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The Image of the Fool in Late Medieval Bohemia*

The figure of the fool is essential to an understanding of late medieval culture. Fools and jesters appeared everywhere during that period. We find them in spiritual and entertainment literature as much as in the visual arts. Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff* and Erasmus of Rotterdam's *In Praise of Folly* are just two of the most important examples of literature grounded in the widely shared cultural concept of folly, which was used by many other authors like Hans Sachs and Thomas Murner.¹ The phenomenon was thus extensively studied in Western Europe, both from the general anthropological perspective and in the context of specific historical situation of the late middle ages.² There exists a vast literature dealing with various visual representations of folly — the phenomenon of a topsy-turvy world, iconography of fools and court jesters as well as other aspects.³ The various feasts and carnivals of the late medieval and early renaissance world, where fools played an important role, also received special attention.⁴ Czech examples were studied much less thoroughly, even though the concept of foolishness was as important in Bohemia as in other European countries and perhaps even more so.⁵ The unique situation of the kingdom divided by the religious rupture between the majority Utraquists and the minority Catholics (i.e. members of the traditional Roman church supported from abroad) was reflected even in the notion of folly. Important examples are the stories about the jester of King George of Poděbrady, Brother Paleček, which are attested from the beginning of the sixteenth century. The wise Paleček who used jokes to ridicule the hypocrisy and vainglory of his opponents was pictured not only as a simple folk hero but also as a devout Utraquist and a loyal supporter of his Utraquist sovereign as well as of the Bohemian Brethren.⁶

Even less attention has been devoted to visual artefacts depicting the theme of folly in Bohemia.⁷ In the following passages I shall describe some of these mostly overlooked artefacts. The goal is to analyse different aspects of the fool's iconography in an attempt to describe the function and usage of the theme of folly in Bohemian late medieval art

The fool with a spoon — Srbeč

The village of Srbeč lies in north-western Bohemia between the two important royal cities, Slaný and Rakovník. The village church of Saint James the Greater is of Gothic origin. It was built in the fourteenth century, but not much has survived of its original furnishings. A mural of the Last Judgement on the south wall of the chancel is a rare relic of the late Gothic phase and datable to the very end of the fifteenth century.⁸ The composition is dominated by Christ sitting on a rainbow accompanied by angels who announce the end of days by blowing on trumpets. Below the Saviour kneel the Virgin Mary and Saint John the Baptist who beseech and intervene for the sake of resurrected sinners. There is a crowd of the redeemed walking calmly by the right hand of Christ. An angel guides them to the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem on the edge of the painting. On the other side, devils drag poor sinners to Hell. The infernal scene is remarkable for a detailed depiction of the sinners and their tortures. There is a man hanging by his feet from a gibbet, another secured to a pole being flogged by devils. A devil carries on his back a sinful priest identified by his tonsure, while yet another sinner is driven to his doom on a wheelbarrow. All these persons, as well as other sinners, are depicted naked. The only

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exception is a man sitting in a majestic chair just at the entrance to Hell, in Leviathan's mouth. This young man with long curly blonde hair wears trousers with legs in different colours. He is apparently not worried about the fuss around, not even about a hairy devil who grabs his chair from behind. The youngster just carefully observes his face in a mirror he is holding. Yet one more peculiar thing is present, a large spoon or stirrer leisurely resting on the young man's shoulder.

The man clearly belongs to the sort of extravagant dandies we can find in more paintings of the Last Judgement across Central Europe. One of them is present in wall paintings from around 1416 in the church of St Ruprecht in Bruck an der Mur in Styria.⁹ The murals, as in Srbeč, depict the Last Judgement. In the lower right corner of the voluminous scene, there is a group of sinners casually walking into the open mouth of Leviathan. As in Srbeč, they are not naked like the others but dressed in extravagant clothes. The jolly company is led by a young man wearing a fashionable waistcoat, long sleeves and a hat with a feather. A clear conclusion is that both murals criticize the vanity of excessive fashion and the gay abandon of luxury. The youngster in Bruck has long hair like his counterpart in Srbeč and a mirror in which he solicitously studies his own face. There is nevertheless a difference between the dandies in the paintings: the spoon (or stirrer) on the shoulder of the Srbeč figure.

