia. Like others of their confession, they displayed a remarkable devotion to their doctrines, roaming the countryside and administering ordinary bread in earthen dishes to seated communicants

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[298] Urbánek & Hrabák, 62. Łasicki's mention of Paleček, taken over from Urbánek & Hrabák, states: "Is, in regia ac inter clerum vivens, singulari quadam industria et salibus suis dans veritati testimonium, errores ecclesiae ita carpebat libere. Ut tamen eum non ferrent, sed etiam charum haberent."
[299] Herben, Jan, *Huss and His Followers* (London: G. Bles, 1926) 141.

in the "apostolic way,"[300] i.e. not clad in the vestments of priesthood. They were persecuted, Jan Rokycana—who appears as a character in the text of the *Histories*—tried them thrice, and they were tortured because of their doctrines. The "Bohemian philosopher"—or, what would perhaps describe him better, an anti-philosopher, as folly he so skilfully employs is geared against received wisdom—is thus constantly on the margin of historical fact, included often, but hardly ever with too clear a validation.

Even though it is primarily rooted in Paleček's religious background, the commitment to the authenticity of the most famous court jester of Bohemian history is certainly intriguing. Rudolf Urbánek, a Czech historian who specialized in the reign of King George of Poděbrady and the author of the only 20th century monograph on Paleček, even based a limited "biography" of the historical Paleček on the scarce facts. According to this brief historical narrative, for him to have been the person involved in the transmission of the Brethren prophecy, Paleček would have been born in the first decade of the 15th century and was a young courtier at the court of Wenceslas IV. He would also have, without a doubt, been a member of the Unity of Brethren and would have come into King George's service as a middle-aged man. Of his time and actions spent in service, the *Histories* could be a pseudo-historical document, pointing to the nature of his appointment, if not necessarily to historical fact, as Urbánek occasionally seems to be eager to assume. He uses another historical document, the 1510 *O obnovení církve* (*On the Church Restoration*) that reports King George granting the Brethren the right to inhabit the village of Kunvald. What Urbánek reads from this is that Paleček was the one to influence the King's decision, and that he must have been in service for a considerable period of time by then to have had such influence with the King.[301]

If they do not necessarily prove the historicity of Paleček in a traditional sense, the historical data at least relatively firmly locate a Brother Paleček in the time of King George of Poděbrady. The conclusion that Paleček of the *Histories*, described as George's court jester,

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[300] Herben, *Huss and His Followers* 140.
[301] Urbánek & Hrabák 42.

must have been the same Brother Paleček active in the historical development of the Unity of Brethren seems relatively straightforward. But would it have been likely that George of Poděbrady kept a member of a radical religious group as a court jester? Incidentally, it is not completely clear how strong the King's allegiance to the Unity of Brethren would have been. In the year 1461, during one of his last acts of obedience to the Papal Curia, he even initiated a brief campaign that was to prosecute the members of the Brethren as heretics. This could easily be taken as evidence against the historicity of any close involvement he might have shared with a member of the Brethren. But given that George is remembered as a diplomatic king, one of his foremost concerns being the peaceful coexistence of opposing denominations—hence his designation "the king of both people"—it may indeed seem probable that he would have kept a member of the Unity of Brethren as his court jester, yet it cannot be firmly grounded in empirical fact. What is more likely is that Paleček was something of an advisor to George, and Paleček became a jester only in the later carnivalesque narratives.

Both King George and Paleček as (historical) characters acquire, to a certain point, further symbolic capital from the association with one another: George's fabled tolerance obtains further validation, while Paleček himself acquires authenticity. As a consequence, Paleček's historicity remains one of the important elements in discussions of the literary character of King George's fool, almost as though refuting it would call into question the very status of history. When positioning myself towards the importance of the historicity of Paleček as a character, I endorse the realistic view of Gabriela Šarochová, when she states that

> we can conclude with a dose of criticism that a man who would have behaved as the Paleček of the tales hardly could have walked this earth—even if he would have been a fool. This does not imply that my view of the "historical" Paleček is negative, I merely profess that he could not be identified as the character of the *Histories*.[302]

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[302] My translation. Šarochová, Gabriela V, "Kristovská postava bratra Jana Palečka, šaška." In: *Marginalia Historica. Sborník prací Katedry dějin a didaktiky dějepisu Pedagogické fakulty Univerzity Karlovy*, (Prague: Katedra dějin a didaktiky dějepisu Pedagogické fakulty UK 1, 1996, 25-39), 28. The original states: "při troše

However, this chapter retains interest in the connection the textual Paleček formed with historical discourses, seeing that cutting them off would unnecessarily limit the scope of the character that stands as something of a go-between, on the unstable margin of fiction and historicity. The Paleček that I am looking at is a concept that encompasses both these categories and one that, by taking its semantic power from them, continues to reproduce itself, rejuvenated and different every time.

Ever since the second decade of the 16th century, the Bohemian lands witnessed a process of gradual secularisation of literature. The foolish and facetious aspects of Paleček's tales fit this trend to a certain point. A major and widely read work of comic literature is the 1518 text of *Frantova práva* (*Frankie's Rights*) that, as the supposedly official ordinance of the drunkards' guild, parodies a guild statute. Shakespeare's Falstaff was not the only one, of course, to point out the joys of alcohol as a companion to a comic character, albeit for different dramatic reasons, in his notable praise of sack (*2 Henry IV*, IV.iii.84-123). Comic potential was also imported through translations. Notably, the early modern comic literature in Bohemia was enriched by a Czech translation of *Eulenspiegel* that appeared in 1552 (as *Enšpígl*), as a part of the popular tradition of publishing so-called "knížky lidového čtení," that is, chapbooks. Eulenspiegel and his narrative, even though nowadays often paired with Paleček as a character close in type, lack almost completely the moralising veneer that distinguishes Paleček in the history of early modern folly. However, in terms of editing a collection based on a single foolish character, *Enšpígl* could have provided something of an inspiration for a printed popular book.

Not only is a relation to the character's historicity quite hard to establish, further indeterminacies in the study of the text emerge, as dating the Paleček tales is not a task that can be done with any absolute precision. *Histories of Brother Jan Paleček* is a work that likely evolved from late medieval anecdotes and legends, and it also likely existed in manuscript before the oldest preserved copy was completed. The oldest examples of the *Histories* are

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kritičnosti je možné usoudit, že člověk, který by se choval jako tak jako rozprávkový Paleček, po tomto světě asi chodit nemohl - ani kdyby byl šaškem. To vše neznamená, že se k existenci 'historického' Palečka stavím odmítavě, pouze konstatuji, že jej s postavou palečkovských *Historií* není dost dobře možné ztotožnit."

three manuscripts and two old prints, all of which predate 1620: the year of the Battle of the White Mountain, the milestone event of Bohemian history that marked the final success of the Catholic restoration when all non-Catholic religious services were prohibited, practices not conforming to the doctrine banished, and texts of such nature were swallowed by the flames of counter-reformative pyres. Possible older versions of the Paleček text could have suffered exactly that.

The oldest source of the *Histories* is the so-called *Budapešťský rukopis* (*The Budapest Manuscript*, held at the National Museum in Budapest, Hungary), inscribed at the very end with the date of 1583, when it was supposedly copied. Several folios before that, another added inscription appears that informs the reader the copy was made by Sixtus Palma and that prints of it exist as well. This version is considered to be the closest to what, according to Urbánek, was the lost original of the tales, one that may or may not have undergone considerable adaptation, perhaps even censorship.[303]

The second oldest copy is a German translation, attesting to the early popularity of the Paleček tales. It is the manuscript from Zittau, a Lusatian city with a Sorbic population nowadays in Germany, only a few kilometres off the border tri-point of Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic. Part of a *codex mixtus*, the text is a close translation of the third manuscript version, the one from Görlitz, another Lusatian city close to the Czech border. This manuscript served as the basis for the printed edition produced on the press of Sixtus Palma, most probably in the first decade of the 17th century. An earlier one exists that is vaguely dated to the mid-16th century. These five texts differ minimally from each other, and they all bring the same tales, identically arranged.[304]

Looking at the information the text itself brings, further conclusions can be drawn about its date. Urbánek, ever the historian, seems convinced there must have existed an *Ur-Paleček*, a text that predated all the five sources and was composed before the historical

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[303] Urbánek & Hrabák 45. The two added inscriptions state in original: "Přepsáno toho létha 1583", and "Od Sixta Palmy sepsané nacházejí se také i tlačené."
[304] For a comprehensive analysis of the five source texts of the *Histories*, see Urbánek & Hrabák 53-59.

circumstances emerged that would have forced the narrative to become milder in terms of its Protestant overtones. One of the proofs extracted from the text that all the five versions are more recent, Urbánek reads in the fact that all of them place the royal court at the Prague Castle, the customary seat of Bohemian kings that was, nevertheless, ravaged during the Hussite Wars. The Castle was reconstructed only later, at the time of Vladislaus II Jagiellon, and King George reigned from a palace in the Old Town of Prague, in the House of the Lords of Kunštát, a clan of King George. Having Paleček in the third tale run up to the Castle to notify the King of the mistreatment of the falsely accused Dubčanský, for example, is therefore a historical inaccuracy—the composer of the tales might have been unaware of the fact, or, more likely, unbothered by it—but likewise, it is something of a proof of the fictionality of the text itself. What matters is not where King George sat, or that Paleček and Dubčanský were once indeed alive in old Prague. Rather, it is the role Paleček plays in the intended *exemplum* that the tale foregrounds: his righteous pursuit of justice for his fellow man, a pursuit that consequently reveals the fool as an instrument of Christian mercy. The mislocation of the seat of the King might, however, be a simple indication that the literary treatment of the Paleček legends came well after the time the tales focus on.

A further instance, which affirms the date of composition was closer to the date of the oldest manuscripts, is the fact that the two oldest ones mention the sick man of the tenth tale as being inflicted by "the French disease." An epidemic of syphilis indeed occurred at the end of the 15th century, which shows how contemporaneity influenced the content. Three later versions leave out the "Frenchness" of the disease. Another date-related disparity occurs in the two original prints of the *Histories*: the house where the murder is committed is referred to as belonging to a man named Sixt, and his acquiring of the house can be traced to 1561, dating the prints clearly after that year. Historical peculiarities of this kind help root the tales in the latter half of the 16th century.

The strands of signification here picked up from an intricate network from which Paleček as a character derives his meanings. Several conclusions seem inevitable at this point. Firstly, the 16th century version of the *Histories* is very likely a result of careful and deliberate editing that introduced a strong ideological overlay to a text dealing with folly. Further, an

initially richer tradition, possibly grounded in anecdotal narratives, must have produced the final version, while a certain intentionality surely lurks behind maintaining just a handful of stories in order to further enhance the ideological effectiveness of the work.

Finally, the *Histories* were edited by someone who is likely to have been a well-educated individual, closely connected to the Unity of Brethren and interested in contemporary cultural fluctuations, someone who understood at once the urgency of transmitting the moral charge and the revolutionary potential of the Brethren as a burgeoning reformative confession, as well as that employing folly for such purpose will likely ensure much wider circulation of the tales' message. However, in order to fully grasp Paleček's singularity in the history of early modern literature of folly, it is now time to turn from the context to the text itself.

IV.iii. Paleček in the Text of the *Histories*

A lengthy title adorns the *Pest Manuscript* of Paleček's tales—"Artikulové, kteréž Bratr Jan Paleček, jsouc při králi Jiřím Českým, činíval: jsa řádu a života rytířského, velmi šlechetného, králi velmi milý i vzáctný byl každému dobrému, než před světem a jeho milovníky za nemoudrého počten byl, že pravdy žádnému mlčeti nemohl"[305]—and subtly signals a fool is to be their subject, even though the word "fool" remains unmentioned, in the title and throughout the text. For his commitment to truth, however, Paleček is here designated as *nemoudrý*, an unwise, and therefore, foolish person; that is the single instance of his wit being questioned. From then on the fact that we are dealing with a witty fool goes without saying, and Paleček would not nominally become a *šašek* until Jan Herben entitles him so in his

[305] My own loose translation of the title would be: "Deeds of Brother Jan Paleček in the service of King George of Bohemia: he that was of knightly order and life, very generous, dear to the King and respected by the good, while the world and his admirers considered him unwise, as he always had to speak the truth." "Artikulové" from the title used to denote "legal documents" or "deeds" (whereby, for instance, "Artikulové sněmu království českého" is translated as "Deeds of the Diet of the Kingdom of Bohemia") and translating the title as "Deeds of Brother Jan Paleček," as opposed to "Articles of Brother Jan Paleček" therefore benefits from the ambiguity of the word. My thanks to Martin Procházka for pointing this out.

1904 version of the tales for children. That *pravdy žádnému mlčeti nemohl* could easily fit Eulenspiegel as well, even though the levels or types of truth the two fools are concerned with differ greatly. No whimsical laughter or mischief motivates Paleček's love of veracity; he never sets out to uncover the foolishness of superficial communication or inadequacies of language. What he is committed to in the twelve tales—twelve, of course, being a number laden with Biblical symbolism, the number of Christ's apostles, the tribes of Israel, and much more—is Christian virtue and a moral life.

Furthermore, together with stressing the general favour he enjoys with the King and the good people, the title further marks Paleček's knighthood, a social status that presumably allows for his proximity to the King, or, what is just as likely, emerges from it. Yet, the foolish knight Paleček will never be portrayed playing out his knightly privilege, unlike that monumental knight of folly, Sir John Falstaff, who usually uses his status as a pretext for buffoonery in various social settings. In a mockery of all—the King, Prince Hal, but mostly himself—he even introduces a letter with: "Sir John Falstaff, knight, to the son of the king, nearest his father, Harry Prince of Wales, greeting" (*2HIV*, 2.ii.112-14).

For Paleček, it is purely his virtuous folly that makes him beloved, and opens doors for him. Unlike Eulenspiegel, whose fooling usually gets him expelled and who has to resort to trickery to fill his belly, or Pomet whose whimsical manoeuvres serving the same agenda are played out behind the scenes, Paleček is literally fed for being a fool. The sixth tale of the *Histories* describes this arrangement, showing a typical witty reversal Paleček orchestrates for himself: he is generously hosted in the houses of the rich, while working for the poor, demanding no reward. What unites all four of the foolish fellows considered in this study, therefore, is the fact that they practice folly for a living, they professionalise it, albeit each reaping its benefits in a different way.

Histories of Brother Jan Paleček neatly narrates a series of episodes clearly centred on a fool as the principal hero, a character that would normally stall action, procrastinate it even, quite like Falstaff does in his magnificent disregard of all sense of propriety, turning to jest

even on the battlefield[306]. As is the case with the tales of Eulenspiegel, another of the traditionally marginal characters invested with centre-stage importance, the telling of Paleček's life is another example of folly that is not a mere digression in the main narrative, but the sole reason the story unravels, as neither of them participates in a larger, more intricate plot, as Pomet and Falstaff do. However, their similarities virtually cease on the formal level. Unlike the vagrant and autonomous Eulenspiegel who serves many masters but is loyal primarily to folly, Paleček is an officially licensed court jester, wholly determined by his relationship to the King. While the other two examples brought forth in this study, Falstaff and Pomet, are both to a large extent affected by their association with their social superiors—Prince Hal in the former case and Ugo Tudešak in the latter—Paleček lacks their ironic stance that enables them to laugh at their masters. Even when he is seemingly chastising King George for his imperfect Christian ways, Paleček quite literally belongs to him. The entire narrative of the *Histories* is indeed framed by the references to their close bond: the very first tale establishes the nature of affection George feels for his fool, pointing out that "if King George sometimes did not see him, he missed him very badly,"[307] while the last tale informs the reader how, following Paleček's death, the King had missed him to the extent that he too passed away soon after.

The bond between King George and Paleček is a peculiarly strong one. Paleček is not a typical fool, a source of courtly entertainment or a peculiar person whose suspended rationality allows him to utter what would in royal presence otherwise be unthinkable. Rather, he acts as the King's conscience, an agent articulating not only honest, but also desirable conduct for a good Christian king. And a good Christian king was a description of George inscribed in history at the time when Paleček's narrative was being composed, very likely participating (at least to a point) in the construction of George's image. He is still remembered as a king who, due to his religious tolerance, would have kept a Brethren fool.

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[306] In the Battle of Shrewsbury, depicted in the final act of *1 Henry IV*, Prince Hal orders Falstaff to give him his sword, but is granted only a bottle of sack, hidden in the holster. With the words: "Ay, Hal, 'tis hot, 'tis hot. There's that will sack a city" (V.iii.54-55) Falstaff fails to resist to "jest and dally," (V.iii.57) yet again proving his role as a hyperbolic procrastinator of action, mismatched with the world of the history.

[307] My translation. Urbánek & Hrabák 83. The original wording: "když jeho král Jiří kdy neviděl, tehdy velmí po něm teskliv býval."

Furthermore, Paleček, the King's conscience, is in the text shown successful at his calling, mainly thanks to his skilful use of folly.

King George appears as a character in seven of the twelve tales,[308] on every occasion interacting with Paleček closely and mostly acting on the fool's direct advice. The first tale of the *Histories* serves to establish Paleček's privilege to practice folly at the court, and to ascertain the effectiveness of his influence on the King: his entitlement being summed up as "he was allowed anywhere,"[309] while fear of his opinions is making the courtiers pay him special attention. From then on, the King is described as uninterruptedly trusting Paleček: his opinion is heard on who the good courtiers are and who is merely serving their own interests; George will correct the wrongs that befall his subjects following Paleček's directions, and he will even consider implicitly reprimanding the Pope for his riches as Paleček, true to his allegiance to the Unity of Brethren, drolly suggests. In their interactions, Paleček is also distinctly shown as an example of licenced folly: he invariably addresses the King as "*bratře králi*", as his "brother", revealing simultaneously a designation of familiarity, a mark of his foolish license, and a Christian universalising appellation used by Christ himself, and one that keeps appearing throughout the Bible. All other characters are brothers and sisters to Paleček too, showing him making no distinction between the high and the low, being an agent of excluded inclusion, and placing him at the same time on the margin of received social order, and outside of it.

The text, however, never lets one forget that aside from being a faithful fool and companion to his King, Paleček is a servant of the Lord and that adherence to Scripture, facilitated by the use of folly, guides his actions. In fact, almost all of the instances of Paleček influencing the King's behaviour are accompanied by a direct reference to the Lord and a properly Christian demeanour. His examples vary, but his method remains the same: the only thing of any consequence is being a good Christian. As examples go, in the second tale the King is reminded of his own standing in the Kingdom of Heaven and for its sake invited

[308] King George is absent from the fifth, sixth, seventh, ninth, and the tenth tale – these bring various good deeds Paleček is involved in, while roaming the country, being a good Christian.
[309] My translation. Urbánek & Hrabák 83. The original text has: "všudy jemu volno bylo."

to correct an unfair advantage some of his subjects are given; when called upon to intervene in the acquittal of an innocent man in the following tale, the King is reminded of his status being lower than that of Christ who had even heard out the Devil, but resisted the temptation; the fourth tale describing the conundrum of how to address the Pope has the King warned against using titles worthy of the Lord himself unwisely; and finally, in the last tale the King is told that he must know that by giving Paleček new skirts, as Paleček keeps giving them away to the poor, he is serving the Lord.

While it is the episodic characters of commoners—peasants, workers, and citizens—that Paleček interacts with who mainly populate the tales of the *Histories*, the Queen also makes a single appearance. In the eighth tale, she is not spared of Paleček's reasoning and fares much the same as the King did: we find her seeking Paleček's advice on whether she would appear more agreeable to the Lord and reap some rewards should she travel on foot, walking behind the carriage, instead of riding on it. Using his licence of a fool to speak unceremoniously with a Queen, Paleček reproaches her for her folly and tells her she would be better off in the castle weaving cloth for the poor, as no unfortunate vagrants ever get rewarded for travelling on foot and neither would she. This episode is peculiar in having a member of the royalty appear downright foolish before a veritable fool and not merely misinformed or unenlightened, as is usually the case with the King. Thus, the Queen becomes a figure of comedy, while her naïve suggestion for the practice of piety and subsequent flight back to the castle are constructed as so pointedly ridiculous that Paleček's wit, when contrasted to hers, might shine ever brighter.

Typically for the age—as has been seen in much comical literature rooted in the popular tradition, Eulenspiegel being no exception—the clergy is not spared in the *Histories* either. A class that seems to give itself naturally to popular comedy, they are unfailingly made butts of jokes by Paleček the witty fool. Yet, given the Bohemian historical context, the jest with the servants of God in the *Histories* has more subtlety than in *Eulenspiegel*, for instance, where their greed and base humanity is ridiculed purely for the amusement of the audience. As the tales are set in a religiously divided Bohemia, Paleček's jokes acquire a political undertone. Both relevant confessions make appearances in the *Histories*, and both are

derided—Catholics as well as the Hussites. The preferred religious position in the text is, obviously, that of Paleček who as a member of the Unity of Brethren takes issue with the lax Christian morality of both denominations, regardless of the fact that the Brethren's views were closer to the Hussites'.

Historically often kept at margins, and voluntarily choosing the marginal existence for themselves, the Bohemian Brethren were stern in their Christian convictions and appeared not unlike some peculiar Protestant pariahs preceding Protestantism. They were the unruly element of a religiously divided country. Designating them as such, naturally, only works in the sense of recognising them as having rejected stale, malfunctioning ways of conventional confessions and opted for more radical, but unfailingly pacifist, alternatives. These alternatives were, however, not always welcomed in the intricate political situation of Bohemian early modernity. In their passion for righteousness, the Brethren risked persecution. A certain folly can therefore be discerned in the very constitution of the order Paleček belongs to.

When it comes to openly criticising the folly of other religious options, as might be expected, greater mockery is reserved for the Catholics. In tale four—the only one that features two distinct plotlines, or two jokes, however brief—Paleček mocks the Catholic Church in a rather elaborate way. As they are trying to argue their cause with the King, Paleček interrupts the richly clad priests demanding they stop their carnival mongering, as the time for festivities had not come yet. When George confronts him to explain this particular folly of his, Paleček defends himself as any witty fool would: claiming a momentary suspense of reason. On account of the priests' exaggerated attire, he had apparently thought he was faced with untimely carnival clowns who were to be chastised and removed from the King's presence. Aside from mocking the Catholic priests for their pride and immodesty, the tale makes for yet another example of a fool exposing the folly of supposedly well-functioning members of society, instances of which litter every text this study is concerned with. Paleček explodes the binary between common sense and folly by drawing attention to the fact that the latter is always subsumed into the former and modifying the process of reasoning and judgement into a joke. A similar principle is followed

in the second part of the same tale, where, as I have indicated already, Paleček advises the King to address the Pope precisely according to the pontiff's merit: "[t]o the proudly proud, the proudest and the richest bishop and nobleman in Rome, a letter."[310] By reaching as far as the Bishop of Rome in expressing its lack of approval for the ways of the contemporary Catholic Church, the *Histories* directly participate in the reformatory discourse of early modern Bohemia and exemplify political uses of Renaissance folly, thereby acquiring notoriety with the Catholic powers that were to regulate all literary production in the land.

Yet, Paleček does not stop at mocking merely the Catholics, and the narrative shows him equally uncompromising in his strict revolutionary attitudes when faced with a Hussite priest. In the tenth episode, Paleček directly interacts with the Hussite archbishop, Jan Rokycana, and manipulates him into mending his neglectful Christian ways. Having found an exceptionally sick man thrown out of the hospital, Paleček tricks Rokycana into believing it was the body of Christ himself that was discarded in the gutter. When Rokycana sends for the body, Paleček wittily turns to Scripture and quotes it back to the man who is supposed to be its authoritative interpreter. In telling him to "[d]o a mercy unto him, as you teach the others to do, as what you do unto the least of the God's creatures, you do it unto God,"[311] Paleček appropriates the urgency of Matthew's delivery of Christ's words from the famous passage, alluded to also elsewhere in the *Histories*: "[a]nd the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (*KJV*, Matthew, 25:40). Paleček here, as elsewhere in the text, emerges victorious out of the encounter, having yet again established his superiority in wit and morality. He is gradually revealed as the true Christian authority, set apart from the hypocrisy of other Christian groups. Through Paleček's actions, the tale illustrates the zeal of

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[310] My translation. Urbánek & Hrabák 85. In original, we find "[t]omu pyšně pyšnému a najbohatějšímu biskupu a pánu v Římě má bejti list dán!" Incidentally, and as an example of a modification of the shelf-life of ideas, ones that constitute humorous discourse in particular, this episode is transformed by Herben in *Bratr Jan Paleček šašek krále Jiřího* to include the German Kaiser, possibly for reasons of censorship, but also as the times Herben was communicating with would have appreciated more the joke being played on that particular monarch. See Herben, Jan, *Bratr Jan Paleček šašek krále Jiřího*, ill. Václav Bláha (Praha: Stát. nakl. dětské knihy, 1958).

[311] My translation. Urbánek & Hrabák 85. The original states: "[u]čiň nad ním milosrdenství tak, jak jiné učíš, že což nejmenšímu božímu učiníš, to samému Bohu učiníš."

the Brethren, but is also noteworthy for its introduction of a historical character that would have raised expectations and carried certain connotations with the audience. Quite like the episodic appearances of King George, the presence of archbishop Rokycana plays a part in the construction of the scenery of an age, but also strives to enhance the necessary illusion of the narrative's historicity, the illusion that trailed Paleček well into the 20th century.

Even though King George features prominently as a character in the *Histories*, while his wife and higher members of the clergy appear in separate tales only, Paleček's world is a pronouncedly plebeian one. He mingles with the common folk, advocating their causes, resolving their differences, or edifying individuals through his behaviour, all in a lay context, permeated with laughter. True to his commitment to Scripture, it is mostly the impoverished who are the beneficiaries of his Christian deeds, explicitly introduced as an undifferentiated collective "poor" in the second, the sixth, and the twelfth tales, so quite literally at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the narrative constituting an unchanging fact about the world and indicating a continual necessity for Christian mercy. The poor remain silent and do not ask for help, they are not agents, but mute sufferers who are given better food, free labour, and clothing by Paleček.

Indeed, it is Paleček's role as a helper that greatly prevails in the narrative. He ceaselessly assists episodic characters either through his actions, or by edifying them, and the two usually come in combination. He volunteers where his help is direly needed, but also distributes it unsolicited. In addition to his good deeds towards the poor, in the third tale he will employ his talents to resolve a major crisis and rescue a man wrongly accused of murder from certain death. Incidentally, this is a somewhat unusual mention of a heinous crime in the literature of folly. Admittedly, instrumental killing is prominent in Shakespeare's histories, and Falstaff in his foolish narrative strand, for instance, causes the deaths of poor men unable to evade the draft, and in *Eulenspiegel* it is the eponymous fool who is nearly hanged by the angry mob on account of rude trickery. However, bringing the crude criminality of murder into prominence as a quotidian event illustrates a sinful world that is to be transformed only through Christian mercy. In the tale in question, Paleček uses his influence with the King and once again plays precisely the role of the King's conscience

reminding him he should follow Christ's example and acquit the innocent man. Criminality cured by mercy appears in the seventh tale as well, where Paleček is stranded overnight in a room with a thief. Rather than wait for the thief to rob him, Paleček volunteers half of his money—the money, as is made clear in the story, Paleček carries around simply to assist him in his charitable work. The thief, and with him any further contrivance of criminal deeds in the stories, is thus intercepted in his intentions and tricked into obedience, not through force, but through mercy. In Paleček's world, naturally, even the wicked are assisted on their way to becoming better Christians. The thief's story immediately precedes the aforementioned one where the Queen is the recipient of Paleček's guidance, and this close proximity of such disparate characters alludes to the universality of both Paleček's agenda and the Christian message.

That folly in general, and Paleček's folly in particular, is in all its occurrences highly paradoxical, I have mentioned in this work many times. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the *Histories* are generically paradoxical as well. The tales amalgamate remnants of two supposedly mutually exclusive and very disparate older genres. Presenting a unity of moralising and buffoonery, of Christian values and folly, the tales in the *Histories* are generically determinable as a fusion of *exempla* and *facetiae*. The latter popular form, discussed already in Chapter II in relation to the sources and inspirations that triggered the hilarious anecdotes of Eulenspiegel, in Paleček's *Histories* it appears in a far milder incarnation. The *facetiae* of Paleček steer clear from scatology, they hardly involve any grotesque elements, or provocations of gratuitous laughter, as is often the case in the narrative of the older German foolish hero. Instead, the humorous anecdotes that frame Paleček as a protagonist invariably aim towards a culmination in a religiously charged moral message, their trajectory being one that aims to illustrate a moral, Christian life of a highly charismatic fool. Therein lays their exceptionality: they employ the hero's mirth and merriment to amuse the audience, as any example of the genre would, but they also strive to edify. Another characteristic that singles out Paleček's *facetiae* from the more typical examples of the genre is the fact that their plotlines are original, they have not been adapted

or appropriated from other sources, nor have they stopped being directly associated with a version of the character of Paleček.

The genre of *exemplum*, on the other hand, easily discernable in the *Histories*, aims to be highly persuasive in nature, presenting a rhetorical argument based on a memorable deed or an event from the past with the aim of making a moral point. Its persuasive power comes from its visual imagery and narrative structure. It draws its origins from the ancient rhetoric schools of Athens and Rome, and was especially popular as an ecclesiastical tool in the Middle Ages, where it found uses as a rhetorical device for battling heresies, or an effective means for the transmittance of spiritual experience from elders to novices. *Exempla* would also be commonly woven into the structure of a sermon, to entice the empathy or guide the comprehension of a congregation. In the later Middle Ages, the form is starting to blend with various other genres and is gradually replaced with other rhetorical forms, such as illustrations, allegories, or indeed facetious anecdotes. As is the fate of many a thing practical and popular, at a certain point it presumably becomes so tedious as to provoke parodies, with Chaucer's *Miller's Prologue and Tale*[312] attesting to this.

Histories of Brother Jan Paleček is a collection of *exempla* insofar as it uses deeds of famous individuals to push forth an ethical agenda and promote religious causes. Unlike some of the more famous older pieces of exempla literature, such as Boccaccio's *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*[313] (1355-60) that tells the tales of the falls of famous men, the text of the *Histories* predominantly instructs through Paleček's actions affirmatively, bringing negative examples only in the deeds of supporting characters, all of which are ultimately transformed through their interaction with the hero. If we read the narrative as having generic connections with the *exemplum*, Paleček is revealed as the ultimate good example to follow, as he himself is directly following the Gospels, and therefore Christ. The text lauds him for his wit and morality and his actions demonstrate the Brethren's understanding of

[312] See Chaucer, Geoffrey, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Dean Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 66-76.
[313] See Boccaccio, Giovanni, *De Casibus Illustrium Virorum*, trans. Louis Brewer Hall (Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1962).

Christianity, making its immediate objective twofold: to edify in the pursuit of Christian morality, but also to promote and direct the reader toward a particular version of Christianity. While the Brethren historically did have their philosophers, Petr Chelčický and Jan Amos Komenský stand tall as the most formidable examples, Paleček is its foolosopher, the one that spoke most clearly to the popular imagination and whose message, because of its use of folly, was perhaps most easily transmittable.

Aside from this extraordinary mixture of amusement and edifying, what runs as a constant through all the tales of Paleček's adventures is the character's peculiar logic of upending common sense. This is also the structuring mechanism of Paleček's jokes. He employs witty reversals that are either explicitly tied to a Christian context by a direct invocation of God, or have as their underlying principle the establishment of the greater good rooted in Christian morality. Paleček's witty reversals function in a way that estranges the given circumstances of the story that are often presented as entangled in a seemingly incorrigible way. The second tale already reveals how Paleček's Christian folly functions. In the story, Paleček asks the King to whom an impressive village they are passing by belongs. Learning that the answer is the poor people of the Holy Ghost Hospital, Paleček does what Eulenspiegel would do: he takes the King's words literally and proceeds with the assumption the poor are the masters of the village. When he discovers the caretakers of the hospital, supposedly in the service of the poor "masters," are better off than the poor, he has the King amend this unfairness. Things are resolved with the poor benefitting: through Paleček's interference even poverty may be cancelled. Being a licensed fool, Paleček is permitted to behave in this way, to employ folly to question the *status quo* and steer events towards his desired outcome. Not unlike Pomet, the master maneuverer of Ragusan Renaissance comedy who will be discussed in one of the following chapters, when he manipulates, Paleček is assuming the status of an active agent in the stories, an authorial and authoritative role that is favoured in the narrative—and because of his doing so, he may be seen as a typical early modern, his recognition of the utility of folly included in that description.

A further example comes from the fifth tale, the most secular one in the collection, which has Paleček use his skill at introducing unusual viewpoints capable of reversing the

starting situation in resolving a financial dispute. Dealing with a pair of quarrelling citizens—an unfortunate caretaker and an unfair widow, the only other female character in the narrative, aside from the Queen—Paleček will play the part of a mediator acting on behalf of the wronged party. The widow had decided to punish the caretaker by taking a sum of money from him, and the man, feeling the punishment had been unjust, requested Paleček's help in bringing equilibrium back to the situation. As not much is needed to set Paleček off, at the very civil greeting the man uses to address the woman, Paleček will accuse him of lying bitterly, thereby betraying the man's expectations at the very outset of a humorous situation and establishing himself as the orchestrator of events. Both the man and the woman become confused by Paleček's reaction as he skilfully manipulates the moment gaining complete control for a display of his logic of reversals. If we follow Paleček's reasoning, by addressing the widow as a merciful lady, the wronged man had been resorting to mendacity on the literal level of linguistic communication, which opened up the space for jest and an opportunity for Paleček to gain the upper hand. The unsuspecting commoners, unskilled in folly, are left with no other option but to agree with the witty fool—the woman's pride bars her from admitting she truly is a cruel tyrant, while the man wilfully accepts the undesirable label of a liar in order to emerge victorious. The money will change hands yet again, making the tale something of an anomaly in its dealing with a secular context, only vaguely influenced by a New Testament line of thinking, insofar as it propagates mercy towards one's enemies. A display of wit and folly, however, remains at its most pronounced.

A typically Palečekian logic of upending conventional wisdom governs also the eleventh tale of the *Histories*, arguably the most complex one in the collection. The tale of feeding unjustly neglected young men with large fish brings together subtle Biblical references, a display of Paleček's exceptional wit in concocting an elaborate joke, and another act of reversing the logic of everyday sense that would have elders better fed than the youth. In the story of a courtly dinner, Paleček is seated at the table with young men who have been served small fish. Ever the fool, Paleček talks to the fish, one by one, telling the King he is inquiring after his brother who had drowned in the river. Therein enters his peculiar

inversion of sense: the fish are too young, they do not know what might have happened to the drowned brother, and the King is to replace them with the large ones from his own table. With the use of folly, Paleček manages yet again to change reality, assuming for a moment the role of Christ who fed the multitude,[314] a highly transfigured role, motivated by the strict Brethren adherence to the Scripture. Paleček does what Jesus had done, and from therein his success emerges. Appearance of the fish—not the first one in the *Histories*, as the poor of the Holy Ghost hospital get better fish to eat in the second tale as well—is yet another instance of Biblical imagery permeating the text, determining it, and anchoring into a specific historical discourse. Fish appear throughout the Gospels and are given symbolic meaning; several of Jesus' disciples were fishermen, and indeed, he commissioned them with the famous words: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (*KJV*, Matthew, 4:19). By showing Paleček following the New Testament so precisely, the text of the *Histories* likewise follows this beckoning: it becomes the text of a foolish fisher of men, transmitting the good news to the masses willing to listen. Folly of the character and of the text thus becomes morally charged and differentiated from its other uses. Unlike the folly of Eulenspiegel that is corporeal and comical; the folly of Pomet that is permeated with political opinions of its day and beyond; or Falstaff's folly of play, "gross as a mountain" (*1HIV,* II.v.208-9), practically overwhelming: textually, semantically, and in its marketable potential; Paleček's folly can hardly be separated from its religious overtones, vibrating through every sentence of the text. Which requires a swerve back to the context, however briefly.

As religion and politics in early modern Bohemia were inseparable—indeed, synonymous—every aspect of both public and private activity was largely conditioned by religious factors. One's choice of denomination quite straightforwardly determined one's destiny, and religion permeated all aspects of one's life. The church was also a major player in the production of culture. It therefore quite logically transpired that the legendary fool, the one that was to be remembered as *the* fool of Bohemian early modernity, had deep roots

[314] "The Feeding of the Multitude" is the combined term for two separate miracles of Jesus in the Gospels. The First Feeding Miracle, "The Feeding of the 5,000" is, with the resurrection, the only one present in all four canonical Gospels: Matthew 14:13-21, Mark 6:31-44, Luke 9:10-17 and John 6:5-15. The second miracle, "The Feeding of the 4,000" is reported by Mark 8:1-9 and Matthew 15:32-39.

in a religious movement that coloured so precisely the historical moment the *Histories* speak about. Paleček is a Brethren fool and this cultural classification reveals his connection to the revolutionary potential of Christianity that was being played out so vigorously on the historical stage at the time. A thorn in the eye of much of Catholic Europe, the movement was slowly waning and being forcibly suppressed by the counter-Reformation as Paleček's tales circulated among interested readership in manuscripts. His *facetiae* were conveniently marked by spiritual experiences, framed as examples for the believers to follow. It has to be pointed out that the folly in Paleček's narrative is not employed for the purposes of attracting and merely entertaining an audience. Paleček's folly has a far more complex purpose.

The reversals of folly that govern Paleček's reasoning are not in all cases straightforward or in any way simplistic. The ninth of Paleček's tales—a tale only nominally and by far the shortest one, as it is constituted of a single long sentence—is an illustrative comment on the hero's moral stance towards the carnival, revealing a Brethren attitude that shuns anything related to festivity. The "tale" tells us that on Good Friday the Bohemian fool is happy and sings as if it were Easter day, but when the carnival comes he cries and prays more than on other days as he feels sorry for the people succumbing to all the excess that has become associated with festivities. Animosity towards carnivals is a properly reformational attitude, the Brethren having instituted it as one of their primary principles, and it reflects the truly forward thinking, one that places great value on the betterment of man's customs and of his soul, characteristic of the age. Erasmus, for one, was like-minded on the topic. Although only seemingly endorsing conventional carnivalesque reversals in his *Praise of Folly*, Erasmus does not celebrate the power of the carnival, rather he employs the reversals ironically. His *Praise* is a work of multiple meanings and intentions, written with a pointed polysemy in mind, and not a straightforward text to be unlocked with a simple carnivalesque key. That this is the case is apparent elsewhere in his work[315] and in his callings for a reform of Catholicism.

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[315] For example, his adage "Ignavis semper feriae sunt – For sluggards it is always holiday" (Erasmus, Desiderius, *The Adages of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001) 203) encapsulates the attitude

A consideration of holiday time and everyday time unfailingly brings to mind Prince Hal's politically programmatic monologue of *1 Henry IV*. (I.ii.185-207). There, Hal confesses to the audience that his existence in the time where "all the year [is] playing holidays" (I.ii.194) is mere pretence, that is, mere play. This confession determines the agonistic relationship of Hal and Falstaff as seeming emblems of work and play, of Lent and carnival, of which more shall be said in a following chapter. As the two plays unfold, the characteristically Shakespearean simultaneity of multiple perspectives will show that everyday time is just as permeated with play as holiday time is. Hal's mission to redeem time, alluding to the Pauline Ephesians: "Take heed therefore that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the season: for the days are evil" (*KJV*, Ephesians 5. 15–16), will not emerge as successful as it might appear and he will carry the mark of folly long after Falstaff is gone. So even though they are vastly different in their starting points and unfoldings, Paleček's protestant refusal to acknowledge worldly holidays and the complex cancelling out of the dualism between work and play in *Henry IV*, they both arrive at a similar point: that no strict separation between the two is possible. Also, while the Shakespearean text is infinitely more nuanced in its structure, substance, and conclusions, both texts instrumentalise folly and foolish characters to paint a picture of a world that for one reason or another cannot be conceived of as a polarised compound of false dichotomies.

The fools, it needs to be said, that the aforementioned Ephesians epistle fragment warns against are not the same fools Paleček belongs to. As is apparent elsewhere in Pauline thought, namely in Corinthians 1, folly is inscribed in the very essence of Christianity. The passages speak of the folly inherent in the faith that has taken upon itself to be foolish in the eyes of those who do not believe. "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe" (*KJV*, Corinthians 1.20-21). Paleček is a fool, but he is also wilfully foolish to preach the good news of Christ and teach by his own example.

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that true Christians treat all days as holy and not as holidays, which have become profane and grotesquely excessive, as his Butcher in *A Fish Diet* describes.

Doubling up on the topsy-turvydom in the short tale and rejoicing in the time of greatest Christian sorrow, on the death-day of Christ, Paleček goes on to show that an understanding of the impossible event—the resurrection of the body—as *possible* is the ultimate cause for celebration, even at the risk of being called a fool.

"Madness and Christianity go hand in hand,"[316] is how M.A. Screech introduces his article on "Good madness in Christendom." This is certainly the case in the *Histories*. Folly and Christianity have been converging and communicating ever since early Christianity, their union being especially visible in the early modern era, and Paleček is a very apt example of this peculiar unity. The character's folly is inseparable from his devotion and vice versa, which is what makes him singular in the history of Bohemian folly, but it also distinguishes him on the greater stage of fools in European early modernity. The text of the *Histories* is just as steeped in Christian values and teachings as it is permeated with folly, and neither of these two designations can, in its case, be granted any strict primacy. The persuasive power of the *Histories* comes precisely from their relationship to folly, almost as though by being foolish they acquire further legitimacy. This is because it is a specific kind of folly that the *Histories* operate with, and it is the folly of Christianity, which likewise motivates the dazzling finale of Erasmus' *Praise*.