The object is a reference to foolishness of the youngster. The explanation derives from a contemporary German pun — *Löffel* (i.e. spoon) had a double meaning with 'fool' (cf. the present-day word *der Laffe*).¹⁰ The popularity of this pun is well attested by

late medieval art, most notably by prints. A nice example is a print by the Master of the Housebook showing an old woman and a fool playing on a lute — the spoon in the left hand of the hag serves here as a reference to foolish lust.¹¹ A similar example represents a small print by Israhel van Meckenem depicting a dancing fool, where a spoon is among other attributes of foolishness such as a jester's cap with bells.¹²

The Srbeč example demonstrates how the iconography of folly freely diffused into late medieval Bohemia even after the Hussite revolution. Arguably, it was comprehensible for inhabitants of Srbeč and for the unknown donor of the painting. German-speaking areas were not far from the village, so the pun with a spoon could have worked even for the parishioners.

Obscene semi-naked fools — Brandýs nad Labem and Brno

The fool was often depicted naked or half-naked, dressed only in a short shirt which left everything below the waist naked, including his genitalia. Such an image of the fool is of ancient origin and we can find it in many illuminated initials of 'Dixit insipiens', Psalm 52, to which we owe most of the fools' depictions. Such is the case of the manuscript containing the psalter and Book of Hours created in Arras around 1300, which is now in the collections of the British Library.¹³ There is a fool dressed in an extravagant coat, but his genitalia are bare. His wretched clothes and the fact that the poor imbecile devotes himself to a mirror are the evident source of the happy smile of a devil who stands in the initial next to the fool. The iconography appears not only in illuminated manuscripts.¹⁴ It



1 / **Last Judgement** (detail),
end of the 15th century
wall painting
Srbeč, Church of Saint
James the Great, southern
side of presbytery
Photo: Ondřej Faktor



2 / **Fool with his dog**,
end of the 15th century
sandstone, 114 × 96 cm
Prague, Lapidarium
of National Museum
Photo: Lukáš Reitinger

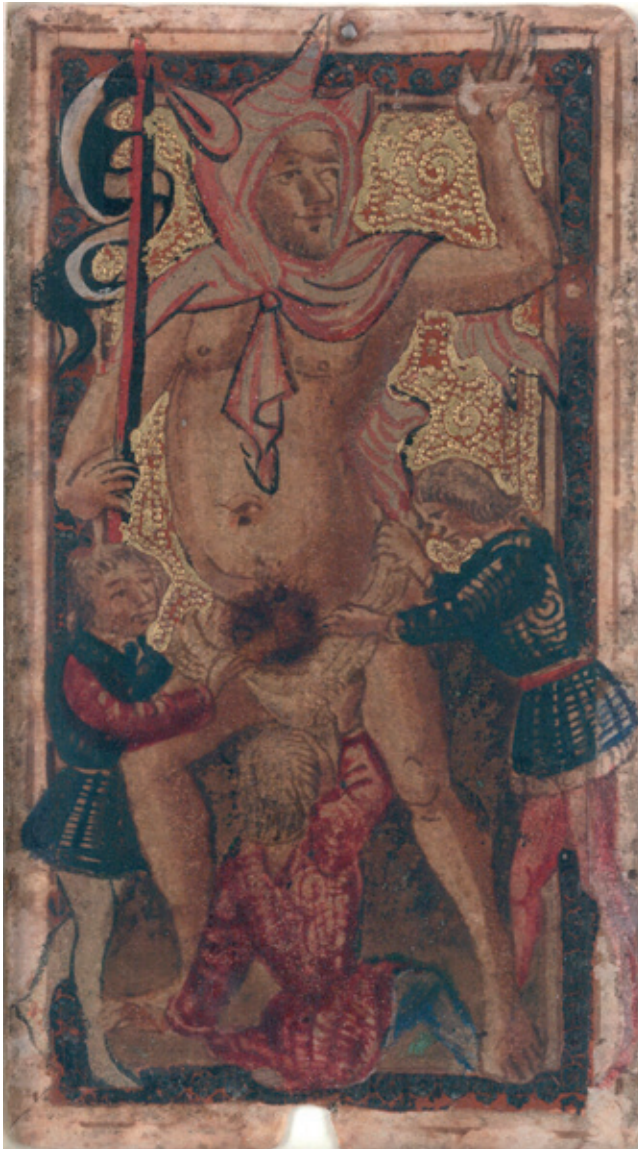
seemingly influenced the much later depiction of fools on Tarot cards, where fools sometimes expose their genitalia, as is the case of the d'Este tarot (probably around 1450) preserved in the Beinecke Library, Yale.¹⁵

Fools in '*Dixit insipiens*' initials were often accompanied by dogs. Sometimes, one can find even a funny interaction between them as in the Bible Historiale (Paris, between 1418–1420) kept in the British Library, where a fool bites the tail of a poor animal.¹⁶ The nakedness of the fool and his doggy companion sometimes appear together, as in the annotated Apocalypse illuminated by the Master of Sarum (England, first half of the thirteenth century) now kept in the Bibliothèque nationale de France.¹⁷ A fool depicted there is characterized by a *marotte* (fool's stave), a strange (double) tonsure, and also by his nudity — his shirt is too short to cover even the waist. Next to the wretch sits a dog that raises its paw in a despairing

gesture, either over his companion or more probably over Christ who is led to his doom in another part of the picture.¹⁸

The iconographic variants which accentuate the relationship between the fool and his dog were probably echoed by an interesting relief found in Brandýs nad Labem. The stone panel, which is now kept in the National Museum in Prague, is of mediocre artistic quality and is partly damaged. It can be only loosely dated to the end of the fifteenth century. The relief has been briefly mentioned in the literature as a depiction of a hunter walking with a dog.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the man leading a dog on a rope is not a hunter but rather a fool. This is indicated by his hood adorned with small horns, or more precisely, little ass's ears, which are clearly noticeable although the upper part of the relief is damaged. It seems that the man was pulling down his trousers to show his genitalia — one way or another, he

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3 / **Fool, from the Este Tarot series**, around 1450
playing card, 14 × 8 cm
Yale, Beinecke Library
Photo: Beinecke Library

with male genitalia.²² These clues reassert the sense of the strange image.

The obscene image with underlying moral meaning in *Brandýs nad Labem* probably served as a house sign.²³ Reliefs or paintings of this kind regularly adorned late medieval Bohemian houses, though they rarely survived until modern times. They did not shun funny inversions of daily situations in the topsy-turvy and sometimes, as is attested by written sources, were openly obscene.²⁴

Yet another example of the semi-naked fool is preserved on a late medieval stove tile from Brno.²⁵ The tile belongs to a larger set excavated from a sump found at Starobrněnská 8. The tiles, covered by green enamel, probably came from one stove and can be divided into several groups, which once adorned different levels of the stove. The fool belongs to a group representing knights participating in a joust. One of the knights can be identified by his coat of arms as a member of important Lichtenburk family (perhaps Hynek Bítovský of Lichtenburk).²⁶ The identification of the other knight is less satisfactory, but the coat of arms belonging to the Kunštát family could point to King George of Poděbrady himself.²⁷ The fool is not preserved in an ideal condition, and parts of the tile are lost. He is riding on a horse or mule and wears a padded jacket with large buttons and a hood with ass's ears. He does not have any trousers, thus his exposed penis swings hopelessly between his legs just below the lower border of the jacket. Much more difficult is the identification of an object the fool holds in his left hand — it is probably a bottle he is drinking from, but we cannot reject other possibilities.²⁸

is manipulating with something in his crotch. The panel is somehow hatched in that area which could even have been done intentionally.²⁰ Similarly, the dog's penis is also chipped off while it is apparent that the unknown artist originally endowed the animal with a relatively large member.

The *Brandýs* relief was probably a free interpretation of the traditional theme of the fool and his dog, taunting the animal, uncontrolled sexuality of the fool. The sexuality of the fool is similarly emphasised in an illustration in the margin of a manuscript containing Pseudo-Aristotle treatises, *De caelo* and *De anima* (England, 1480) now kept in the British Library.²¹ The merrily dancing semi-naked fool is holding his uncovered penis, perhaps in a crazy emulation of his hybrid companions who are playing on trumpets and bagpipes. A fat swine just next to the fool is blowing bagpipes, which is an instrument often directly associated

The meaning of the foolish rider was probably to mock both the knights and their chivalrous contest. Heralds or pages dressed as fools appeared at medieval tournaments in central Europe from the middle of the fifteenth century. Their strange costume was probably meant to humble the otherwise criticized pride of jousting knights, or the spectacular show itself. They also added another entertainment level to the tournaments.²⁹ However, the fool on the Brno tile is different from other extant examples of tournament heralds dressed as fools. It is not only that he is half naked, but that he rides a horse himself which is also abnormal — heralds dressed as fools were usually depicted on foot. It seems that the implicit function of heralds to deride the seriousness of the tournament was radically enhanced in the Brno tiles, but the interpretation of the group remains uncertain.³⁰ I cannot agree with the explanation provided by