The folly of Christianity is in full accordance with the folly of God. "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (*KJV*, Corinthians 1.25). The Christians are devoted to a foolish God that saved the world through an act of folly: incarnating and sacrificing his own Son. The Son, in turn, also acted as a madman and was laughed at, the same as his disciples, and the subsequent preachers—all deemed foolish by the Jewish and the Gentile world when their religion first emerged. As Screech explicates, "[d]efenders of the doctrines of the Incarnation, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of the body in such a hostile intellectual atmosphere tended to insist on the 'foolishness' of what they preached. The wisdom of this world was dismissed as being indeed

[316] Screech, M.A., "Good madness in Christendom" in: Bynum, W.F., Roy Porter and Michael Shepherd, eds, *The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry* (London; New York: Tavistock Publications, 1985: 25-39) 25.

incompatible with that of God, who did indeed prefer to work in ways which are not only silly, but absurd and insane by the standards of Athens, Jerusalem, Alexandria or Rome."[317] And what preceded the Christian folly is the divine madness, the *stultitia Dei*, against the background of which the tales of Paleček are to be read.

It has elsewhere been noticed that the most important intertextual relationship of the *Histories* is the one with the New Testament. Šarochová[318] rightly draws attention to the presence of the Gospels throughout Paleček's adventures, and especially in the words and actions of the character, as has been pointed out throughout this chapter. Paleček behaves in the way Christ had advised in his Sermon on the Mount—the longest piece of Jesus' teaching in the Bible, reported in Matthew 5-7—following it at times *verbatim*. He fashions himself in absolute submissiveness to an external power or authority, that of God. This explains the depth of the message the text is trying to convey, its peculiar saturation with meanings outside it, its brimming with symbolism. But this is only one level in which the folly of *Histories* operates.

Seeing the Gospels as the key for understanding of the text itself, as Šarochová does, reterritorialises it into its own symbolic interpretation. Yet, the fact that Paleček is made to be a fool, and not just an ordinary character operating in ordinary relations of common sense, is what is responsible for the continual internal instability of the text that refuses to be straightforwardly translated into particular passages of the Scripture. Paleček is not only doing what Jesus had done, he is becoming what is at the core of the Christian understanding of their faith, the *stultitia Dei*. He *is* a holy fool: his connection to folly is constructed as inextricable, and the language he speaks always is already deterritorialised, given that it is spoken by a fool. He is a vessel for the mission of the Brethren, likewise fuelled by a similar impulse, a holy folly that made them renounce the comforts of this world, be persecuted and banished, so that they would be able to live and preach in accordance with the Holy Writ. Furthermore, Paleček as a character in a Brethren text

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[317] Screech, *Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly* 19.
[318] See Šarochová, especially 32-37.

necessarily has to be a fool proper, because "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" (*KJV*, Corinthians 1.27).

The folly of Paleček therefore releases the revolutionary potential of the text, inspired by the same impulse within the radical version of Christianity. In *Saint Paul: the Foundation of Universalism* Alain Badiou argues that a Pauline universalism, permeated with an understanding of the folly of God, is rooted in the event of Christ's resurrection. The Resurrection is an outstanding event that conditioned the emergence of subjectivity because, through it, mankind acquired the possibility to conquer death: if the embodied Christ is resurrected, the possibility of man's resurrection also exists. Badiou re-configures Christian folly in more secular and explicitly political terms, which see it as attacking the forms of mastery. He presents a Pauline model of subjectivity resistant to the hardships of the world because it is full of hope of things to come—a subjectivity also embodied in the character of Paleček.

Such a proleptic vision of Paleček, intertextually bound to Scripture as a text of the distant past that directly presages what will happen in the future, is also a vision of folly. Such folly disrupts the neat Bakhtinian system of axes, where the extratemporal vertical axis of Christianity, related to the other-worldly and best exemplified in Dantean structures in *Divine Comedy*, is opposed to the Rabelaisian, carnivalesque one where an "extraordinary faith in space and time, that passion for spatial and temporal distances"[319] is established on a horizontal level. This "equivalence […] specifically contrasted with medieval verticality"[320] is resolved in Paleček who, due to his peculiar relationship with the holy folly of Pauline Christianity, may be understood as a figure disrupting the schematism of space and time, and uniting the Bakhtinian axes by proposing that Christianity could be based on the universal interconnectivity of individuals: all get his attention, from the nobles to the low ones and all deserve to be saved. This universal interconnectivity is arranged horizontally and

[319] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 168.
[320] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 168.

cancels out all earthly hierarchies. As such, it approaches the rhizomatic structures Deleuze and Guattari see as alternatives to arboreal ones, implicit in Bakhtin's understanding of medieval verticality.

Paleček may, therefore, be said to become a rhizomatic agent of Pauline universalism, overcoming the necessity for oppositional thinking found in Bakhtin. His folly, being derived from such a vision of Christianity, is permeated with exciting possibilities. Badiou shows that, due to its egalitarian nature, Paul's universalism has a revolutionary potential, rather than the conservative agenda usually implicit in conceptualisations of universality. The key event of Christ's resurrection unites anyone from any age, "in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life."[321] Hence, Paul's invigorating claim that "[t]here is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (*KJV*, Galatians 3.28). As Paleček's *Histories* clearly understand as well, an unflinching hope and an active faith fortified by love is all that is necessary for salvation at the resurrection, in which everyone will become brothers, the brethren of the Brethren.

IV.iv. Transformations and Legacies

Perennially popular figures of folly are usually translated into different contexts and discourses, and Paleček is no exception. Devoted to his material, Rudolf Urbánek, the aforementioned historian and author of the only monograph on Paleček, repeatedly mentions a "Palečekian tradition" in his work. While speaking of a tradition may approach an overestimation of the subsequent influence of the text and its main character, especially if juxtaposed with Eulenspiegel whose multiplicities have been drawn upon in so many a context that he remains firmly ingrained in German national consciousness, Paleček as a character in both historical and literary discourse does show considerable resilience when faced with the passing of time, and pronounced adaptability to various contexts. He is, after

[321] Badiou, Alain, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) 81.

all, a figure of folly, or a felicitous example that speaks directly to various audiences, and as such is often evoked to illustrate different agenda. The text has, therefore, followed a dynamic trajectory, where some of its aspects were variously foregrounded or neglected. For the purposes of this study, I take the text to be, on the one hand, peculiarly positioned within the networked structure of early modern folly, as this chapter has thus far strived to illustrate. On the other hand, by looking at the character's transformations and legacies, it becomes apparent that many figures of folly possess infinite variety.

In the times that followed its original context, the fortunes of Paleček, tied closely to the Unity of Brethren, already started to change, mainly because the aforementioned aftermath of the Battle of the White Mountain considerably influenced the cultural landscape in Bohemia. Persecuted, as the rest of the non-Catholics, members of the Brethren started leaving for German lands and Poland and, with them, so did the memory of Paleček. G. C. Rieger's *Die alten und neuen Böhmischen Brüder* (1734) mentions Paleček briefly, but no other known German sources are vocal about him. Instead, the Paleček tradition was kept alive amongst the Brethren themselves, who transcribed the manuscript and later printed the *Histories*. The booklet of Paleček's holy folly appeared as an appendix to Jan Amos Komenský's 1756 edition of *Historie težkých protivenství církve české* (*The History of Hardships and Adversities of the Czech Church*), nestled in the context of reformatory discourse, with the moralistic level of the narrative gaining the upper hand. Komenský's had a widespread influence that extended across early modern Europe (including England), and his legacy is in many ways comparable to Erasmus'. The remembrance of the *Histories* owes considerable gratitude to Komenský's legacy.

As religious matters lost their status of utmost political importance, other aspects of the Paleček text were brought into the foreground. A hero that had throughout reception history enjoyed considerable popular recognition, his quality of being closely linked to the romanticised past of the kingly Bohemia and yet communicating directly with the people corresponded closely to the objectives of the Czech national revival. It was the time when with new and urgent constructions of "Czechness" the comic potential of Paleček was noticed anew. A popular text in a national language, the narrative of Paleček became a vessel

for an attempt at rekindling national pride, dwarfed by staunch German influences. In 1834 Jan Hýbl went to publish the text as *Paleček, obsahu poučného, opravdivého i žertovného, k užitečnému i obveselujicímu čtení* (or: *Paleček, of content instructive, true and comic, for a useful and joyful reading*), securing new audiences for the folly of the past and furnishing it with a title that strives to clearly guide their understanding. The same century saw Paleček branch into several other cultural strands where his comedy became his primary distinguishing characteristic. He gave his name to a journal of comic content that ran from 1841-47 and again from 1872-87, thereby securing for the character quick associations solely with humour. The year 1865 even saw an attempt at imitation of Paleček,[322] when Josef Václav Frič published his parody in the journal *Květy*, edited by the poet Jan Neruda and Vítězslav Hálek. The fabrication was not particularly successful, but does again speak of Paleček's popularity.

If there is a scholar who contributed to the popularisation of Paleček, and in general, to awakening a wider readership for the stories from which the character sprung, it has to be Jan Herben. His involvement with Paleček, from both a creative and scholarly standpoint, spreads across a long period. A politician of the famed 1890s generation that was headed by Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and saw serious reform movements of their own, Herben was also a writer in the realist tradition and a historian with a keen interest in the Hussite period. He published the first scholarly edition of the *Histories* in 1868, and in 1902 edited the Sixt Palma print. In 1882 he turned the historical text into contemporary prose, "Jan Paleček: historický obraz" ("Historical image of Jan Paleček"), illustrated by Mikoláš Aleš, painter and draughtsman and a key figure important both for the late 19th century Czech nationalists and for the Czech fin-de-siècle art, the artist whose portraits gave recognisable faces to many fabled historical figures. The following year Herben wrote a critical study of the tales and the historical persona of Paleček, "Klenovský-Paleček" that separates Paleček from Klenovský, a

[322] The journal publication bore the title *Z kratochvilné historie o bratru Palečkovi několik a vnov časem náhodou vykutálených kusů čili artikulóv o čtyřech kusech nově vymyšlených*.

historical figure contemporary to the fool, thus far mistakenly considered to be identical to Paleček.[323]

Herben's perhaps best-known contribution to the Paleček corpus is his rewriting of the stories as children's literature. Herben's *Bratr Jan Paleček šašek krále Jiřího* (that is, *Brother Jan Paleček, the Fool of King George*) first appeared in 1902 and was re-issued several times. In the steady tone of an expert storyteller, Herben's text appropriates the Paleček *Histories*, adds heavily to them and reshapes them into lush, fable-like tales. Herben worked with the known foundations, building upon them, including the two stories that do not appear in the standard text, and invented new episodes. Most memorably, he has Paleček reproach King George for favouring princely children over their low-born peers, involving thereby the interests of his target audience in the legend of Paleček's virtue.[324]

The author belonged to Masaryk's close circle that shared his intellectual concerns. Therefore, Herben's keen and prolonged interest in the figure of Paleček gains further significance if examined in the context of Masarykian reconfigurations of Czech history. Writing in 1894, Masaryk embarked on a task that aimed to unabashedly build a coherent narrative of national identity in his work *Czech Question*.[325] He sees the historical trajectory of the Czech people as imbued with a particular "humanist" idea—distinct from the received, historically precise sense of the term—that places the utmost value on the enlightened, rational, and peaceful progress of mankind. As he writes, "with the humanist idea we have made an admirable continuation of our past, while the humanist programme invests our national effort with sense and justification."[326] A strong focal point in this teleology for Masaryk is Petr Chelčický, as the key thinker of the Brethren tradition. In Masaryk's view,

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[323] Urbánek & Hrabák 79-80.
[324] See Herben, *Bratr Jan Paleček šašek krále Jiřího* 39-41. The said story appears entitled "Paleček napomenul krále pro pýchu", that is, "Paleček scolds the King for his arrogance."
[325] For a detailed consideration of the implications of the *Czech Question*, see Střítecký, Jaroslav, "The *Czech Question* A Century Later" (Czech Sociological Review, 1995, Vol. 3, No. 1: 59-73).
[326] My translation. Masaryk, Tomáš Garrigue, *Česká otázka: snahy a tužby národního obrození* (Praha: Svoboda, 1990) 186. The original text has: "že ideou humanitní navázali jsme docela správně na svou minulost a že program humanitní všemu našemu snažení národnímu dává smysl a sankci."

> Chelčický became a superior example of a Czech man—clear, consistent, a fearless thinker and worker, at the same time an enemy of violence, Huss and Žižka in a single soul. He was a man profoundly Czech, intact by the learned Latin scholastics, in no way opposed to progress, on the contrary, its warm supporter and advocate.[327]

As a proponent of a distinctly Brethren line of thinking, Paleček, therefore, seems to have become a token of the Masarykian narrative of Czech history that played a nation-building role, constructed as a non-violent, ethical pursuit of truth. This humble early modern fool is seen as a link between this narrative's inception in the teachings of Jan Hus, reconfigured in the pacifist accounts of Petr Chelčický, and the Unity of Brethren, trying to bypass the problem of the Hussite violence that, with its long history of bloody battles, had stained what would have otherwise been a pronouncedly intellectual and progressive trajectory.

With Herben's early 20th century rewriting of the tales in the form of children's literature, Paleček was typecast as harmless reading matter effectively excluded from the serious canon. One exclusion, however, brought about an inclusion into many other contexts and Paleček acquired a large audience once again. Here Eulenspiegel, naturally, springs to mind, and being "spectacularly famous and paradoxically unknown," [328] as Paul Oppenheimer deemed the German jester, is a label that might be used for Paleček as well. Even though no bowdlerisation was needed in transforming the stories of Paleček into a narrative suitable for a young audience, as was the case with Eulenspiegel's scatologically saturated narrative, both have been tamed and domesticated, generically and thematically. The fate of Eulenspiegel can be compared thus to the current popular image of Paleček, insofar as the reimaginings have, in both cases, to a fair degree veiled the hero, detaching him from his early modern context. However, it is mainly thanks to this incarnation that

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[327] My translation. Masaryk 173. In the original we find: "povstal v Chelčickém lepší vzor muže českého—jasný, důsledný, neohrožený myslitel a pracovník a přece nepřítel násilí, Hus a Žižka v jedné duši. Člověk cele český, netknutý latinskou učenou scholastikou, ale nikoliv nepřítel pokroku, naopak vřelý jeho zastánce a šiřitel."
[328] Oppenheimer xxi.

Paleček's story managed to survive and is nowadays still known to a wide and varied readership and Eulenspiegel has his own childproof incarnation to thank, but only partly, for securing him a fate fairly similar.

Herben's Paleček in the children's version must have had more serious readers than one would imagine, as one of them appears to have been Leo Tolstoy. The monumental Russian novelist, as Urbánek reports[329] was acquainted with Herben's version of the tales and they inspired him to write his own story on Paleček. It is possible to assume Tolstoy would have found the stories of Paleček interesting given that they belong to the tradition of the Unity of Brethren, and he was known to have been an admirer of the pacifist philosophy of Petr Chelčický, one of the most famous of the Brothers. Tolstoy's Paleček story remained unpublished, but was translated into Czech by Jozef Kopta in 1935.

In the second part of the 20th century, Paleček became the hero of two historical novels. Author František Kubka built around him *Palečkův úsměv a pláč* (that is, *The Laughter and Tears of Paleček*, published in two parts: *The Laughter* in 1946 and *The Tears* in 1948) stylising the historical character as a picaro of the Eulenspiegel type in the story of the first novel that fabulates his life prior to his meeting King George. The second part, tells the more compact story of the fool and his king. Kubka created an extensive cast of supporting characters around Paleček and furnished him with some mythical characteristics. The plotlines of the two novels inspired a historical musical in 1974, the libretto for which was written by Petr Rada. Thus was the appeal of Paleček tried out within a strand of popular entertainment, proving that, when transfigured, the idea of folly is perfectly capable of remaining marketable for several centuries.

In 1973, Emanuel Frynta, translator, editor and one of the founders of the nonsense tradition in Czech poetry, turned his attention to Paleček and placed him in a peculiar network of witty fools. Frynta was an opponent of repressive Soviet measures that followed the communist takeover in 1948 in then Czechoslovakia, and that saw many intellectuals

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[329] Urbánek & Hrabák 81-82.

persecuted and silenced. This aggravated his possibilities of scholarly activities, so he turned his attention to translation (he translated, among others, Pushkin, Lermontov, Chekhov, and Christian Morgenstern), children's literature, and the poetry of nonsense. His *Moudří blázni* (*Witty Fools*) is an anthology of humorous stories, dedicated to a group of international (Eulenspiegel and Nasreddin) and Czech fools (Kacafírek, Paleček, and the good soldier Švejk). With alterations and adaptations suitable for a youth audience, Frynta presented some of the best-known adventures of these temporally and geographically separated characters, connected through their strivings to "struggle against the harsh authoritarianism of people and circumstances with their feigned folly,"[330] commenting, perhaps, on his own precarious position. Thus, Paleček—like Švejk, but in a mode different from this loveably blundering loquacious storyteller that lacks a moral agenda—becomes a model of shrewd survival in precarious times. They are constructed as typically Czech heroes, equipped with humour as a weapon against hegemony. This tradition of folly will reach one of its singular 20th century pinnacles in the character of Jára Cimrman,[331] the fictional trans-medial genius created in the artistic endeavours of Zdeněk Svěrák and Ladislav Smoljak.

In another attempt of launching Paleček as popular entertainment, in 1988 Eugen Sokolovský directed a children's film made for television, based on his adventures. The character has thereby been translated into different media, his influence reverberating and establishing itself within Czech cultural consciousness. If Pomet is imagined as the quintessential Ragusan, Falstaff as a cherished character of theatre goers, as much as critics, and Eulenspiegel as an emblem of a rigorous, vigorous comic stamina, Paleček is in his own way a peculiar link to the proud and princely Bohemian past, still so palpably apparent in the streets and byways of Prague and the many castles scattered throughout the country. Not unlike the inescapable Jan Hus, for many who live immersed in Czech culture he is a

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[330] Frynta, Emanuel, *Moudří blázni* (Praha: Albatros, 1984) 124. The original states that "svým předstíraným hlupáctvím bojovali se surovou autoritou lidí a poměrů," and brings this line in quotation marks, not stating where the quote might have been taken from. This could easily be an omission, but could also be taken as a shrewdly intentional distancing from the statement's implications.

[331] For an account of the convoluted background of this character, who won the contest for the greatest Czech personality in a BBC-licensed survey, see Brzezińska, Anna, "Mystification in Czech cinematography and Czech culture" in: *Pro Scientia Publica*, *Journal of Education, Culture and Society* No. 2, 2013: 309-315, esp. 311-313.

reminder, or at least a vague association, of the singular events that once shook the country, but even more perhaps, he is an enduring symbol of folly, that eternally recurrent concept that enchants as much as it repels.

IV.v. Conclusion: Folly as Holy

The portrait of Paleček this chapter has painted is a shifting image of a protean construct, paradoxical even, and those are the qualities he shares with the three other figures of folly in this study. What set Paleček apart and allowed for an examination of a very specific employment of folly in European early modernity is the fact that he is a pronouncedly Christian fool. That is, a Christian and a fool on the same level and simultaneously, a figure suspended between these two traditions that are far less incongruous than they might have at first appeared. As a character, he is an axis of a text that pivots around him, turning now to religion, now to politics, or to entertainment, always remaining in the realm of laughter. Furthermore, the laughter that the Paleček text utilises is, in Screech's terms, primarily "a vehicle for Christian joy, Christian preaching, or the propagation of Christian truth."[332] This puts the humble text of his *Histories* in the company of the great Renaissance minds who chose to spread serious ideas utilising laughter, such as Erasmus and Rabelais.

Being a fool, Paleček in the text subverts the supposedly natural, commonsensical way of thinking, negates it, and forces his collocutors into realising that "common sense" is not a category that works any more. Just as much as Paleček himself, as a character within the textual world where folly reigns, deterritorialises language, invents it anew, and mobilises it to affect reality, the *Histories* push the impulse of deterritorialisation of expression even further. On one level, they enrich the language they were written in, the language that no longer belonged to the persecuted Brethren who ensured the Paleček legend be preserved by recording the tales and fertilising them with Christian symbolism, weaving through the text

[332] Screech, M. A., *Laughter at the Foot of the Cross* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999) xxiii.

the messages of Christ's good news, and their own political agenda. On another level, having the Paleček character inextricably bound to folly ensured the text of the *Histories* a direct link to the doctrine of *stultitia Dei*. This opened up a revolutionary potential of the text, springing from the revolutionary potential of Christianity, and gave its message a claim to validity, no matter the context. The fact that the Paleček character is still so closely connected to the discourse of historical veracity not only illustrates the need for legitimisation of historical struggles through imbuing various narratives with an epistemological claim, but also adds to the importance of the text's involvement with the folly of God.