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4 / Drawing of a pig playing bagpipes, a jester showing his genitals, a man blowing a flute or pipe, and various hybrid creatures, 1487

Sloane MS 748, fol. 82v
London, British Library
Photo: British Library

the archeologists Hana Jordánková, Irena Loskotová and David Merta, that the tiles show the victorious attack of Hynek Bítovský of Lichtenburk on the Utraquist king, George of Poděbrady, and thus a somehow late reflection of Hynek's victories over the Bohemian Utraquists.³¹ If anything, the tiles probably refer more to the general situation of the country than to a specific political event. The division of important noble families over their support of different aspirants to the kingship was seen as disastrous in contemporary sources.³² The incomplete heraldry on the tiles representing families from both the main sides could thus indicate such criticism.³³

Fools and Morris dancing — Kutná Hora

There is a curious group of three statues on the parapet of the Church of Saint Barbara in Kutná Hora which always attracted much more attention among scholars than the examples I have discussed earlier. The weathered figures were replaced in 1969 by copies created by Miroslav Smrkovský, and the original statues were thought to be lost.³⁴ Fortunately, they have recently resurfaced and can now be admired in a permanent exhibition inside the church. The statues were noticed for the first time by Bernhard Grueber in 1861.³⁵ He identified them as a master and his two apprentices. According to



5 / Fool, second half of the 15th century
stove tile, 32 × 18.5 cm
Brno City Museum
Photo: Brno City Museum



6 / **Dancing fools, so-called dancers**, before 1499 (state in 1930)
sandstone
Kutná Hora, Church of Saint Barbara
Photo: The Štenc Archives, Prague

Grueber, the master could have only been Matěj Rejsek, the master builder of the choir vault finished at the end of the fifteenth century. The master allegedly points to a clock to show the importance of passing time; an industrious man uses his time to work, while a lazy slug just wastes his life, concluded Grueber. Accordingly, the apprentices should have represented counterparts to the industrious master and should have symbolized idleness. Subsequent generations of scholars more or less accepted Grueber's interpretation and variously expanded this narrative.³⁶ However, there has always been another tradition in Kutná Hora according to which the statues have been called 'dancers'.³⁷

The discourse concerning the statues was recently carefully analysed by Michaela Ottová, who rightfully rejected the connection of statues with Rejsek. The so called 'clock' in the hand of the middle figure is nothing else than a drum. This is also the interpretation of Smrkovský's copy. Moreover, the strange position of the damaged left hand indicates that 'the master'

probably held another musical instrument, possibly a trumpet. The same musical instrument was chosen by Smrkovský for his replica. Two other figures with foolish attributes are 'dancing' on the top of the balustrade next to the musician. They are described as naked, but due to their condition they could have been originally dressed in clinging clothes whose forms disappeared through the efflorescence of the stone. Ottová points to the fact that they sit on points on top of the balustrade and attributes their gestures to this fact. According to Ottová, the figures 'sit on the sharp points of the pyramids, which are explicitly piercing their rectum'. They allegedly react to their situation by spreading their buttocks.³⁸ I cannot agree with her here. The top of the balustrade is not adorned by pyramids; the extensions have edges on top and not sharp points. The figures are not pushing out their backsides — on the contrary, they are stretching their arms in front of themselves. Therefore, their position cannot simply be described as uneasy — it is just the result of the need to attach them to the balustrade. This means that

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7 / Fool 'watcher', one of the so-called dancers, before 1499 (state in 2006)
sandstone
Kutná Hora, Church of Saint Barbara
Photo: Aleš Mudra

Ottová's connection of the figures with a scatological iconography is also highly spurious.³⁹

But who are these strange figures? They indeed reflect the iconography of fools — the musician has a sleigh bell attached to his dress, one of the dancers is wildly sticking out his tongue, and we have older reports that at least one of the alleged apprentices had a jester's cap.⁴⁰ A possible solution stems from the configuration of instruments of the musician and the strange gestures made by his companions. All these aspects can be seen in various depictions of the Morris dance (*Moriskentanz*). Particularly, the movement of the hands of the statue which was called by various authors a watcher (*koukač*) is convincing — a direct comparison can be made with the famous print by Israhel van Meckenem depicting the dance.⁴¹