When compared to three other fellows of infinite jest in this study, Paleček is not as sardonic as Falstaff sometimes appears in his self-serving loquaciousness, nor is he smug like Pomet, that tamer of Fortune. He does not open his body up to leave an audacious mark on the world and entice gratuitous laughter, as Eulenspiegel does. He is perfectly programmed to follow the folly of his Christian ideals—the folly of God, of Christianity, of the Brethren. He was made a fool so that the foolish message that underlies the religion he is speaking for would shine brighter and wiser. His folly is utilitarian and pointed: were he not a fool, the moralising message of the text would have lost its edge and appeal. He is laughed at, just as Christ was laughed at and ridiculed, but is written so as to extort the last laugh, as the Christian message he seeks to spread is a message of great joy. Ultimately, what Paleček proves, and what chimes in with the other three examples in this study, is how reductive it is to conceive of folly as jest, as it is hardly ever just jest.

V. Falstaff and the Folly of Play

> [T]he brain of this foolish-compounded clay, man, is not able to invent anything that tends to laughter, more than I invent or is invented on me: I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men.
>
> *2 Henry IV*, I.ii.5-9

V.i. Introduction: Purposes and Follies

"In every thing the purpose must weigh with the folly," (*2 Henry IV*, II.ii.168-69) Prince Hal announces with conviction to Poins at the very end of scene II, ii of *2 Henry IV*. This is the Prince's first appearance on the stage in this part, and the two of them had just conspired to play yet another prank on Falstaff. On Poins' proposal, Hal has consented to a "low transformation" (*2HIV*: II.ii.168-9). At hostess Quickly's tavern, they plan to disguise themselves as drawers, to wait on Falstaff and catch him unawares as he suspends his customary bravado and lays bare his "true colours" (*2HIV*, II.ii.163).

That the Prince should opine such transformation to be low is in accordance with previous episodes. In *1 Henry IV*, at the humorous height of his unruly days, the Prince had voiced his opinion on "the very bass string of humility" (*1HIV*, II.iv.5-6) that the drawers are, just before subjecting one of them, the unsuspecting Francis, to unkind whims of his royal humours, reducing him to parrot-like iterations of "Anon, anon, sir" (*1HIV*, II.iv.43). Drawers and kings hardly belong together, and their mingling seems to result in nothing but folly. Once executed, Poins' newly planned masquerading escapade will on different levels be Hal's ultimate. By reassuming his role of disguised nemesis he had previously played in the humorously botched Gad's Hill robbery, it will allow the masked Prince to unmask Falstaff and stare in the face of his unlikely companion's cowardice and hypocrisy.

Apart from this, however, it will mark the end to the Prince's mischievous behaviour, as thenceforth he will neither participate in further frolics at Eastcheap, nor share the stage with Falstaff again, before renouncing him publicly as the crowned King in the play's finale.

The folly of Hal's masquerade has in this case a very plain purpose: to provide idle jest in the intermission between battles, while the throne is still occupied, and Hal still values the procrastination of responsibility. He and Poins know Falstaff well—they are expecting him to blunder, and consequently lie and hyperbolize in order to escape the expected predicament, thus producing entertainment value. Such unprincely behaviour will be rewarded with a momentary escape from the demands of duty and the cruelty of war. And thus the Prince's purpose will indeed come to weigh with his feigned folly.

Yet the jesting Prince is further justified by an ulterior motive: the seemingly harmless joke is bound to expose the grotesque champion of Hal's "rude society" (*1HIV*, III.ii.14). It wishes to reveal Falstaff is a deceitful parasite who seeks personal advancement through association with Hal's "princely heart" (III.ii.17). If Falstaff is a fake, Hal's own performance of England's prodigal son gains ever more validity. Therefore, a far greater purpose is in the course of the two parts of *Henry IV* unravelling as being weighed with the folly of literally gargantuan proportions. It is Hal's true purpose that is central to the two plays. As early as *1 Henry IV*, I.ii., Hal briefly lifts his own mask for the benefit of the audience and delivers a manifesto of his solitary enterprise of regal self-fashioning. The famous monologue is unique in the play as the only rendered in verse, which makes it all the more resonant. Its opening lines sum up his impending transformation:

I know you all, and will awhile uphold
The unyoked humour of your idleness.
Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
To smother up his beauty from the world,
That, when he please again to be himself,
Being wanted, he may be more wonder'd at,
By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
Of vapours that did seem to strangle him. (I.ii.185-193)

Hal institutes himself as the proverbial regal sun, albeit one in a precarious historical constellation that includes his father, the current King, but also Richard II before him. Richard, the "glistering Phaethon," (*Richard II*: III.iii.178) saw his own anointment as natural and the language he spoke was, as James Calderwood conceptualized it "a language of names invested with automatic truth and consonance to nature, […] a thought-benumbing collection of verbal signs pinned to a dead universe of things."[333] Before Bolingbroke could become Henry IV, it was necessary to sever this prelapsarian language from nature, equally as it was necessary to dissociate "Richard" from "King" and—almost—sever what becomes a mere "hollow crown" (*Richard II*, III.ii.160) off of Richard's head. Being an heir apparent, Hal is removed from the counterfeit state of his father, yet capable of taking advantage of truth that shines all the brighter by being counterpoised to lies. This is a legacy of which Hal is well aware, and already in his first soliloquy he starts taking advantage of it by parading his intelligence and rhetorical savvy.

Hal goes on to confess wilful action, and distances himself from "you all," (*1HIV*, I.ii.185) who are "base contagious" (I.ii.188), "foul and ugly" (I.ii.192). He is speaking primarily of Falstaff and Poins, who had retreated from the stage successively, and the base milieu they represent. However, it might not be too outlandish to claim that by "you all" Hal may be implying the audience as well. Sounding their compliance through laughter, at that very moment they would likely still be revelling in the atmosphere his interplay with Falstaff had conjured, their mirth freezing abruptly as Hal's verses are pronounced. Following this prologue, through cold calculation, governing his actions and carefully controlling his words, Hal will embark on a two-play-long mission to construct the perfect regal persona of the future Henry V.

The scale of such a purpose requires the employment of what is arguably the most carefully constructed figure of folly in the Shakespearean canon. It requires the invention of Falstaff as the epitome of folly in *Henry IV*. In this chapter, I shall read Falstaff as a great

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[333] Calderwood, James L. *Metadrama in Shakespeare's Henriad: Richard II to Henry V* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1979) 65.

thespian and the player of folly: one in whom the folly of play becomes transparent. As Kiernan Ryan suggests: "Falstaff can indeed merely invert; he cannot transcend that official world, which beholds in him its mirror image, its secret sharer, not its negation or displacement."[334] In playing the folly, Falstaff, therefore becomes the play itself, the perpetual enactment of the world around him; the world he refracts through the prism of folly. He takes the play too far and his demise might likely come from that very quality of his. He is, after all, the only one of the four players I have introduced in this thesis, who will be explicitly rejected. Falstaff's folly is, likewise, in a particular sense connected to the pragmatic use of lie in political discourse. In this chapter, I shall read the mendacity Falstaff will come to symbolize as instrumental in affirming Hal's reformed kingship.

The choice of Falstaff as the Prince's boon companion is far from arbitrary, and Falstaff's perennial prominence is likely as much a consequence of the role he plays in the general design of the two plays, as of his expertise in this performance. By playing this role exceptionally well, Falstaff absorbs the projections of wickedness cast onto him by the princely sun in the making. He is a player: he behaves in such a way in order to justify all expectations triggered by his bad reputation and the Prince's fancy, and embodies folly large enough to justify the seriousness of the ultimate purpose. In order to solidify his sworn reformation, the Prince will conclude his transformation in an act of exorcism against the "old, white-bearded Satan" (*1HIV*, II.iv.451) and finally banish "plump Jack" (*1HIV*, II.iv.467).

As for my own purpose in this chapter, I shall consider some of the many faces of a player of folly as peculiar as Falstaff of the *Henriad*. I shall examine the evolution of his meanings: what he was as well as what he has come to be, reconsider his role in the world of the two plays, especially in relation to Hal. In conclusion, I shall offer a comment on future possibilities of reading Falstaff as a figure of folly in constant flux, perpetually striving to outplay his previous performances. In order to do that, and to capture an open, shifting

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[334] Ryan, Kiernan, *Shakespeare* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2002) 64.

structure akin to the three previous examples of my thesis, I shall suggest a reading of Falstaff's folly of play in the context of Deleuze and Guattari's nomad thought.

V.ii. Plump Jack's Perennial Appeal

His reputation being as huge as his fictional person, Sir John Falstaff has been proclaimed many a time throughout the history of reception as likely one of the most loved[335] of Shakespearean characters. While such assertions may generally be useful in determining the pulse of the audience at a given historical moment, they invariably prove to be somewhat difficult to verify. One proof of popularity could be sought in the fact that the 1598 first quarto of *1 Henry IV* prominently displays the subtitle "With the humorous conceits of Sir Iohn Falstaffe" on its title page. The printed play itself was a bestseller of its time. It went through two editions in the year of its textual premiere, and was reprinted thrice in Shakespeare's lifetime, exceeding print runs of all his other plays.

On stage it fared no worse, it seems. First performed around 1596, ample historical evidence[336] suggests it remained the staple of the repertoires, predominantly English, but performed elsewhere as well, ever since the 17th century. This does indeed suggest that some of the popularity of *1 Henry IV* must have been borne on Falstaff's broad shoulders. The sequel did not repeat this remarkable success in print, yet "sir Iohn Falstaffe's humours" are still featured on the title page of the 1600 quarto, the only edition of the play published during Shakespeare's life. On that occasion, however, Falstaff was made to share space with the "swaggering Pistol" in the subtitle.

Falstaff's invincible wit has since its inception secured him a number of famous admirers, first among which could have been Queen Elizabeth herself. The inescapable

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[335] Early audiences certainly cherished Falstaff. As David Scott Kastan informs us, "[a]lmost immediately, the play became Falstaff's." For a further elucidation of the shifting affinities to the fat knight, see Scott Kastan, David "Introduction" in *King Henry IV, Part 1* 81-96, here 81.
[336] See Kastan, "Introduction," especially subchapter "The play in performance" 76-106.

historical anecdote that gained currency in the early 18th century was told for the first time by John Dennis in the Introduction to his 1702 *Comical Gallant*,[337] an adaptation of *The Merry Wives*. It was repeated in print by Nicholas Rowe in his 1709 edition of Shakespeare's works.[338] The anecdote has the Queen so well pleased with Falstaff that she commissions a play portraying the fat knight in love. This was, presumably, the inception of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, a farce composed, as the legend has it, in a fortnight. In *The Merry Wives* Falstaff's character departs substantially from the model established in the histories. Historical reliability of this anecdote has long ago lost currency. What is more of an issue is its endurance, the perennial appeal of folly and play: it shows how easy it presumably is to believe that even a monarch would have been partial towards the fictional rascal. What is more, the very existence of an additional play that acts as a vessel for a character of Falstaff's proportions attests at least to his marketability, if not merit.

In the long history of his existence in the cultural field, Falstaff has departed from his original theatrical context many a time. He has been the subject matter to numerous visual artists[339] for centuries; he has inspired various literary spin-offs speculating on his life outside of the Shakespearean action; his farcical tomfoolery from *The Merry Wives* has been very successfully transported into the operatic medium[340], not only by Verdi, albeit most famously; Edward Elgar composed a symphonic study around the key events of *1* and *2 Henry IV* in 1913; Falstaff made it onto the silver screen in different incarnations;[341] and even tangentially became a part of the so-called Marvel Universe of fictional comic-book

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[337] Dennis, John, *The Comical Gallant,* (London: Cornmarket Press, 1969 [1709]).

[338]Rowe's introduction to his edition of Shakespeare is available online as: Rowe, Nicholas, *Some Account of the Life of Mr. William Shakespear (1709)* (Project Guttenberg, 12 July 2005 <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16275/16275-h/16275-h.htm> 13 July 2014).

[339] The 19th century especially loved Falstaff—he was often taken up by genre painters, such as Adolf Schrödter in 1841, Eduard von Grützner in 1896, or Philip Francis Stephanoff c. 1840; while George Cruikshank made a series of etchings to illustrate Robert B. Brough's 1858 *The Life of Sir John Falstaff*. See Brough, Robert B, and George Cruikshank, *The Life of Sir John Falstaff: A Biography of the Knight from Authentic Sources* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858).

[340] The year 1799 saw Antonio Salieri's *Falstaff, ossia le tre burle*; Carl Otto Nicolai's *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor* were first performed in 1849; Verdi's *Falstaff* premiered in 1893; Ralph Vaughan Williams composed *Sir John in Love* in the late 1920s; and even Gordon Getty had taken up the subject in his 1984 *Plump Jack*.

[341] Falstaff made it into Laurence Olivier's 1944 *Henry V*, as well as Kenneth Branagh's 1989 version of the same play, Orson Welles immortalized him in his own performance in the 1966 *Chimes At Midnight*, and Gus Van Sant renamed him Bob Pigeon for his 1991 film, *My Own Private Idaho*.

characters by directly inspiring Volstagg,[342] the somewhat less flawed companion to the eponymous hero of *Thor*.

Critical regard for the foolish fat knight follows popular opinion closely, if not always in sentiment, then certainly in the amount of attention he has so far received. As early as 1777, Falstaff became the theme of the very first book-length study[343] of his character, when Maurice Morgann meticulously argued for his misread valour. Throughout the dusty old tomes of character criticism, Falstaff was celebrated as vigorously as he was chastised; his genealogy was carefully established and scrupulously rebuked many a time; and his role in the peculiar structural arrangement of the second tetralogy was discussed nearly *ad nauseam*. As often happens, critical consensus was hardly ever established, and Falstaff has been approached from so many different angles that his intertextual portrayal resembles a uniquely protean beast, whose malleability seems to allow him to fit into numerous moulds.

Alfred Ainger recognized in Falstaff the Vice of the morality plays, who "was invariably a comic character; not at all with any view to make light of sin, but in order thereby to make sin contemptible. Just so the fat knight Oldcastle [i.e., Falstaff] would be sure to be made as ridiculous as possible for popular presentation."[344] This line of descent carries great meaning, has many adherents,[345] and is prompted explicitly by Falstaff himself identifying with the Vice through his weapon of choice, in his characteristically pompous bluster: "If I do not beat thee out of thy kingdom with a dagger of lath, and drive all thy subjects afore thee like a flock of wild geese, I'll never wear hair on my face more"[346] (*1HIV*, II.iv.130-33). Enid Welsford saw in Falstaff the pinnacle of the buffoon tradition of "the

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[342] Volstagg was created by Jack Kirby, one of the doyens of American comic book scene, and was first introduced into the plot of *Thor* in August 1965. See, for instance, Kirby, Jack, *Journey into Mystery*, #119 (New York: Canam Publishers Sales Corp., August, 1965).
[343] See Morgann, Maurice, *An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff* (London: printed for T. Davies, 1777).
[344] Ainger, Alfred, *Lectures and Essays, Volume 1*. (London: Macmillan and co., ltd, 1905) 129.
[345] See, for example, Wilson, John Dover *The Fortunes of Falstaff* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943); Bethell, Samuel Leslie, *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition* (New York: Staples Press, 1948); Spivack, Bernard *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to His Major Villains* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968); Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly*.
[346] *1 Henry IV*: 2.4.130-33.

incorrigibly impudent rouges, the irrepressible mischief-makers"[347] whose "gross men of the earth […] knew well that the normal physical functions of the body have always provided the human race with an inexhaustible source of merriment."[348] H.C. Goddard resorted to mythical explications, claiming that Falstaff carried "the proportions of a mythological figure. He seems at times more like a god than a man. His very solidity is solar, his rotundity comic."[349]

Northrop Frye discerned another very important type in the braggart knight, one that will become one of Falstaff's most faithful labels. As Frye writes, "Falstaff is a mock king, a lord of misrule and his tavern is a Saturnalia."[350] C.L. Barber took up this path in a discussion of the festive elements in the *Henriad* that is perhaps the most well known of its kind. He similarly advocated the Saturnalian view, but modified the designation of Falstaff, who remains a lord of misrule, but not quite. Barber maintained that "he is not properly a holiday lord, but a *de facto* buffoon who makes his way by continually seizing, catch as catch can, on what names and meanings the moment offers."[351] Barber is speaking here of the world of the play and Falstaff's qualities within it, yet I would extend this claim of Falstaff's semiotic opportunism to include his status in the critical reception.

It is quite probable that the character of Falstaff does indeed share lineage with all the cultural and literary types identified here, even if Shakespeare was completely unsuspecting of what kind of a hybrid creation he succeeded in constructing. Eulenspiegel, the first fool I encountered on my journey, can parallel such a multitude of influences easily. Yet deciding that Falstaff is simply a Vice figure—quite like deciding that Eulenspiegel is merely a hero of a simple late-medieval chapbook; that Pomet is a witty servant of the commedia erudita

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[347] Welsford 50.
[348] Welsford 51.
[349] Goddard, Harold Clarke, *The Meaning of Shakespeare, Volume 1* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960) 178.
[350] Frye, Northrop, Troni Yvette Grande, and Garry Sherbert. *Northrop Frye's Writings on Shakespeare and the Renaissance* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2010) 11.
[351] Barber 225.

tradition; and Paleček a court jester and nothing more—undermines the potentialities of the original texts and the deliberate openness brought about by the use of early modern folly.

My short list of Falstaffian possibilities harks back to a long history of critical inquiry and merely presents a sketch of what is already accomplished. What I would suggest, is to take Falstaff as a vast unmarked territory made up of language. All the past readers tackle this Falstaffian territory and project onto it their mappings. Every age and every critical school has its Falstaff, much like Eulenspiegel, Pomet and Paleček are transformed in the hands of new critical readers, theatrical and film directors, artists and audiences.

When we take all the different mappings together, they prove highly unstable, often overlapping and infinitely combinatorial. Yet, the image that emerges from these mappings is still not exhaustive, leaving plenty of territory to be covered and recombined by the visions of Falstaff to come. One of the key reasons for such an abundance of readings that Falstaff prompted is surely to be sought in Falstaff's love of play. He can be viewed as akin to Cleopatra—that other great thespian of Shakespeare's, excessive and foolish like Falstaff himself, but unlike him guided by love—famously characterised by Enobarbus, proclaiming that "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale / Her infinite variety" (*Antony and Cleopatra*, II.ii.245-246). The infinite variety embodied in Falstaff, his propensity for play and gratuitous enjoyment in jest, clearly beckons an equal variety of readings. Another factor to be reckoned with when considering the many layers of the great player-fool is the fact that many discourses were drawn upon in the creation of Falstaff. Therefore, it is time to consider some of these.

V.iii. Falstaff's Background

Historical approaches to the knavish knight have sifted out certain important components of the character, worth examining in some detail. To start with, Falstaff was not always Falstaff. It is now a commonly accepted fact that the early modern audiences, with or without the

Queen, must have enjoyed the antics of the fat knight that take up roughly a third of the two plays, knowing Falstaff under a different name. Initially, as is now very well documented,[352] Shakespeare had named Falstaff Sir John Oldcastle, paralleling the boastful knight familiarly known as Jockey, who appears in *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*, one of Shakespeare's primary sources for the *Henriad* and an anonymous play performed in the 1580s by the Queen's Men.

Oldcastle himself, however, had been built upon a very real model: the Lollard martyr publicly executed in 1417 for heresy and an alleged plot against Henry V, his one-time friend.[353] In the process of historical refiguring, Oldcastle's initial notoriety was cast aside and he was appropriated by the emerging ideology of the Church of England in Shakespeare's time, a context in which he became an important historical figure. In retrospect, however, critics would at times find the conjunction of a proto-Protestant martyr

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[352] Richard James mentions the change of Oldcastle's name to Falstaff in his *Epistle to Sir Harry Bourchier* in 1625, and so does Thomas Fuller in *Worthies of England* in 1662. Traces of the change are also present in the texts of Shakespeare's plays. In of *1 Henry IV*, Prince Hal calls Falstaff "my old lad of the castle" (I.ii.42); the 1600 quarto of *2 Henry IV* has one of Falstaff's speeches in I.ii. prefixed "Old." instead of "Falst;" Justice Shallow mentions in the same play that Falstaff had been a "page to Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk" (III.ii.25-6) an assumption that is sometimes singled out as true of the historical Oldcastle, as well as of the historical Fastolf who presumably supplied Falstaff with a new name; and also, several iambic pentameter lines in both parts are irregular when using the name Falstaff, but correct with Oldcastle. For a more comprehensive discussion of Falstaff as Oldcastle, see Scott Kastan, David "Introduction" in *King Henry IV, Part 1* 51-62.