Late medieval Morris dance was performed to the music of drum and trumpet. The dancers used to swing their limbs wildly, moving them in awkward directions. In most cases, dancers danced around the central figure of

woman holding a prize in her hand (an apple, a ring etc.). The dance thus represented a dancing contest of some sort, whose eager participants tried to overcome the others by their dancing skill and win the woman and the prize. Their strenuous effort was ridiculed by the presence of a fool who accompanied the ensemble in most cases. In fact, the fool was the predestined winner of the dancing contest; who other than a fool could win the fickle heart of a girl? The moral meaning of the dance is apparent — the desire-driven men dancing wildly to attract the lady are even more foolish than the fool himself.⁴² In Italy, the sexual connotations of the dance were sometimes strengthened by the fact that the dancers were depicted naked.⁴³ This is particularly interesting as there is more proof about the activity of Italian artists in Kutná Hora at the end of the fifteenth century.⁴⁴ Thus even if one acknowledges that the dancers were originally naked, it is not impossible that an Italian artist came with a print which served as an inspiration for the figures on the parapet.

The moral explanation of the dance certainly contributed to its wide popularity and made possible its depictions in representational works of public architecture. The famous sculptures of Morris dancers by Erasmus Grasser (created in 1480), which adorned the main hall of the Munich town hall, and reliefs with the same theme preserved on the equally famous Goldenes Dach (around 1500), the loggia of the archduke's palace in Innsbruck, are just two examples.⁴⁵ Also, the written sources attesting to the production of the dance confirm its popularity. It was mostly performed during Shrovetide (*Fastnacht*) which is indicated by several accounts preserved from different towns referring to payments going to the performers.⁴⁶

According to various sources, the dance was popular across the whole of Europe — we have testimonies of performances as well as visual representations from various countries — England, Germany, northern Italy and even Hungary.⁴⁷ One account confirms the production of the dance in Cheb (Eger), where it was performed during Shrovetide 1487.⁴⁸ Other Bohemian evidence is from 1559 when Martin Kuthen of Šprinsberk writes about some 'Moorish dance', which was performed during the Prague visit of King Ferdinand I.⁴⁹ The evidence for the almost certain presence of Morris dancing in late medieval and early modern Bohemia is scarce but this could be attributed to the fact that forms of pre-modern dancing have attracted only limited attention from scholars since Čeněk Zíbrt's seminal book about historical dances in Bohemia.⁵⁰

Could the performance have been acceptable for the Utraquist burghers of Kutná Hora? There are some harsh condemnations of Shrovetide by Utraquist authorities like Jan Rokycana, but it seems that daily practice was much more relaxed.⁵¹ For example, there are notes from the middle of the sixteenth century about the procession of butchers' apprentices during



8 / **Israhel van Meckenken, Ornamental Engraving with Morris Dancers**, end of the 15th century

engraving, 12 × 26.8 cm

New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art



9 / **Miracle of Saint James with ducks** (detail), around 1520–1530

panel painting / tempera, wood, 70 × 60 cm

Most, Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary

Photo: Marta Pavlíková — Kateřina Neumannová

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Shrovetide and Saint Margaret's Day in Kutná Hora. The apprentices wore masks and celebrated different traditions, some of which were prohibited by the city council yet were still performed.⁵² It is therefore possible that an organized performance of Morris dancing demonstrating the foolishness of sinful delights was for Utraquist burghers much more acceptable than other wild masquerades. Even Ottová in her book connects the figures on the parapet with a Shrovetide play.⁵³ Ottová proposes that the source is a much later play about *Masopust*, the incarnation of Shrovetide, which does not contain any dancing or specific details that could be connected with the statues. The play was written by Mikuláš Dačický of Heslov († 1626), but he could have referred to some earlier tradition. All these sources attest that Shrovetide was celebrated in Kutná Hora and that we should not overrate the impact of condemnations of Utraquist church authorities.