[353] This Oldcastle, the historical Sir John Oldcastle, was fictionalized on the Elizabethan stage in a couple of plays bearing his name, of which only the first part remains. Printed in 1600, and again in 1619, this play is a part of the so-called Shakespeare Apocrypha, a number of plays attributed to Shakespeare by various editorial or later critical processes, but whose attribution remains disputable. Peter Kirwan has shown, in an unpublished article "'The doubtful title, gentlemen, prefixed:' Paratextual Truth Claims and Authenticity in the 'Shakespeare Apocrypha,'" presented at the conference Early Modern Paratexts held on 26 July 2013 at the University of Bristol, that the paratextual attribution of *1 Sir John Oldcastle* to Shakespeare on the title page of the 1619 edition, wrongfully dated 1600, is a historical trace of the publisher's act of appropriation and not necessarily solid historical proof. The play-text of *1 Sir John Oldcastle* distances itself from Shakespeare's Falstaff in its very Prologue that states: "It is no pampered glutton we present, / Nor aged Counsellor to youthful sin" (*1 Sir John Oldcastle*, Prologue 6-7), and goes on to dramatize the events in life of John Oldcastle, portraying him as a religious dissenter quarreling with the Roman Catholic Church. The play is set during the reign of Henry V and shows a botched-up rebellion against the King led by predominantly comical characters of Acton, Beverly and Murley and does not associate Oldcastle with this political uprising. It ends on a conciliatory note, with the events of Oldcastle's prosecution and subsequent martyrdom presumably enacted in the second part, now lost. The play also contains a minor character of Sir John of Wrotham, a corrupted priest who keeps a concubine named Doll and is something of a Falstaffian persona, but in truth a far cry from Falstaff himself. It is, however, through the character of Sir John Oldcastle that this play is connected to the *Henriad*, even if their two Oldcastles hardly overlap. See Munday, Anthony, Michael Drayton, Robert Wilson, Richard Hathway and Percy Simpson, *The Life of Sir John Oldcastle, 1600* (Oxford: V. Ridler at the University Press, 1963).

and a gluttonous carnivalesque figure of folly outright perplexing, given its blatant incongruity.

Kristen Poole[354] recently offered a highly plausible solution to this historical puzzle. She explains that, since Lollardy in the late 16th century became increasingly connected with religious extremism, what such an approach in fact signalized was a parody of the Puritan rhetoric. In Poole's own words: "Falstaff does not, therefore, parody the self-styled saints in a determined, wilful way. Rather Falstaff—in and of himself—is a parodic representation of a 'Puritan.'"[355]

The Oldcastle-Falstaff would have been recognized by his amused audience as emerging from a tradition of farcical figures caricaturing the Puritan in the polemical responses to the Martin Marprelate pamphlets. The character of Martin Marprelate was something of an icon in his time. In his critique of contemporary clergy, the fictitious Martin exploded onto the public sphere by employing for his purposes the sharp blade of folly. This had as a curious outcome—it made Martin immensely popular, not merely among sympathizers of his cause. The obvious retaliation of the authorities was to commission some of the equally skilled University Wits to cross swords with Martin. From their responses emerged a literary and theatrical type of a duplicitous Puritan, who boastfully expresses his virtuosity, yet secretly enjoys the wickedest of vices, upon which the Oldcastle character was built.

The historical medieval knight, however, had living descendants who enjoyed considerable power in Elizabethan England. Before long, they decided to exercise influence and demand sanctions for the play that portrayed their celebrated predecessor as a crude carnival clown. Under pressure, Oldcastle was nominally purged from the play in print. Performance, however, was a different matter. Yet, his absent presence continues to cast a shadow on at least one of Falstaff's excessive dimensions to this day. For instance, in 1986,

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[354] See Poole, Kristen. *Radical Religion from Shakespeare to Milton: Figures of Nonconformity in Early Modern England*. 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 16-45.
[355] Poole 37.

Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor made an editorial decision to restore the name of Oldcastle in *1 Henry IV* in the Oxford edition of *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*,[356] in an attempt to rehistoricize the play and newly bring to surface a buried dimension of the character. Whether such a decision is ultimately valid is difficult to say, especially given that the epilogue of *2 Henry IV* decisively deals with the issue of banishing Oldcastle, presumingly in order to put to rest the naming controversy. It states, quite bluntly that "for Oldcastle died a martyr and this is not the man" (*2HIV*, 31-32). Nonetheless, the act of reinstating Oldcastle into a text as authoritative as the Oxford edition of Shakespeare certainly draws attention to the dynamic quality of the Shakespearean canon. Not only were the play-texts radically unfixed at the time of their creation, they remain quite unstable even in our utterly historicized present.

The original Oldcastle became the Falstaff that we know probably through appropriation of the name of another medieval knight: Sir John Fastolf, who had a fairly prosperous and long military career. As history has it, Fastolf fought in many important battles of his day, among them the Battle of Patay against the French led by Joan of Arc, which the English lost. At Patay he was forced to flee and desert the army led by sir John Talbot in order to save his men. Shakespeare had taken up this episode in *1 Henry VI*, where Fastolf is portrayed as the antipode to the brave Talbot, whose cowardice caused Talbot's imprisonment by the French. A humiliated traitor, Fastolf is in the play stripped of his garter and exiled by the King upon pain of death. The historical Fastolf is also very curiously connected to the fictional Falstaff—the new incarnation of Oldcastle—through his ownership of an inn called the Boar's Head in Southwark in London.[357] Falstaff's favourite provider of sack on Eastcheap is, of course, known under the same name.

These connections may be deemed as fairly loose, yet they once again foreground the complexity of the famous player of folly. What, after all, is in a name, one might wonder.

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[356] See Wells, Stanley and Gary Taylor, eds. *William Shakespeare, the Complete Works* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1986).
[357] Harriss, G. L., "Fastolf, Sir John (1380–1459)" *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. (Oxford: Oxford UP, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9199> 29 Aug. 2013).

Closely looking at the name of Falstaff, even it in itself becomes an emblem of his ill-founded boastfulness and a herald of his ultimate demise. Precarious and shaky throughout, at the end of the play, his staff will definitely fall. The curious correlation with Shake-speare's own name has been noted before, but apart from its curiosity, it remains generally shaky.

In a different, typically new-historicist attempt to tease out overlooked aspects of Falstaff's connections to early modern reality and shed a new light on Shakespeare's possible original inspiration, Stephen Greenblatt took a different turn. He built a compelling case that connects Falstaff to the central figure of the university wits—the circle of poets writing for the London stage in the late 16th century—namely, Robert Greene.[358] Greene was in his day notorious for his debauched, alcohol-fuelled lifestyle, as well as remarkably sharp wit and a personality of a lapsing addict. He was living a bohemian self-mythologizing life in London's taverns, having left behind his wife named Doll. Squandering whatever he would earn, the condition of Greene's purse must have been akin to Falstaff's, when he complains: "I can get no remedy against this consumption of the purse: borrowing only lingers and lingers it out, but the disease is incurable" (*2HIV*, I.ii.237-239).

Greene was neither the most talented, nor the most successful of the group, yet in his time he was certainly the most outspoken. One of the attitudes this Oxbridge graduate—and therefore a "proper" gentleman—was his snobbish insisting on differentiating between players and poets. Shakespeare, at the beginning of his career and at the time of the university wits' greatest successes, would not have been considered a poet at all. He was one of the players, he wrote for the players and he infamously lacked a university education. He must have, however, become acquainted with the group, especially following the success of their collaborative *Henry VI* trilogy. And the group, on their part, could have seen him as unfair competition. The posthumous *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit*—published by Henry Chettle who vigorously advocated Greene's dubious authorship of the pamphlet—dramatically argues the poets should

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[358] See Greenblatt, Stephen, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005) 216-25.

> trust them not: for there is an vpstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and beeing an absolute Iohannes fac totum, is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a country.[359]

These oft-quoted lines certainly attest to the possibility of some form of annoyance with Shakespeare's success.

What Greenblatt suggests is that the upstart "Shake-scene" could have retaliated in works of his own. If so, he could have done it in a fictional portrayal of a curiously endearing but boastful, sinful, alcoholic, lying, wasteful and cowardly rogue extremely skilled at performing linguistic acrobatics: his own vision of Robert Greene in the character of Falstaff. Yet again, as compelling as it may be, neither does this assertion drain all the meaning out of "that trunk of humours" (*1HIV*, II.iv.437), nor does Greenblatt claim so himself. Falstaff is a carefully constructed composite of sources, a fusion of voices and discourses, brought together in a bombastic disciple of Folly that is also remarkably successful at generating critical commentary. Like the other three cases thus far presented, he is a magnet for interpretation and yet another proof that early modern players of folly favour openness and plurality.

When considering openness and plurality, a mere mention of Falstaff is likely to trigger connotations of mirth and foolery typically associated with the carnival. He is commonly perceived as the prime example of the festive realm of the tavern in the two plays. The tavern in *Henry IV* is a conspicuously early modern setting, where sack flows and jest is the prime motivator, a realm removed from the sombre medieval values of the world of players in the history action. The ostensibly sharp contrast between the two realms represented in the plays and the fact that Falstaff is, obviously, the central proponent of the tavern world in the *Henriad* guides the predominantly celebratory interpretations of the

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[359] Chettle, Henry, Robert Greene, and Daniel Allen Carroll, *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit: Bought with a Million of Repentance (1592)* (New York: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1994) 84.

character. "[T]he apostle of permanent festivity"[360] as François Laroque dubbed him in *Shakespeare's Festive World*, Falstaff is at times viewed as festival incarnate. Indeed, a festive interpretation of Falstaff and his banishment has been influential for a long while now, not merely since C.L. Barber's aforementioned *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*.

One of the most resilient festive types identified in Falstaff is the Lord of Misrule. As an element of ancient festive tradition, the Lord of Misrule would be an elected ruler of the Christmas-time Feast of Fools who presided over various festive revelries, in the pagan tradition of Roman Saturnalia. For the duration of the festivities, the Lord of Misrule was granted subversive authority to issue orders as he pleased. At the end of the designated thirty days, however, the mock king was known to be sacrificed at the altar of Saturn, for the benefit of the community. This practice trickled down and survived in mutated forms in various medieval and early modern ritualized festivities, where in the cyclically conceptualized passing of time every accession presupposed a downfall and every ending anticipated a new beginning.

Barber, one of the most prominent advocates of the festive image of Falstaff, contends that "the Falstaff comedy, far from being forced into an alien environment of historical drama, is begotten by that environment, giving and taking meaning as it grows. […] Shakespeare dramatizes not only holiday but also the need for holiday and the need to limit holiday."[361] Whereas it used to be customary to read Falstaff's narrative thread in the two parts of *Henry IV* as a satirizing mirror-image of the historical events in the plays, Barber sees the dynamic relation between the historical and the comedic action as saturnalian, Falstaff's misrule functioning as a safety-valve, and his subsequent banishment as a consolidation of the newly established rational rule of Hal as King.

Since Barber was writing before the Anglo-American (re)discovery of Bakhtinian thought, an obvious temptation would be to build upon this saturnalian interpretation and

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[360] Laroque, François, *Shakespeare's Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage,* trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991 [1988]) 236.
[361] Barber 219.

employ carnivalesque theory to read Falstaff and his championing of the lower bodily stratum as emblematic of a carnivalesque worldview that celebrates the vitality of the popular, of life, and renewal, as a number of critics have done. In such a reading, the tavern realm over which Falstaff presides indeed *becomes* the lower bodily stratum of the play as a whole, pitched against the cold and calculated mind absorbed into the political everydayness that Hal will come to represent. This reading would endorse the Falstaffian festival as a subversive strand that, even though seemingly overcome at the end, ultimately continues to destabilize any authoritative power that threatens to contain it. "Carnival, like the king, never dies,"[362] concludes Laroque in his largely Bakhtinian analysis of the Falstaff-Hal dichotomy.

As satisfactory in its symmetry as it may seem, the carnivalesque interpretation does suffer from certain instabilities, if taken too far. While it is true that Falstaff appeals to the popular taste, he can hardly be said to represent the people. Taking Falstaff to be an embodiment of the carnivalesque does not account for his pronounced self-reliance, or for the fact that none of his lines actually echo any kind of coherent popular voice. His rampant individualism, as many of his other properties, is deeply contradictory. Two of the things he seemingly indulges the most, namely laughter and sack-drinking, are both ubiquitous social lubricants that presuppose communality.

Paradoxically communal, Falstaff is far from being a spirit of the people. If anything, he is a detached commentator who seems unaffected by interests other than his own. A case in point is the soliloquy on how he had "misused the King's press damnably" (*1HIV*, IV.ii.12-13) that exposes the unfair ways of the Elizabethan recruiting system. The soliloquy in question,[363] that in times less politically correct than our own must have generated roars of laughter from the audience, employs his habitual rhetoric of excess to lampoon the unfortunate, the lowest class of society.

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[362] Laroque, François, "Shakespeare's "Battle of Carnival and Lent": The Falstaff Scenes Reconsidered" in Knowles, Ronald, ed. *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin* (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 1998) 95.
[363] *1 Henry IV*, IV.ii.10-47.

Quite like his discourse, Falstaff's laughter is nowhere near the carnival laughter of all the people, as Bakhtin conceptualized it in *Rabelais and his World*.[364] That is, the communal laughter that includes and engulfs everyone and is timeless in nature, rather than directed toward isolated events. Conversely, Falstaff uses laughter precisely to ridicule individuals and isolated events, and does so to gain personal advantage. As Indira Ghose has shown in her excellent study *Shakespeare and Laughter*,[365] Falstaff's laughter is often an end in itself, and his satirizing antics face "the danger inherent in any satire—that of spilling over into sheer entertainment."[366] Which supports my thesis that Falstaff's folly is the folly of play, an early modern exploration of the limits foolish discourse. As much as plurality seems to be at their centre, carnivalesque readings of Falstaff at times tend to curb this very plurality in favour of representing him as a fixed figure of reckless, celebratory carnival.

Aside from his erroneous correlation with the popular spirit of the carnival, Falstaff's festive character may be viewed as un-carnivalesque on yet another level. His festive character has a darker side that can be described as a degeneration of the carnivalesque and is closely related to the concept of time. Characterized by liminality, Falstaff is located at the closure of a popular tradition and the beginning of a new order—one represented by Hal, the redeemer of time—and one that cannot (or will not) accommodate him. This locus converges with the transformation of the carnival, the process that saw the constraining of festivals into temporally bound forms regulated by economic exchange. It is the time when the opposition between the holiday and the everyday gets a stronger expression and the state starts to exercise control over their alternation, curbing the jest and disciplining potential subversion.

The corrupt carnival, and by extension the corrupt brand of folly, that Falstaff exemplifies can be viewed as a product of the transformation of the social time that Bakhtin described in *The Dialogic Imagination* as unifying, productive and generative. This form of time Bakhtin located within the pre-class agricultural stage of social development that gets

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[364] See Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, esp. chapter "Rabelais in the history of laughter" 59-144.
[365] See Ghose 156-63.
[366] Ghose 158.

articulated in later literature, especially the folkloric bases of the Rabelaisian chronotope.[367] Bakhtin emphasizes the connection of the carnival with the largely idealized "time of labor [...] of productive growth [...] not separated from the earth or from nature," in which "everyday life and consumption are not isolated from the labor and the production process." According to time thus conceptualized, there is "no precise differentiation of time into a present, a past, and a future (which presumes an *essential individuality* as a point of departure)." [368]

Relying on Bakhtinian concepts produces readings that do not take into account how ill-fitted Falstaff can be for such celebratory accounts, both because of his individualistic tendencies, and because his world is incongruous with the idealised, unified time on which Bakhtin bases his carnivalesque. As an illustration of such a reading, we may consider Laroque's discussion of time in *Henry IV*. Laroque recognises a

> pendulum-like concept of time, the very same that we also find in the alternation between the figures of the court and the battlefield, on the one hand, and Mistress Quickly's tavern on the other, in *Henry IV*, where the only way of establishing the firm foundations of historical time is to exclude Falstaff and his permanent festivity. And until that linear time can be established, history trips and stumbles in its progress: the altercations between Falstaff and Hal […] have the ring of an almost direct echo of ritual oppositions between Carnival and Lent.[369]

This view again presupposes that Falstaff emerges from an idealised past in which the time was unified and festivals reappeared rhythmically, synchronised with nature. In such a view, the banishment of Falstaff functions as a clear tipping point into orderly linearity and the disorder that has always been implicit in this order, with or without Falstaff, is ignored.

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[367] See Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, esp. 206-10.
[368] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 207. Original emphasis.
[369] Laroque, *Shakespeare's Festive World* 204.

Conversely, I contend that, if we conceptualize Falstaff as a representative of a fallen festival, the regular and orderly image of symmetrical dualism that structures *Henry IV* gets destabilized. Martin Procházka criticizes the Bakhtinian notion of unifying time, pointing to the "rash generalization [that] ignores the deep gulf between the sacred and the profane, festivity and everydayness. It is based on a backward-looking romantic utopia, idealizing the life of the folk community and identifying it with natural rhythms."[370] That is yet another reason why Falstaff is not a true embodiment of the carnivalesque in the Bakhtinian sense, or a pure festive figure, as he is sharply disconnected from all romanticized utopian festivals. Likewise, it opens up a possibility to question a rigid dichotomy that presupposes order can be a given, untainted state.

It may be said that Justice Shallow's ruminations in III.ii. of *2 Henry IV* look back to a similarly utopian time, one that still supposedly saw the carnival spirit in its uncorrupted form. Falstaff does not belong to such a time and merely concurs with Shallow briefly, in the deliberately vague line "We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Shallow" (*2HIV*, III.ii.154). The line was made famous by Orson Welles, one of the greatest embodiments of Falstaff in film, who chose to entitle his Falstaff-centred adaptation of the second *Henriad* precisely *Chimes at Midnight*. Welles based his entire sentimental interpretation of the Shakespearean material on the supposed wistfulness Falstaff expresses. Yet, one should read Falstaff a bit more closely. Leaving the hapless Justice, old Jack will ruminate: "Lord, lord, how subject are we old men to this vice of lying!" (*2HIV*, III.ii.275-6). Paradoxical as ever—resembling a Cretan proclaiming all Cretans to be liars—Falstaff himself signals to the mendacity of the past viewed through rose-tinted spectacles.

Falstaff is, therefore, far from being wistful. In his second visit to Gloucestershire in act V. of the same play, he will pragmatically follow his selfish interests and proceed to cheat Shallow out of a thousand pounds. This deed clearly belongs to a time that values profiteering more than communality and one that is able to produce festivals merely as a

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[370] Procházka, Martin. "Shakespeare's Illyria, Sicily and Bohemia: Other Spaces, Other Times, or Other Economies?" in: Procházka, Martin, ed. *Shakespeare's Illyrias: Heterotopias, Identities, (Counter)histories*. (Prague: Faculty of Arts, 2002: 130-150) 136-7.

form of temporally conditioned heterotopias.[371] Foucault describes heterotopias, defined as different spaces, as "actually realized utopias"[372] that always link some kind of fictitious projection with actuality and start functioning fully once a break with traditional time is established. The heterotopic festival is bound by time that Foucault sees as "time in its most evanescent, transitory, and delicate form."[373] Such a festival is easier to control, as it requires a stricter licence.

This impulse will be pushed to its extreme by Ben Jonson in *Bartholomew Fair*, the last of his four great comedies first performed in 1614, which presents the festival (i.e. the Bartholomew Fair in 17th century London) as a site of perpetual exchange: economic, discursive, as well as sexual. Falstaff's world is already largely guided by economic principles that indicate the change in the social function of the festival. Boar's Head tavern, for instance, is a place of commerce that also functions as a brothel. The prominence of economic principles in *Henry IV*, therefore, explains Falstaff's proneness to criminality to a certain degree. It is *Bartholomew Fair* that stages the pinnacle of such a world where the fair itself is the main character. In it, the human subjectivity is introduced to perpetuate the conditions of the fair that has lost its utopian dimension and invites audiences to engage with it critically.

Yet, paradoxically, Falstaff's selfishness has hardly soiled his reputation as Shakespeare's most endearing comic creation. Even his completely unethical commentary exhibits a sharp wit, which proves a guarantee of his ceaseless charm, and his tomfoolery often foreshadows the hypocritical sombreness of the historical characters. His unforgettable rendition of the old King in the *play extempore* in *1 Henry IV* is but one example of this. The

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[371] See Foucault's full description of the concept of heterotopia in "Different Spaces," in Foucault, Michel, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, translated by Robert Hurley et al. (London: Penguin, 2000) 175-85. Heterotopias would include places like the cemetery, nursing home, asylum, or prison, to name some of typically Foucauldian examples, but also libraries and museums. The heterotopia of the festival is set apart from the other kinds with respect to its relation to the concept of time. Unlike, for example, museums and libraries that function as accumulators of time, the heterotopia of the festival is characterized by ephemerality; it is absolutely chronic and absolutely embedded in time.

[372] Foucault, "Different Spaces" 178.

[373] Foucault, "Different Spaces" 182.

nimble prose he speaks, that differentiates and excludes him from the historical blank-verse-speaking world, is even more inflated than his own body, and saturated with mendacity. His lies, in all probability never meant to be taken seriously, are truly "like their father that begets them, gross as a mountain, open, palpable" (*1HIV*, II.iv.183-84) and they make him as grotesque and as ambiguous as the fallen festival itself.

V.iv. "The strangest fellow" of the *Henriad*

The time is now to ask who or what exactly the cowardly knight is, within the text of the *Henriad*. At the risk of embarrassingly stating the obvious, one of the main things that Falstaff is, is of course, a role. And, as can be expected, Falstaff is a large role. He often speaks more and longer than other characters, and a simple glance at blunt statistics confirms this. Falstaff has 151 cues in *1 Henry IV* where his lines add up to approximately 616 (following him are Hotspur with 562 and Hal with 551), and 184 cues with altogether 637 lines in *2 Henry IV*. This is by far the largest number of lines in the play, second to him being the King and Hal, with only 296 and 292, respectively.[374]

Given that most of these lines contain remarkably clever turns of phrase, extremely amusing and witty discourse, even such cold numeric data would suggest that Falstaff does not serve as mere "comic relief," occurring in spasmodic humorous interludes that temporarily amuse the audience between the scenes of important historic action. He seems to hold his ground quite firmly, forming one of the pillars upon which the play as a whole rests. His presence in the text and on the stage is strongly felt, and may at times even seem overbearing. Therefore, it should not be surprising that as a consequence he was occasionally perceived as larger than life, moreover, as life itself, as though he was a living being and not a character made up of language.

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[374] Source: <https://sites.google.com/a/shakespearelinecount.com/www/henryivpart1characters> and <https://sites.google.com/a/shakespearelinecount.com/www/henryivpart2characters>. Both links accessed 29 Aug. 2013.

One such account came from Harold Bloom who magnanimously declared he could find no fault in Falstaff. Old Jack was, in his view, along with Hamlet, "a miracle in the creation of personality,"[375] a master of language unparalleled in Western literature, whom "we need […] because we have so few images of authentic vitality and even fewer persuasive images of human freedom."[376] Bloom's Falstaff is quite literally a "creature of bombast" (*1HIV*, II.iv.318) one dangerously overshadowing the play that spawned him, and a sublime creation of Art meant to induce fear and trembling. This Falstaff is on some levels related to Orson Welles' masterful, but uniquely sentimental rendition of Falstaff in his *Chimes At Midnight*, even though Bloom's discourse succeeds in out-performing even Welles' performance. Suffice it to say that Bloom's Bardolatry tends to be overstated in its uncritical laudatory appraisals of the character.

Falstaff is masterfully crafted, that is indubitable, but the length of his role and its discursive brilliance could be due to some external factors, and not just sheer genius of "the Bard." Greenblatt's Greene connection could explain the linguistic ludicrousness of the role, as Falstaff inspired by Greene would certainly be required to exhibit a mastery of language so typical of the university wits. Hal, after all, goes to Eastcheap and is so outwardly fond of Falstaff precisely because Falstaff is teaching him a new language—one of fallen holiday, of debauchery and the popular, in all its meanings. But sustaining the tavern scenes for so long, and having Falstaff's role so large and amusing, could also have a purpose far more practical.

At the time of the second *Henriad*, Shakespeare was writing primarily for the stage, which also meant he was writing for a profitable new enterprise anticipating the modern entertainment industry. The theatres, primarily seen as spaces of entertainment, were

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[375] Bloom, Harold, and William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Henry IV Parts One and Two* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2004) 53. This is Bloom's own edition of the two plays he dubbed "the Falstaffiad", prefaced by a fifty-odd page introduction that concentrates almost solely on Falstaff, excerpted from Bloom, Harold, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), a large monograph in the style of, for example, A.C. Bradley's character criticism. Incidentally, *The Invention of the Human* became a bestseller quickly after it appeared on the market in the same year when John Madden's romantic comedy *Shakespeare in Love* received seven Academy Awards and rekindled further popular interest in Shakespeare.
[376] Bloom 55.

becoming commercialized. And filling the theatre with audience required some inventiveness on the part of the playwright as well.

As Tiffany Stern has shown,[377] play-patronage was a costly affair, for the groundlings as well as the financially more stable audience sat in the galleries. An average theatregoer would have had to pay for more than just a theatre ticket to see a play, as one needed to get to the South Bank where the theatres were located, and the crossing of the London Bridge, for example, involved paying a toll. Therefore, putting on a play that contained a character as wildly appealing as Falstaff could have been an act of clever self-advertising; a marketing strategy in the industry of infinite jest.

Falstaff could have been invented as appealing, extensive, almost larger than life, with a belief in mind that good theatre can advertise itself, which is again starkly contrasted to Jonson's self-promoting strategies employed in the Induction to *Bartholomew Fair*. Jonson encourages audiences to think of his play in terms of exchange between various currencies: the quality of performance, admission price and the ultimate effect. Moreover, he refers to the play as "ware"[378]—that is, a commodity—and his Induction is fashioned as a contract of purchase. Jonson is thereby building a sharp satirical framework that is supposed to say as much about the play, as about the success of its author.

Furthermore, what could be considered in Shakespeare's case is the fact that actors specializing in comic roles were also sometimes shareholders in companies, and that roles could have been developed around their capabilities. Bart van Es[379] suggests that the material situation of a theatrical enterprise certainly influenced the compositional style of a playwright who was as involved in the business side of the art as Shakespeare was.

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[377] In an unpublished paper "'Fill thy purse with money:' Financing Performance in Shakespearean England," presented at the German Shakespeare Gesellschaft conference in Munich, 27 April 2013.
[378] "It is further covenanted, concluded and agreed, that how great soever the expectation be, no person here is to expect more than he knows, or better ware than a Fair will afford." In Jonson, Ben, *The Alchemist and Other Plays: Volpone, or The Fox; Epicene, or The Silent Woman; The Alchemist; Bartholomew Fair*, ed. Gordon Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 332.
[379] See Van Es, Bart, *Shakespeare in Company* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) esp. 99-109.

It was in 1594, so only about three years before *1 Henry IV* was first performed, that Lord Chamberlain's Men were formed and that Shakespeare decided to buy a one-eighth share in the company. This decision not only made him wealthy but meant that he got to know the actors he was writing for. Unlike the freelance playwrights whose pieces would have been hired and staged by various companies, Shakespeare would have had the opportunity to collaborate on the development of different roles, and that would certainly have affected the conditions under which he presumably produced the play-texts. Therefore, even though evidence to support such a claim is unfortunately sparse, Falstaff could have actually been written with a specific player in mind.

One particular candidate seems quite likely to have filled the role, although the thesis has not been universally accepted. It has been suggested before, but it is elaborately expounded in David Wiles' *Shakespeare's Clown*[380]—namely, that Falstaff was written exclusively for Will Kemp to play. Kemp, one of the great comic stars of the Elizabethan theatre, a champion of the jig and improvisation, was a successor to Richard Tarlton, the legendary theatrical clown of the previous generation. Portly and charismatic, Kemp stylized his playing as a common Englishman, one who plays for the pit, often conspires with the groundlings in asides, is baffled by the workings of the higher classes, but quite skilful in sustaining himself.

Moreover, Kemp was in the late 1590s one of the five core shareholders in Lord Chamberlain's Men, so likely to have had some influence and worked with Shakespeare closely. What seems to be his strongest link with the role of Falstaff is the fact Kemp left the company in the autumn of 1599, and Falstaff does not reappear in *Henry V*, even though he was explicitly announced in the Epilogue of *2 Henry IV*. Kemp presumably left after a dispute that was never sufficiently explained, but it is conceivable that his style of clowning was losing its appeal. Hamlet's directorial warning "And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them" (*Hamlet*, III.ii.33-34) may be viewed as having Kemp in its subtext.

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[380] See Wiles 116-35.

After 1599 the comic roles Shakespeare is writing (for example, Touchstone, Feste, or Lear's Fool) are markedly different from the ones he invented before (like Bottom, or Dogberry, or, indeed, the huge and significant Falstaff), which is, among other things, due to the fact that around that time Robert Armin must have joined the company, with whom Shakespeare created some of his most notable witty fools. After the company had moved to the newly opened Globe theatre in 1600, it stopped being associated with the performance of jigs, one of Kemp's trademarks.

Falstaff, of course, did not disappear from the company's repertoire after Kemp's departure, suggesting the role, and the plays where it appears, acquired enough popularity to be recognizable even without the star actor. It must be emphasized, however, that the argument of equating Falstaff with Kemp exists on the plane of pure conjecture, because even Wiles' evidence is largely circumstantial, no matter how persuasive it may seem. But it does rather elegantly put to rest most of the critical disagreements regarding Falstaff's rejection. On the other hand, Falstaff is not only Falstaff of the past, but contains proleptic dimensions as well. So, for the sake of Falstaffs of the future, the context is acknowledged, but remains conditional upon allowing further interpretations that come from the text itself.

One of Falstaff's most overstated features, and the single one that is impossible to overlook, is his bodily excess. It relates him directly to the aforementioned theatrical parodies of Martin Marprelate, recalling the contemporary popular image of a gluttonous, hypocritical Puritan, or perhaps even to Robert Greene's own "swollen parcel of dropsies" (*1HIV*, II.iv.438). It can also easily be brought into connection with carnivalesque imagery of overindulgence in drinking and meat eating during festival season—likely one of the reasons why the connection of Falstaff and the carnivalesque seems so natural to critics exploring this strand of thinking. His fleshiness is so pronounced that Falstaff even becomes the festival meat, being explicitly addressed as a "Bartholomew boar-pig" (*2HIV*, II.iv.227) or a "roasted Manningtree ox with the pudding in his belly" (*1HIV*, II.iv.440).

The text of the two plays is heavily laden with allusions to the size of Falstaff's body so that the language that paints him never lets the reader forget his imposing corpulence.

Visually, Falstaff would recall representations of Shrove Tuesday, and one need only to think of Pieter Bruegel's bloated figure battling Lent in the famous painting to understand how well Falstaff would fit into that carnival world, if he were not, as I have read him, bereft of the regenerative qualities of the carnival.

Falstaff's corpulence may be brought into connection with one of his primal indulgences, namely, laughter. Laurent Joubert—the French royal physician to Catherine de' Medici and Henry III of France, and author of numerous influential medical texts—in his *Traité du Ris* of 1579 linked laughter with the tendency to accumulate bodily fat. The fat, he thought, consisted of excessive blood not converted into either choler or semen. In Joubert's widely cited treatise fat and laughter became correlative: those who laughed more easily were inclined to become fat, and fat people tended to laugh more easily.[381] Furthermore, excessive laughter was seen as having harmful effects, possibly resulting in heart failure. It is not easy to establish what kind of influence medical opinion had on the popular, or whether it might have departed from its original context and influenced the environment where theatrical texts were being produced. But it does remain that Falstaff's excess—his bodily excess, as well as his excessive laughter—gets seemingly disciplined before the end two plays. His removal is meant to benefit the new order the Prince would be instituting through his reformation, yet Falstaff's words and his folly put that reformation into question.

While Falstaff's corpulence is more than a sign of gluttony, his relationship to food and the earthy delights of eating is sharply contrasted to Pomet's, for instance. Falstaff is not once shown eating, nor does he explicitly ruminate on food. He wears his weight as a symbol of sloth and the sinful life he leads. His body weighs him down, in a similar way in which he slows down the action in the play. The excessive dimension of Falstaff is paralleled in the excessive and abundant prose he speaks.

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[381] Joubert, Laurent, *Treatise on Laughter*, trans. Gregory David de Rocher (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1980) 125.

In a previous chapter, I have shown that Pomet, an equally loquacious character, reaches a poetic ecstasy when he rambles on about food and his insatiable "pampered stomach."[382] Pomet's delights are almost Epicurean in their hedonism, while Pomet himself lacks the decaying and decomposing quality that Falstaff's body exhibits. Cowardly running away from the Gadshill robbery, Falstaff's fat body "lards the lean earth as he walks along" (*1HIV*, II.iii.17). He is similarly characterised in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, where he complains that he is "as subject to heat as butter, a man of continual dissolution and thaw" (III.v.98–100).

Image 6: Detail from the frontispiece image of *The Wits, or Sport upon Sport*[383]

[382] Držić et al 202.
[383] Source: <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bc/Restoration_Theatre_Drolls_Characters_1662.jpg>

Where Falstaff approaches Pomet's elation with food is in his own elation with sherris-sack, although Falstaff's motivation differs from Pomet's, who sets out to vindicate the aesthetic element of gourmand pleasures. In Falstaff's praise, sack

> ascends me into the brain; dries me there all the foolish and dull and curdy vapours which environ it; makes it apprehensive, quick, forgetive, full of nimble fiery and delectable shapes, which, delivered o'er to the voice, the tongue, which the birth, becomes excellent wit (*2HIV,* IV.iii.95-100).

Falstaff's praise of sack is something of a compact mock-encomium of his own, employing the irony Erasmus' Folly championed. Falstaff invests the alcoholic drink with properties of transforming bad things into good and portrays it as an antidote to the crisis the play dramatises, namely the crisis of authority. The praise of sack is a masterful display of Falstaff's foolish eloquence and his indulgence in play. It puts to test the notions of wit and courage, which, as he reasons, dissolve into "nothing without sack" (*2HIV,* IV.iii.112-113). His praise is, we should bear in mind, a praise delivered by a player of folly. As such, neither does it lay claims to its own wisdom, nor does it serve to assert its immediate opposite is the truth. Instead, it gestures towards the fact that things—wit and valour, in this case—are hardly ever what they seem. This is best supported by the fact that Falstaff, concluding his praise of sack, reveals Prince Hal's courage to be fuelled by his own indulgence in drinking. Because the young Prince is given to drink, Falstaff tells us "he is become very hot and valiant" (*2HIV,* IV.iii.120-121), unlike his father, who claimed himself that his "blood hath been too cold and temperate, / Unapt to stir at […] indignities" (*1HIV*, I.iii.1-2). Falstaff, therefore, reveals Hal's susceptibility to folly and the falseness of his assertions and pretensions to a transformation that is supposed to "show more godly and attract more eyes / Than that which hath no foil to set it off" (*1HIV*, I.ii.204-205).

One of the pleasures of Falstaff is ultimately a cruel one: like Hal and Poins, the audience enjoys seeing him distressed, as distress is surely to trigger his discursive brilliance. As garrulous as Pomet, he, however, lacks a privileged position within the play and was not constructed as a central intelligence of a comic microcosm. Which is not to say that he lacks

paradoxical wisdom. And yet, his famous wit hardly ever amounts to much and is ultimately a fool's truth: spoken in jest and generally ignored. It may be that therein also lays his appeal. He is a misleader of youth that has no authority; his territory is a morally dubious state of denial, a self-indulgent state one allows oneself before assuming worldly responsibility.

Falstaff relies on his self-serving prose to get himself out of any corner. This quality he shares with Eulenspiegel, a player of folly similarly prone to find himself in quandary, but equally capable of talking himself out of it. Eulenspiegel, however, leads an existence that is far more autonomous than Falstaff's. The German jester indulges in antagonising, but does not require the applause and appreciation of the audience within the text, and moves about freely, setting no roots, admiring no Prince Hal. The two are equally corporeal, but whereas Eulenspiegel uses his body as a tool for folly, Falstaff's symbolises the decay of the recuperating powers of festivity.

One of the things the text immediately conveys is that Falstaff has a bad reputation. Even before he is introduced as a character, we have heard Bolingbroke's complaints about his wayward son:

Inquire at London, 'mongst the taverns there,
For there, they say, he daily doth frequent,
With unrestrained loose companions,
Even such, they say, as stand in narrow lanes,
And beat our watch, and rob our passengers;
Which he, young wanton and effeminate boy,
Takes on the point of honour to support
So dissolute a crew. (*Richard II*, V.iii.5-12)

"He" is, of course, Hal, but this is also the instance where the unnamed Falstaff appeared for the first time in front of the audience, even before the play that contains him. In the fifth act of *Richard II*, as Bolingbroke becomes Henry IV, his first declaration is of his son's prodigality, thinly veiling a fear that he would have to pay a price for deposing Richard by

being betrayed by his own "young wanton and effeminate boy" (*Richard II*, V.iii.10). His contemptuous designation, "at London, 'mongst the taverns there" (V.iii.5) will grow into an entire parallel world in *1 Henry IV*, a world over which Falstaff will seemingly preside, but in which his young Harry will speak all the languages required.

The first actual appearance of Falstaff immediately follows the one-scene opening of *1 Henry IV* that briefly explains the King's—and therefore England's—causes to be "so shaken as we are, so wan with care" (*1HIV*, I.i.1). Falstaff is once again implicitly introduced by the King referring to the "riot and dishonour [that] stain the brow of my young Harry" (I.i.84-85) a theme that Falstaff will continue by proclaiming himself a thief by vocation, a "minion of the Moon" (I.ii.25) contrasted to Hal's regal sun.

When we see him onstage for the first time, Falstaff is alone with the Prince, somnolent perhaps, which suggests the intimacy of the situation. To further affirm this, he addresses him as Hal on numerous occasions, then "lad" (I.ii.1), "sweet wag" (I.ii.15), which turns into "mad wag" (I.ii.42) when Falstaff so wishes and is crowned with "the most comparative, rascalliest, sweet young prince" (I.ii.77-78). Their exchange is witty and nimble, with Hal never once falling behind the loquacious "old lad of the castle" (I.ii.42). In fact, it is Hal who is mostly in control of the situation, introducing new topics, and teasing Falstaff with mentions of hanging. It does not take Falstaff long to reverse the already implied accusations against himself and project them straight onto the heir apparent in a verbose parody of what the Prince, in the hypocritical reality of his father, should be feeling:

> O, thou hast damnable iteration and art indeed able to corrupt a saint. Thou hast done much harm upon me, Hal; God forgive thee for it. Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing; and now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked. I must give over this life, and I will give it over: by the Lord, and I do not, I am a villain: I'll be damned for never a king's son in Christendom (I.ii.87-94).

This is typical Falstaff: hyperbolic at every turn of the phrase, mocking in few short lines Hal's designs, Christian virtue, even the possibility of veracity. His words are, however,

vapour to the Prince, like nagging, empty speech, and he immediately changes the subject, much to Falstaff's delight, to purse-taking. A lot depends upon how this first exchange between the unlikely boon companions is acted out, whether as a light-hearted banter, or carrying an ominous subtext foreshadowing the demise of their relationship, yet even the text itself seems to suggest that Hal is the one pulling all the strings. He is, after all, the Prince of Wales, and the mention of his status will never be far from Falstaff's lips.

Wrapped up in all manner of metamorphoses that allow for his Jack-in-the-box resilience and winning charm, Falstaff seems to be guided by an unflinching desire to lead an existence free of care and responsibility, a desire to inhabit something of a Foucauldian heterotopia of the festival. And Falstaff, in his excessive enjoyment of play, almost wishes this heterotopia could be unconstrained. His purpose is to perpetuate folly. That also seems to be his major fallacy, at least in the world of Shakespearean history, as all festive heterotopias are temporally conditioned.

Falstaff functions outside of conventional time, as Hal leads us to believe. He has no reason to be so superfluous as to demand the time of the day, "unless hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the tongues of bawds" (*1HIV*, I.ii.6-8) and so on. As he lists common markers of festival culture, Hal's catalogue locates Falstaff within a world set apart from the everyday. Hal claims to understand this principle of separation between jest and duty:

If all the year were playing holidays,
To sport would be as tedious as to work
But when they seldom come, they wish'd for come,
And nothing pleaseth but rare accidents (I.ii.194-197).

What is more, Hal, unlike Falstaff, seems to be in complete control of his time. The conclusion of his ominously programmatic monologue resonates with the famous couplet I'll so offend, to make offence a skill; / Redeeming time when men think least I will (I.ii.206-207).

Hal is a master of time, but also a master performer. In a world so strategically dependent upon the theatricality of regal power and performativity of politics—where rhetoric serves the war, and men are "good enough to toss; food for powder, food for powder" (IV.ii.64-65)—Hal will rise to the challenge of the role that awaits him in *Henry V*. When compared to Hal's calculated brilliance, Falstaff is a largely ridiculous fool who childishly prances around on the margins of historical action hoping to procure some money for his consumption-infected purse, sack to satisfy his unquenchable guts and laughter of others to justify his existence. But rather than serving to redeem Hal, Falstaff's folly reveals the dark underbelly of Hal's machinations.

The folly of Falstaff's play is on full display once he steps onto Hal's main stage. Falstaff's actions in the battle, while at the same time caricaturing a very human fear and unwillingness to participate in the gruesome affairs of the war—"I would 'twere bed-time, Hal, and all well" (*1HIV*, V.i.125) is one of his childish, highly vulnerable pleas—serve to establish his unsuitability for the world Hal is trying to fashion. The Prince had procured him a charge of foot, and it is the first time he would actually be allowed to participate in any way in the realm of the history. His enlisted ragamuffins are purely linguistic creations, never appearing before the audience, or being given a voice in the text. Soon enough they will all have perished, save the three whose fate is reportedly to end up as crippled beggars.

The beginning of the battle is marked by Falstaff's famous "catechism on honour" (V.i.127-140), once again sharply contrasted with the ideology of the state and power. In the catechism Falstaff might to our times sound unusually serious, his nihilistic words betraying an awareness of the relativity and constructiveness of grand causes, perhaps even his own brand of corrupted pacifism. But on the stage of history, within the world of the play, he is an unimportant player of folly and his words are null and void.

Falstaff's further actions, namely saving his own skin by counterfeiting death, and the counterfeit of Hotspur's murder, outwardly solidify his cowardice, but also reaffirm his resilience. The act of the fake murder—or, literally, faking a fake murder, as the murder is of course performed in theatre and Hotspur is not actually cold—is Falstaff's single

performance that has any consequence. Hal will afterwards display uncustomary kindness towards him by supporting his performativity of heroism and secure him a role both in the post-Shrewsbury world, as in the second part of the play.

Therefore, Falstaff is no less a performer than Hal is, his histrionic personality throughout the two plays casting a comical shadow over the more serious players. Falstaff is, however, blinded by folly: he does not completely comprehend the seriousness of the historical realm, but enjoys the play for its own sake. That "the play's the thing" (*Hamlet*, II.ii.566) he takes literally, it can even be regarded as his credo. And the play for him is the thing wherein he hopes to capture not merely the conscience, but also the heart of the future King. But, once again, the fault is in his folly.

The relationship of Hal and Falstaff is a peculiar one. In criticism, it is often designated as either surrogate parenthood that provides yet another structural parallelism in an elegantly constructed play, or a relation of carnivalesque tutorship discarded once it has been emptied out. If this relationship may at all be called friendship, then surely it is of a one-sided kind, as Hal had rejected any kind of emotional involvement very early on. What he is doing may be the exact opposite of what Francis Bacon would slightly later come to describe in his essay that covers the topic of the amicable relationships:

> For princes, in regard of the distance of their fortune from that of their subjects and servants, cannot gather this fruit, except (to make themselves capable thereof) they raise some persons to be, as it were, companions and almost equals to themselves, which many times sorteth to inconvenience.[384]

The prerequisite of friendship is egalitarianism, as Bacon believes, and only by advancing the friend socially would a Prince be able to enjoy the relationship. But Hal has no intention of enjoying the relationship, so he himself descends into the world that he clearly holds is below him. He is his father's son, after all, and will prove his father's worries

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[384] Bacon, Francis, "Of Friendship" in: *The Essays* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985) 139.

unfounded. Falstaff, on the other hand, speaks freely of his love for Hal. In a speech that is seemingly directed to Poins, but that in fact affirms everything he had thus far said about Hal, Falstaff declares:

> I have forsworn his company hourly any time this two and twenty years, and yet I am bewitched with the rogue's company. If the rascal hath not given me medicines to make me love him, I'll be hanged; it could not be else: I have drunk medicines (*1HIV*, II.ii.15-19)

The example is not solitary: if Hal loves him, he would stop mocking his cowardice in the robbery; if he loves him, he would practice an answer to his father in a *play extempore*. And trying to slither out of hostess Quickly's accusations in front of Hal, he would trumpet and exaggerate: "A thousand pound, Ha! a million: thy love is worth a million: thou owest me thy love" (*1HIV*, III.iii.135-136). Falstaff is a fool in his actions, as well as his affections. And underneath its ridiculousness of expression, his love for Hal can almost be taken as the only honest thing about him.

W.H. Auden was convinced of the old rouge's sincerity. "Falstaff loves Hal with an absolute devotion. […] He believes that his love is retuned, that the Prince is indeed his other self."[385] Jonathan Goldberg[386] went further from presupposing platonic affections and challenged the views of heterosexist criticism by articulating the multiple ways in which the text is constructing Hal as an object of desire: England's, Falstaff's, the audience's, and ultimately the critics'. He reads in Hal's reformative project an additional a wish to leave behind the ingrained shame he feels because of relations with the bed-presser that Falstaff is, and to conform to his own vision of perfection, that in *Henry V* must culminate in his marriage to Kate, whom he will teach how to speak.

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[385] Auden, W. H., *The Dyer's Hand, and Other Essays* (London: Random House, 1962) 191.
[386] See Goldberg, Jonathan, *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), especially chapter "Desiring Hal" 145-75.

The presupposition of Hal's and Falstaff's relationship venturing into the realm of overt contemporary homosexuality was explored in Gus Van Sant's 1991 cult film *My Own Private Idaho*, which adapts Welles' *Chimes At Midnight*, and reimagines the story in the context of American hustler scene, with modified Shakespearean dialogues echoing through shady motels and trailer houses. Even if he may be held accountable for stretching the limits of Shakespeare, Van Sant's film remains a notable exploration of the proleptic element of Falstaff and, by extension, the whole of the *Henriad*.

Homoerotic or otherwise, if the relationship between Hal and Falstaff is indeed taken as signifying more than friendship, then merely for the sake of the argument if not much else, it becomes somewhat reminiscent of the relationship the Fair Youth and the lyrical subject of the *Sonnets* share. The connection is not a new idea proposed by queer criticism, but one that has been around for some half a century. Auden had already covered this territory in his elegantly poetic criticism, and a sharper correlation has already been established by William Empson,[387] who compared the registers of desire within the *Sonnets* and Hal's and Falstaff's scenes. Taking up just one example of the possible parallelism, in Sonnet 58 we encounter another older man doting upon a youth of higher social standing, declaring, what might easily be put into Falstaff's mouth:

That god forbid, that made me first your slave,
I should in thought control your times of pleasure,
Or at your hand the account of hours to crave,
Being your vassal, bound to stay your leisure! (Sonnet 58, 1-4)

A correlation of this sort might well be regarded as cherry-picking, but the verses do echo, to a degree, Falstaff's fondness of the cruel Prince, the fondness that Auden likened to the blind devotion of the Little Mermaid of the folktale, who loses her immortality without ever gaining compensation of temporal happiness. Falstaff, however, is far from any kind of immortality, even if criticism sometimes inflates him to such proportions. To restate a

[387] Empson, William, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1960) 108.

previous argument: overly sentimentalizing him as a character leads to his detachment from the plays, a danger of his overgrowing the text. And even if his own resemble him in being "gross as a mountain, open, palpable" (*1HIV*, II.v.209), as Hal has it, they should still be taken as an integral part of a fictional world.

Falstaff's lies have also opened up a way into a more moralizing critique of Falstaff's role in the *Henriad*. He becomes, as James Calderwood termed it, an emblem of the fallen language that permeates the plays portraying multiple crises: of kingship and regal power, of allegiances and friendship, of rhetoric, but most of all a crisis of truth. In Calderwood's sobering analysis[388] Falstaff appears as a creature entirely made up of words, allowed on the stage only after Bolingbroke has manoeuvred his way to the throne, debasing true legitimacy and legitimizing base lies. Calderwood's Falstaff is a master of improvisation and a devious manipulator of language, the ultimate artist of relativization whose irreverent humour exposes all value as empty. And as such, he has been denied all meaningful agency, intervening into the historical world only with the preposterous claim of having killed Hotspur.

Falstaff cannot act in the historical field because "[s]o stuffed with speech is he that doing is beyond him, he can only *be*—for there is an inevitable inertia to the word in itself as opposed to the inherently kinetic thrust of action,"[389] a diagnosis that may well befit certain aspects of Prince Hamlet. This overwhelming stasis prevents Falstaff from ever plotting, so even in that he is doomed to be defeated by action and plot that are supposed to run the politics of history. For Calderwood, this Falstaff embodies Shakespeare's final decadent basking in the "tendency toward sensual verbal indulgence,"[390] pushed to the very pinnacle of irrepressible hilarity, where it threatens to devour the plot that stands for progress of the state.

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[388] See Calderwood esp. 39-46.
[389] Calderwood 43.
[390] Calderwood 41.

V.v. Conclusion: Future Falstaffs

Encountering darker visions of Falstaff in criticism is not overly common and it is, I believe, important to welcome them. Falstaff, as it happens with the best incarnations of folly, has been known to blur critical vision, and teasing out aspects of his meaning not immediately visible surely enriches understanding. As Martin Procházka points out, falling in line with Calderwood, "Falstaff's boisterous rhetoric is no mere carnival of words: it is represented as a potentially dangerous power whose nature can become violent and even military. In using Falstaff, Hal learns to use lie as a pragmatic rhetoric of war geared to political purposes."[391]

Hal requires the lie of Falstaff, as much as the world of history requires the realm of the tavern, because they need to be appropriated as counterpoints that will establish the truth of kingship and, in turn, the legitimacy of the historical narrative. Calderwood perceives the relationship between the two plots of the *Henriad* as one of a structural metaphor that, through correlating Gadshill with Shrewsbury, "suggests that the English rebels are merely history's cutpurses."[392] In this type of correlation, Falstaff is unmasked as a criminal element used by Hal as an instrument of attaining new order whose truth he can manipulate.

However, even the completely unmasked, dark Falstaff cannot be the ultimate certainty that engulfs a player of folly. Falstaff's fallen rhetoric is a discourse of folly, a wilful employment of unreason in the name of laughter, and his lies are intentional inversions of the officially sanctioned truths. Having used up the lies, Hal cuts Falstaff off in his final rejection with "How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!" (*2HIV*, V.v.48) warning him to "[r]eply not to me with a fool-born jest" (V.v.55). And for the first time since he has stepped on the stage, Falstaff is at a loss for words. He is eliminated from discourse and, together with his clique, banished "till their conversations / appear more wise and modest to the world" (V.v.100-101).

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[391] Procházka, Martin, "'New Languages:' Pragmatism, Rhetoric and War in Shakespeare's Second Tetralogy And Ford's *Perkin Warbeck*", unpublished paper presented at the Erasmus Mundus Intensive Programme event "Staging European Identities: Memory, Conflict and Commerce in Early Modern European Culture" at the Charles University in Prague, 28 May 2013.
[392] Calderwood 54.

Strictly speaking, Falstaff is neither a fool, however foolish he may be, nor a jester, regardless of how much he enjoys a good jest. But he is just about wise enough to *play* the fool, to appropriate the fool's discursive tools. And in doing so, he must be aided by his environment—his audience within the play, as well as the audience of the play—because folly, that rather dangerous protean phenomenon, as Foucault has shown in *Madness and Civilization*, is discursively produced. That Falstaff is finally banished is ultimately Hal's choice, he is the one to stipulate what accounts for folly and how long it is desirable to put up with it, he has the power to summon, but also to cancel laughter.

Just like laughter in the theatre, discursive folly as an early modern phenomenon required certain conditions in order to work. It needed to involve, among other types of understanding, a temporary suspense of moral judgement. We seem to understand this principle still, as the immensely popular characters of today's commercial culture are known to be morally despicable, as are often Homer Simpson and Eric Cartman, two animated caricatures of the deeply flawed common man, both of whom arguably have something of Falstaff in themselves. Which is not to say early modern folly or its employment was immoral in itself—quite the contrary, if we are to judge from Erasmus' example, employing folly sometimes also meant affirming virtue.

However, Falstaff's folly of play, albeit masterly and singular, is of a fallen kind insofar as it becomes an end in itself. His appropriation of it speaks of the nature of laughter in the theatre and the dangers of its gratuitousness. Falstaff's folly is as seductive and contagious as a specific kind of transformed theatre—one that has discovered the marketability of entertainment. As Ghose concludes,

> what Shakespeare dramatizes in *Henry IV* is the potential risk that inheres in the idea of play. At the beginning of the play, Hal and Falstaff share a world of playful abandon that leaves its trace on their speech. […] But the danger inherent in play is

that of losing the ability to differentiate between reality and fantasy. Falstaff loses track of the real world.[393]

In my conclusion, Falstaff's Janus' faces please and repel according to the beholder's point of view. This view I get from the Shakespearean texts, form the conclusions I draw from criticism, but also from two notable Falstaffs I have recently seen performed. In 2010 Roger Allam delivered in many ways a magnificent Falstaff directed by Dominic Dromgoole at the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. Utilizing all the peculiarities of the stage at the Globe, as well as full theatricality of the character, Allam's hilarious rendition brought to the surface all the endearing aspects of the fat knight. Collaborating with his charmed audience in forming the character, literally playing for the pit, Allam made the early modern lines speak directly to the modern spectator, and his success was recognized with the prestigious Olivier Award in 2011.

The following year BBC2 released *The Hollow Crown*, a star-packed television series—as brilliantly cinematic as the latest television productions get—that adapted Shakespeare's second tetralogy. In it, Simon Russell Beale's Falstaff was faced with a different medium, and an environment with no groundlings to share in with his jokes. Beale created a Falstaff who, in a nutshell, seemed to have read James Calderwood. Smaller in stature than might be expected, he shuffled and muttered, lacking the usual *basso profundo* one might expect of a Falstaff. He never completely convinced how, with such apparent guilt on his shoulders, he managed to hold the attention of Tom Hiddleston's remarkably princely Hal. And yet, his more serious scenes of the battle, and especially the rejection, were delivered with such quiet, sombre weight that it succeeded in uncovering a very dark layer of the character, and put the entire performance into a different perspective. For his Falstaff in *2 Henry IV*, Beale has been awarded a BAFTA for best supporting actor in May 2013. Both Allam and Beale are rightly renowned for their artistic work, and their Falstaffs—two Falstaffs that could not be more different from each other—very vividly represent the virtually infinite dimensions of the character.

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[393] Ghose 158-9.

Given his infinite dimensions, Falstaff functions very well as an example of Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage. "An assemblage," they say, "in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously (independently of any recapitulation that may be made of it in a scientific or theoretical corpus)."[394] Falstaff, changeable and adaptable in his propensity to constantly perform, moves along these flows and mocks them, just as he mocks the ostensibly serious world around him, and—through his own—uncovers its inherent folly. Assemblages are instances of multiplicities—one of the key heuristic concepts Deleuze uses in his own work and the parts of it he produced with Guattari—that is, complex structures without prior unity, irreducible, quite like Falstaff, to single transcendent unities.

Since "[m]ultiplicities are rhizomatic, and expose arborescent pseudo-multiplicities for what they are,"[395] we may notice this process occurring in the relationship of Falstaff and Hal. The Prince, ambitious to acquire a status of multiplicity for himself, claims to be "so good a proficient in one quarter of an hour that I can drink with any tinker in his own language" (*1HIV*, II.iv.28) He is, likewise, described by Warwick to be

> [B]ut stud[ying] his companions
> Like a strange tongue, wherein, to gain the language,
> 'Tis needful that the most immodest word
> Be look'd upon and learn'd; which once attain'd,
> […] comes to no further use
> But to be known and hated (*2HIV*, IV.iv.68-73).

Hal is surely a representative of an arborescent hierarchical system, and his efforts to learn the languages of his future subjects are motivated not by a striving for plurality, but by his desire to categorise the subjects and establish a proto-disciplinary society.

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[394] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 25.
[395] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 8.

Falstaff, who had only a couple of scenes before proclaimed to "have a whole school of tongues in this belly of mine" (IV.ii.18), is an unruly element, unfit for Hal's vision of the future Kingdom. His petty criminality, together with his histrionic, multifarious nature can be located at the intersection of Deleuze and Guattari's "'discursive multiplicities' of expression" and "'nondiscursive multiplicities' of content,"[396] that is, of forms of expression irreducible to mere words and forms of content irreducible to one thing. Falstaff, who is mendacious in expression and evasive in his actions, presents a threat to Hal's hierarchical, arboreal dream. He simultaneously reveals the impossibility of that dream; the very mendacity that is at heart of history and its authoritarian creation.

Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of delinquency, based on Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, is likewise fitting for a further description of Falstaff's location at the juncture of these two types of multiplicities. In Deleuze and Guattari's view, in order to curb the multiplicities of Falstaff's kind, "words and concepts such as 'delinquent' and 'delinquency'" are introduced to "express a new way of classifying, stating, translating, and even committing criminal acts."[397] Because Hal's new order requires discipline, Falstaff needs to be banished from the official discourse; removed until his language starts to "appear more wise and modest to the world" (*2HIV*, V.v.101). He becomes a labelled criminal, a delinquent. Once crowned King, Hal will have to *proclaim* Falstaff "[t]he tutor and the feeder of my riots" (V.v.62), discipline and punish him by ordering Lord Chief Justice "[t]o see perform'd the tenor of my word" (V.v.71). Falstaff's banishment, in my view, does not affirm or constitute order. It uncovers its inherent folly of establishing new truths on blatant lies.

If we perceive culture as a web of different systems of signification, Falstaff is best described as one of its hefty nodes, suspended between different popular, literary and theatrical traditions that all contribute to the character's polyvocality, but none describes him completely on its own. Falstaff is a character that formed and continues to form connections within this multidimensional network that is also poly-temporal, as Falstaff in the text not

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[396] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 74.
[397] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 74.

only brings together all the Falstaffs of the past, but also already contains interpretations of the future. And all these new interpretations are bound to reflect upon as well as bring us back to the original text, finding new meanings in it and reshuffling the old, in a way perhaps reminiscent of Shakespeare's own attitude towards his historical sources.

In his essay on the *Henriad* Kiernan Ryan traces out the formation of meaning of historical action for Shakespeare's contemporaries, as well as for modern audiences. As he concludes: "[p]arts *1* and *2* of *Henry IV* afford us nothing less than a preview of the past. They project us forward to a point where we can grasp Shakespeare's version of his times as the eventual past of a still unfolding future."[398] This type of potentiality I see in Falstaff as well. The rhizomatic view of Falstaff should not, however, be produced at the expense of giving in to a relativizing position that empties the discourse of folly out of all meaning. There could be such a thing as "too much of a good thing" (*As You Like It*, IV.i.105), and too much of Falstaff might blur one's understanding of the subterranean workings of power that tailor history and sanction truth.

The ultimate banishment of Falstaff, I contend, should not be read as a banishment of folly. His folly and his crime may be seen as results of his nature of multiplicity, made manifest in his overindulgence in jest and a tendency to protract the time-for-laughter to the point of gratuity, where it reaches a stage in which festivities threaten to overtake all time. But his rejection is not clean cut and the comedy in *Henry IV* is not introduced simply to be discarded by the new state power. Falstaff's folly is, paradoxically also his wit. And since, as he knows, he is "not only witty in [him]self, but the cause that wit is in other men" (2HIV, I.ii.8-9), Falstaff's foolish wit uncovers the foolishness of the system that presages a disciplinary society, one that is reliant on linguistic labelling.

In the end, Falstaff's folly remains perennial. It casts a big, gross shadow over the events that follow in the conclusion of the second *Henriad* and we remain far from immune to his appeal. In its obstinate ambiguity and ambiguous obstinacy, Falstaff's folly—perhaps

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[398] Ryan 66.

like all folly—is quite like what Auden says of poetry. It "makes nothing happen: it survives."[399]

[399] Auden, W.H., *W. H. Auden Poems. Selected by John Fuller* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005) 34.

VI. Conclusion

> First my fear; then, my curtsy; last, my speech.
> My fear, is your displeasure; my curtsy, my duty; and my speech to beg your pardons. If you look for a good speech now, you undo me, for what I have to say is of mine own making; and what indeed I should say will, I doubt, prove mine own marring.
>
> *2 Henry IV*, Epilogue 1-6

VI.i. The Paradoxical Wisdom of Folly

"There is no difference between what a book talks about and how it is made."[400] If this is the case, the most foolish assumption of this book, my thesis, was to map folly, a phenomenon of multiple meanings, causes and effects. My thesis was about the four players of folly, just as much as it was about itself, reflecting from the mirrored pages—from the *Spiegels* of Eulenspiegel and the rest—its own logic, taking the shape of the material it set out to study. In passages that moved from historical context to textual analysis, reception and appropriation, the text of my thesis transformed and adapted itself to different discourses. It did so quite like a player of folly would, when faced with different problems.

The journey my research took me on was meandering and open-ended; it might have explored many more routes than those here taken and incorporated views on many more players of folly that left distinct marks on the early modernity. Across early modern Europe, many writers who might have been brought into play masterfully used the discourse of folly. Writers such as Poggio Bracciolini, François Rabelais and Miguel de Cervantes—to name but a few obvious ones—or David Lyndsay and Gil Vicente—not to forget some of the perhaps less obvious. My choice of the texts that contain Eulenspiegel, Pomet, Paleček and Falstaff, however, proved fruitful and felicitous. It made possible several key discoveries I shall sum up in this Conclusion, painstakingly aware that a phenomenon as ephemeral as folly cannot be summarised into crude certainties, because challenging all certainties is what is hidden at folly's core.

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[400] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 4.

I had taken as one of my starting points Foucault's contention that "[i]n the Renaissance, Madness leaves this modest place [the Middle Ages allocated it in the hierarchy of vices] and comes to the fore."[401] My explorations of particular texts, on the one hand, and arrivals at some general conclusions, on the other, are all set against the backdrop of a realisation how momentous the early modern period is for the study of folly.

Folly, as Foucault reads it, was free and liberating in the Renaissance. It found notable expressions in the philosophical imaginations of humanists such as Erasmus, who fashioned in his *Praise* what was likely the most influential face of folly. This mock encomium, steeped in irony, spearheaded a renewed intellectual interest in the potential of folly. Essentially, what it paradoxically reminded its own age, as well as ours, was that the purpose of knowledge is hidden in the recognition of one's own ignorance. I have found that my players of folly—in different ways traversing popular and high humanist culture—all had this paradox inscribed in their core. They taught us certain things without explicitly trying to teach anything at all.

The relation of foolish discourse to knowledge in early modernity was particularly pertinent for my research. What the readings of my fools reveal is that the paradoxical potential of attaining knowledge through folly likewise saw its heyday in the era. Since this was an era which faced a proliferation of knowledge, under such conditions, folly almost became a necessity. The new systems and categories with which the early modern man understood the world and his place within it were met with an equal abundance of folly. Writing on laughter—one of folly's main weapons of choice, and one of its nearly unavoidable consequences—Indira Ghose argues that it "articulates the strain of scepticism about a stable worldview that traversed the early modern age and undercut its sense of optimism."[402] Early modern folly and its players, in my view, accomplished a similar thing: they questioned the certainties of the ostensibly sensible world.

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[401] Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation* 21.
[402] Ghose 5.

The nature of knowledge in the Renaissance requires equal historicising. In *The Order of Things*—a work that maps out shifts and changes in the meaning of knowledge in Western thought from the Renaissance to the present—Foucault engaged, among other things, with the Renaissance poetic epistemology. I find that his understanding of the Renaissance episteme has significant repercussions for the understanding of the paradoxical wisdom of early modern folly as it appears in literature.

At the heart of Foucault's account is the notion of representation. In early modern times, he contends, knowledge "consisted in relating one form of language to another form of language; in restoring the great, unbroken plain of words and things; in making everything speak."[403] During the era when my four players of folly begin to operate, knowledge was, therefore, seen as a matter of resemblance between signs and its primary function was interpreting.

A rift at the end of the Renaissance—parallel to the one Foucault notices occurred when the voices of madness started becoming suffocated and alienated—happened when the relationship of deep affinity between language and things was severed. In the pre-Classical episteme articulated in the Renaissance, language "has been set down in the world and forms a part of it, both because things themselves hide and manifest their own enigma like a language and because words offer themselves to men as things to be deciphered."[404] And early modern players of folly, as I argue throughout my thesis, went about deciphering the enigma of their world manifest in language in their own, peculiar ways.

These conditions change after the Renaissance. Resemblance, Foucault tells us, loses currency in the 17th century and gives way to causality and "language, instead of existing as the material writing of things, was to find its area of being restricted to the general organization of representative signs."[405] Thereby, "the profound kinship of language with the

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[403] Foucault, Michel, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. (London; New York: Routledge, 2002 [1966]) 44.
[404] Foucault, *The Order of Things* 38-39.
[405] Foucault, *The Order of Things* 47.

world was […] dissolved"[406] and all language becomes discourse. This event caused large-scale changes in knowledge, culture and society and triggered a gradual change in the conceptualisation and status of literature.

Literature began to redress the loss of the signifying function of language. This happened because, as Foucault has it, literature

> achieved autonomous existence, and separated itself from all other language with a deep scission, only by forming a sort of "counter-discourse," and by finding its way back from the representative or signifying function of language to this raw being that had been forgotten since the sixteenth century.[407]

Literature comes to occupy the liminal space in culture, where "the living being of language"[408] was located in the pre-Classical episteme. It seeks to recover this lost connection, to offer hope in the dejected circumstances of the world that has forgotten its ties to an episteme that valued resemblances in favour of identities. Literature is written as a "traversal of this futile yet fundamental space,"[409] and, yet, it can never return to the circumstances before the breach, precisely because of the nature of the following epistemes. The ties to the initial and originary Word, that is, to God and to Logos, had been lost and discourses started to move unrestricted.

What I have come to realise through my readings of the early modern texts of folly from which my four players sprung is that they, as artistic and artful creations, can be seen as characters in which this impending state of lost salvation is articulated. I have found that the liminal space of literature that Foucault illustrates in *The Order of Things* is precisely the place of openness and plurality that a player of folly inhabits. It is this access to openness and plurality that saves the fools from sceptical and religious despair and reminds us that there is

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[406] Foucault, *The Order of Things* 47.
[407] Foucault, *The Order of Things* 48.
[408] Foucault, *The Order of Things* 48.
[409] Foucault, *The Order of Things* 49.

an alternative. The plurality of knowledge implicit in their foolish discourse attests to a certain inclination that suggests things do not have to be how they are.

Through their relationship to the radical ironies and paradoxes that govern both unreason and reason, early modern fools peculiarly presage the profound change Foucault is describing.[410] In their own time and in their own texts, my four characters bring forth their own form of "anti-discourse," akin to the one that literature will later apply on a much larger scale. By utilising folly manifest in their wit and humour, they overcome the hopelessness of the fringes of culture where modern literature, as Foucault sees it, later finds itself. As I have read it, Eulenspiegel's, Pomet's, Paleček's and Falstaff's "anti-discourse" articulates a paradoxical wisdom in their texts and in their cultures. And this wisdom is expressed through a kind of intense and ironic eloquence only folly is capable of voicing.

Foucault himself marks the convergence between the two types of personality, the mad and the poetic. Omitting the lover, he almost reiterates Shakespeare's contention that the two social outsiders "are of imagination all compact" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V.i.8). Foucault states the liminality of the two figures and their relation to signs: madman's accumulative tendencies and poet's ludic access to the language of resemblances. The madman and the poet, in Foucault's words,

> share, then, on the outer edge of our culture and at the point nearest to its essential divisions, that "frontier" situation—a marginal position and a profoundly archaic silhouette—where their words unceasingly renew the power of their strangeness and the strength of their contestation.[411]

Where the position of the players of folly diverges from the position of literature is in the affirmative ways their marginality can be employed. It is still capable to make a difference, however desperate at times. Eulenspiegel does so in using his body as a foolish instrument equal to language; Pomet emerges victorious by recognising the folly of politics;

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[410] My thanks to Martin Procházka who alerted me to this line of approach.
[411] Foucault, *The Order of Things* 55.

Paleček finds a way to marry folly and the promise of salvation in Christianity; while Falstaff, in his wretched manoeuvres of mendacity shows that even gratuitous folly has a purpose: to question the perceived stability of authority. Their folly operates from the margins, aware of its own transience and able to profit from the flux of experience. The paradoxical wisdom thus exhibited is found in its denial of constants, universals and its ironic rejections of epistemological claims to absolute truth.

Uses of folly in early modernity, as I have come to learn, were many and diverse. Its perhaps most obvious—but in no way ultimate—application was as a form of social critique. Even in the relatively short period of the 16th century, from its very beginning when *Eulenspiegel* appeared up until the 1590s that saw the first Falstaffs on the Elizabethan stage, folly was employed in a plethora of contexts. In its distorting yet revealing mirror, it reflected and mocked the development of such notions as taste and cultural sensitivity, the burgeoning entertainment industry, or politically conditioned appropriations of comedy. Each of my four players of folly comments on different discourses that constituted important lines of thought in early modernity. And through their foolish commentary, they attempt to affect and transform these discourses, succeeding to reveal in them certain tacit instabilities. I have observed in Eulenspiegel, Pomet, Paleček and Falstaff four different uses of folly that I shall now briefly summarise.

VI.ii Eulenspiegel

I find Till Eulenspiegel—the German jester whose fame acquired a notoriety of its own—best suited for an examination of how body and mind work together in performing folly. Eulenspiegel's productivity of verbal jest—hinging on explorations of language that unmasks the nonsense inherent in sensible speech—I read as being ingeniously coupled with his bodily productivity. The corporeality of Eulenspiegel's jest appears most clearly in the use of scatological motifs, frequent already in medieval farce and satire. These are resorted to when his verbal humour either fails or are employed as a supplement to it.

To a certain extent, this incessant productivity, both of language and of bodily waste, makes Eulenspiegel in my reading approach the Bakhtinian notion of the grotesque body. On the one hand, I find Bakhtin's contention that, in early modernity, a new picture of the world was constructed "around the human conceived as a body"[412] convergent with the worldview that the *Schwankbuch* promotes. Likewise, Bakhtin's recognition of a return to "a reality, a materiality, to language and to meaning"[413] in Rabelaisian prose I see present in *Eulenspiegel* as well. On the other hand, Bakhtin's insistence on the centralized structure of the grotesque body, looking back at a unified, homogeneous time, and anchored in idealized pre-historic past, proves unhelpful for describing *Eulenspiegel's* preference of flux.

Because of his productiveness, variability and the sheer multitude of the stories he goes through, I understand Eulenspiegel as akin to the joyful schizo introduced in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*. This figure, inseparable from the process of production, does what Eulenspiegel does in his flows of language, excrement and stories: he keeps moving, inseparable from nature, from his body and a particular form of desire that perpetuates production. In my conclusion, Eulenspiegel becomes an example of the affirmative appropriation of the early modern discourse of corporeality, rooted in its medieval manifestations; a player of folly who speaks and jests by means of both body and language. I read Eulenspiegel's embodied folly as his tool, one he uses to unsettle the smooth flows of dull everydayness and remind his bemused audience—both his readers and the characters he encounters in the text—that bodies are merry instruments, and not just vessels of a half-conscious survival.

VI.iii. Pomet

My second player of folly is Pomet Trpeza, Marin Držić's comical ruler of the ludicrous world of *Dundo Maroje*; a master of wit and folly capable of outperforming anyone he meets

[412] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 171.
[413] Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 171.

on his way. The intricate cultural context of the early modern Republic of Ragusa proves paramount in my reading of the play, whose comical complexity and hectic polyvocality must have gotten ample inspiration in Držić's contemporaneity. The voices represented in the comedy echo the voices intersecting in a historical moment when Ragusa was in its prime, located on the peripheries of East and West. The cultural influences of the surrounding, more powerful lands affected the Republic profoundly. Nonetheless, it was simultaneously trying to keep them at bay and preserve its ideal of *libertas* intact.

I read Držić as a man of the theatre who recognises this complex political situation and enriches his comedies with this understanding. Since comedies were his preferred mode of expression—one likely imposed on him by the censorious authorities that potentially viewed the comic as harmless—he had folly at his disposal to comment on the social and political reality. My reading of Pomet takes note of a parodic Machiavellianism and an aesthetically hedonistic Epicureanism fused in the character. By merging these philosophies, Pomet in my reading overcomes the constraints of a conservative, rigid reality. As a method in his manipulations, like a puppeteer guiding the somnambulant, gullible characters, Pomet appropriates folly and leads the play out of a deadlock.

Informed by the understanding of early modern folly as a type of agency capable of proposing alternatives, my view of Pomet reveals in his author a dramatist with an astute sense for the folly of politics. In this folly Držić would dare to participate himself, later in his life. His attempted conspiracy, unknown in his lifetime and in the age that followed it, I read as a confirmation of the daring of folly and the extent to which it would go, seeking to imagine a change.

VI.iv. Paleček

A Bohemian hero comes next on my journey, and he mobilises the folly of Christianity. Named Brother Jan Paleček, he is remembered as a court jester to King George of

Poděbrady, a ruler at the time when the country was in a complicated political situation, shattered by recent religious upheavals and local warfare. I read Paleček, a fool on the margin of reality and fiction, as firmly embedded in these religious circumstances.

The Bohemia of King George remembered vividly its Hussite Revolution, the great religious upheaval that divided the country by destroying the institutions of the Catholic Church, robbing it of its property and even instituting an austere proto-Reformation Christianity and a new Holy Communion ritual for the laymen. The Hussite teachings brought about the creation of the Unity of Brethren, a small Christian denomination whose member Paleček was. Their religious and social agenda was manifest in a radical pacifism that they based in Christian faith and love. Paleček's belonging to the Brethren informed my reading of his folly.

Reading Paleček as a propagator of Christian mercy and strict adherence to Scripture steeped in folly, I recognise in him a product of the text that was itself in an intertextual relationship with the word of God. In its pages shines the folly of Christianity, emerging from *stultitia Dei*, the concept that Erasmus employed in the finale of his *Praise*. Paleček's *Histories* are charged with the revolutionary message the Brethren strove to spread, for everyone could assume their beliefs because all can be saved.

Through his words and the example he made of himself, I understand Paleček as a foolish apostle of Pauline Christianity. He embraces everyone around him—from the King down to the lowly peasant, all of whom he addresses as "brothers"—in Christian love and hope. The image of Paleček's folly that emerges from this reading is one that could open up a world where Christianity becomes the ultimate power of practical humanism. In Paleček's world thus conceptualised, individuals could be joined in an ideal that folly itself presupposes: one of no hierarchies and open possibilities.

VI.v. Falstaff

The final player of folly I chose to study is a player in every sense of the word. I encounter Sir John Falstaff, Shakespeare's enormous creation of thespian power, on the threshold of political play, influencing, mirroring, but never completely entering it. I read Falstaff as an exploiter of his superiors, namely Hal, his "sweet young prince" (1HIV, I.ii.77-78), striving to secure the perpetuation of gratuitous foolery and parasitic existence. I show him, however, to be equally exploited by others. Namely, the presence and utility of Falstaff secure Hal with a newly fashioned royal persona, dexterous in employing mendacity.

Falstaff is also the only one of the four players that is explicitly renounced, banished and killed off by the playwright. This choice of rejection of folly, however, I see as far from absolute, basing this view on the fact that Shakespeare in the two plays favours neither the deeply flawed politics of the crown, nor the steamy lusciousness of Eastcheap. Falstaff's folly I see as the folly of play—the stage-play, but also the incessant playing of authority made manifest in the folly of eloquence, power and deceit. The folly of such play will continue even after he is removed from the stage. Hal will keep on playing, and his performance will never be free from his tainted past.

Far from seeing him introduced simply to be discarded by the new state power, I read Falstaff's comedy in *Henry IV* as integral to the world where constant crisis has its dominion. Falstaff casts a bulky shadow over the exchanges in the world of history proper, but he neither transcends it, not is completely absorbed in it. What emerges as his role and his importance is to incessantly remind us, in his self-serving banter—the banter that debases all value, even the word of Scripture—that man is but "foolish-compounded clay" (*2HIV*, I.ii.6).

VI.vi. The Nomadic Thought of Folly

If a generalisation is to be made, we may say that, at its most philosophical, the discourse of folly in Renaissance literature is used as an epistemic mode with which to critique the knowledge of the ostensibly reasonable world. I have discerned several main ways in which this happens. For one, folly gestures towards how knowledge is always contingent and linguistically produced. Here belong Eulenspiegel's endless linguistic disruptions that uncover the absurdity of speech, and Falstaff's digressive ruminations on the nature of honour, for example, as being a mere word. Further, folly frequently illustrates how knowledge of a concept is always more than its particular instance—brotherhood for Paleček, for example, is a concept that reaches far beyond relative kinship and is exemplified in Christian hope and salvation for all.

Ultimately, I see that the discourse of folly can be employed to suggest that there is a degree of idealisation in the formation of conceptual categories, which are often postulated as inflexible. In my readings, my four players of folly emerge as questioning and mocking what is stable and true about the body, politics, faith and the potential of play in early modern discourses and beyond. I read Eulenspiegel as uncovering spaces of jest that make us see the world and our bodies in it anew. Pomet I see as questioning the political stability by his jocoserious manipulations in the arena where he is supposedly bereft of agency. My Paleček example gestures towards the possibility of universalism found in a particular, pure kind of Christianity, often overlooked when faith is politicised. And lastly, I see Falstaff's digressions and his expanding of time into futile jest as his folly of play: a necessary ingredient in a complexly compound world, regardless how much this world would like to eliminate it. Most importantly, however, I have discovered that early modern folly does all of this without making a claim to its own wisdom, remaining in the realm of paradox.

I have suggested earlier that early modern folly, as the players in this thesis employ it, can be affirmative, that it can advocate and perhaps even engender change. This affirmative quality I see as folly's second major function in early modernity; it complements the critique of the stability of knowledge. In order to read early modern folly as affirmative, I have

suggested early on that it might be taken as a form of nomadic thinking. This complex means of perception—a way of being, even—is postulated by Deleuze and Guattari in their jointly written works. Brian Massumi insightfully suggests that nomad thought "does not respect the artificial division between the three domains of representation, subject, concept, and being: it replaces restrictive analogy with a conductivity that knows no bounds."[414] The counter-discourse of my four fellows of infinite jest in their different ways questions representation and shows that a boundless ludic interplay of meanings is a necessary complement to knowledge.

The counter-discourse of the early modern players of folly makes their knowledge truly rhizomatic, like nomad thought does. They likely knew how to "establish a logic of the AND [as opposed to the binary logic of either/or], overthrow ontology, do away with foundations, nullify endings and beginnings."[415] These fools may, therefore, be seen as almost philosophical thinkers, the nomadic thinkers who explore the "lines of flight,"[416] that is, the potential directions in motion that facilitate the reassessment of a complex situation, reconfigure it, or completely metamorphose it. These fools, I believe, instinctively knew what Hamlet shrewdly points out, namely that "there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so" (*Hamlet*, II.ii.244-245).

By engaging with the reception history of my four players of folly, I have learned that these characters possess something comparable to the trans-historical appeal that Jan Kott discerns in Shakespeare, who is "like the world, or life itself. Every historical period finds in him what it is looking for and what it wants to see."[417] I view the texts that contain the four fools as dynamic fields of productive potential, generating commentary and inspiring departures from the original contexts. The appeal of the characters made them survive for centuries. They have been appropriated in numerous ways, ways that straddle the high and the low culture.

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[414] Massumi, Brian, "Translator's Foreword" in Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* xii.
[415] Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 28.
[416] See Deleuze & Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, esp. 4, 10, 15, 98, 298, 466-467, 561-562.
[417] Kott, Jan, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, trans. Bolesław Taborski (London: Routledge, 1974 [1964]) 5.

There is, however, a darker side to the seemingly universal appeal of the "all licenced fool" (*King Lear*, I.iv.186), a darker side that Borges is keenly attuned to in his brilliant cod-academic discussion of a fictional scholar, who has dedicated his life to the quixotic task of "re-creating" *Don Quixote*. As Borges' narrator reflects:

> There is no intellectual exercise that is not ultimately pointless. A philosophical doctrine is, at first, a plausible description of the universe; the years go by, and it is a mere chapter—if not a paragraph or proper noun—in the history of philosophy […]. The Quixote, Menard remarked, was first and foremost a pleasant book; it is now an occasion for patriotic toasts, grammatical arrogance, obscene *deluxe* editions. Fame is a form—perhaps the worst form—of incomprehension.[418]

My fellows of infinite jest frequently found themselves invoked in moments when national identity required formations that would speak to wide, heterogeneous groups and convince them of a shared heritage. In moments such as these, the full historical and philosophical potential of the characters is necessarily simplified: they become caricatures of themselves. Moreover, their openness and their capacity to generate alternatives are glossed over. Instead, they become unwitting and unfunny spokesmen for the crude patriotism that Borges decries.

It could be that nationalists of all stripes have failed to comprehend the fools' nature—their ironic detachment from specific causes, their refusal to play the power games of the serious world. But this "incomprehension" has, nonetheless, left its mark: it might well be the reason why these fools are commonly overlooked in serious discussions of culture, why they are dismissed as mere "comic relief."

If we are to avoid incomprehension implicit in the shallow appropriations of the works of the past, a solution could come from an active engagement with the paradoxical living tissue of history. Once we endorse the processual nature of the past, and do not behold

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[418] Borges, Jorge Louis, *Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999 [1944]) 41.

it as a closed and distant entity, it becomes clear that the meanings of historical texts and events exist in a constant becoming, that they are always being negotiated in the expanding universe of textuality. This is the reason why I have tried to write my "history" of four particular players of folly from a nomadic point of view.

Greenblatt's assertion that literary studies is fuelled by a desire "to speak with the dead," with the hope to "re-create a conversation with them" is by now a cliché. Admitting to the futility of that desire, Greenblatt concludes that, after the quest, "all I could hear was my own voice."[419] Along with performing the seemingly endless task of gathering the evidence that is scattered within the texts of art and history, as well as inscribed into the materiality of the past, I find that one should also nurture a sensitivity to that what *we* are writing into these texts in invisible ink. And if we do want to participate in the kind of macabre communication Greenblatt suggests, what we also have to do is listen: because, on the intertextual plane, the dead will begin to speak about us.

What the fools of this thesis tell us about ourselves is that we limit them by making them represent certain nations. They are the heralds of openness and possibility; the nomadic thinkers evading the constraints of officially sanctioned truths. It is precisely their folly that, I believe, takes them beyond such constraints—a folly that reached a peak in the early modernity when the voices of fools, yet unchallenged by the new truth claims of modern science, were endowed with access to a different kind of truth, one that resists certainty. This is why I brought these four players of folly together, remembering that "[f]ools, they are the only nation" (*Volpone* I.ii.66), as I already quoted Jonson jesting.

When the texts I have discussed in my thesis are read today, I believe that their power reveals itself to us in the recognition of a dissonance that lurks behind all knowledge. And fools, quite like poets, seem to understand that. A poet, the kin of the fool, is "he who, beneath the named, constantly expected differences, rediscovers the buried kinships between

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[419] Greenblatt, Stephen, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) 1.

things, their scattered resemblances" and "hears another, deeper, discourse, which recalls the time when words glittered in the universal resemblance of things."[420] In order for my speech not to "prove mine own marring" (*2HIV*, Epilogue 6), I give the final words of my thesis to a poet. With sublime simplicity, William Carlos Williams managed to express what is at the heart of all the discourse of folly. Namely, that

> Dissonance
> (if you are interested)
> leads to discovery.[421]

[420] Foucault, *The Order of Things* 55.
[421] Williams, William Carlos, *Paterson* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1992 [1946-1951]) 175.

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In Prague, September 10, 2014

Martina Pranić