If the weathered statues were meant to represent Morris dancers, as I have tried to show, the extant ensemble of dancers is incomplete. The surviving musician and two dancers are just part of the usual setting. As in other places, there should have been *Frau Venus*, the woman holding the 'prize' for the winners, and other dancers. The number of missing figures is hard

to estimate, but it was not high. On some depictions, there are just three or four dancers, similarly the fool is sometimes missing as the foolishness is sufficiently demonstrated by other dancers.⁵⁴ The proposed reconstruction is fully consistent with the surviving decoration of the Church of Saint Barbara. The parapet could have easily been adorned by more statues than just three. In fact, there is a question as to why there are only three statues, as even the part of the parapet directly above the main entrance remains empty. The condition of statues on the outer parts of the church was very bad even in the nineteenth century and it is possible that some of the statues could have been removed during Baroque alterations to the church.⁵⁵ But it is also possible that they were never completed, perhaps due to personnel changes during the construction. While earlier literature connected the origin of the statues with Matěj Rejsek, I fully agree with Michaela Ottová that the dancers owe their forms to a tradition completely different from that of the Prague autodidact. The free movement of the dancers' limbs and the self-assurance of their postures balancing on the top of the parapet is in sharp contrast with the rudimentary nature of Rejsek's other works which relied on robust figures and shallow reliefs.⁵⁶

10 / **Ill-matched couple**, around 1480–1490
stone corbel, Kutná Hora, Hrádek
Photo: Aleš Mudra



11 / **Fool**, around 1480–1490
stone corbel, Kutná Hora, Hrádek
Photo: Aleš Mudra





12 / **Hunt**, around 1490 (state in 1963 after uncovering)

wall painting, Castle Žirovnice, Green Chamber

Photo: Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences — Prokop Paul

The Fool in context

The different iconographical variants presented in the previous paragraphs are only various aspects of one general figure of the fool. The basic property of this figure is its ambiguity and power to inverse the meaning of the image. There are more surviving Bohemian images testifying to such function.

A late medieval altarpiece from Most (north Bohemia, around 1520–1530), which is now displayed in the decanal church is remarkable for its iconography reflecting medieval pilgrimages. The moveable wings depict legends of the most popular medieval pilgrim saint, Saint James the Great. The outer fixed wings show images of Saint Sebald and Saint Wendelin. The death of Saint Alexius was on the altar's extension (it is now a part of the predela).⁵⁷ According to heraldic representation, the altar's donor was a member of the powerful Gutštejn family, probably Albrecht of Gutštejn († 1550), a rich noble, who was at the time the warden of the mint of the Kingdom of Bohemia.⁵⁸ A fool is depicted in one of the four scenes with the legend of Saint James and two pilgrims. Two pilgrims, a father and son are wrongfully accused of a theft. The poor son is hanged but survives with the miraculous support of Saint James, even though he remains hanging on a gibbet. The father seeks for justice from a judge whom he tells about the miracle. The judge who is just eating his dinner is incredulous and ridicules the miracle, saying that the young man is as

much alive as the ducks he is just eating. Another miracle immediately happens — the ducks are revived and fly from the judge's plate. The story has a happy ending — the son is cut down from the gibbet, reunited with his father, and the false accuser is convicted and hanged.

The fool is depicted in the background to the scene showing the father's visit to the judge and the miracle with ducks. He is dressed in yellow clothes and a traditional hood adorned with ass's ears. He could have been interpreted just as a court jester of the wealthy judge, but this is somehow contradicted by his position within the picture. He is not depicted next to his master but in the background, where he is grilling a plucked bird in the kitchen. This position can be associated with the inversion of the meaning — it points to the fact that two birds flying from the plate in the foreground of the picture are part of the miracle. The fool prepares dead meat, but the miracle turns the meat back to living animals. Perhaps there is even a connection with the initial disbelief of the judge — *dixit insipiens in corde suo...* A fool denies the presence of God but the foolishness demonstrated by his costume is in fact the best proof of God's existence. Accordingly, the appearance of the fool who inverts rules paradoxically helps to define what is natural and what is unnatural.⁵⁹

The depiction of the fool often appears in connection with various acts of misconduct associated with sexuality. Negative images of ill-matched couples, an old man with a young woman or an old lady with a young man, were

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particularly popular in the late middle ages.⁶⁰ Fools are often present in this context to point out the stupidity of the old man or woman. This is the case of one print from the circle of Hans Leyden: an old man is embracing a young woman who is stealing his money and giving it to the young man standing nearby. The fool is pointing at the ill-matched couple and at Death waiting in the background.⁶¹

Keeping such foreign examples in mind, we can explain the configuration of figures on the corbels of a chamber in Kutná Hora's Hrádek, the palace belonging to the leading burgher and nobleman Jan Smíšek of Vrchoviště.⁶² Damaged statues can be found in the four corners of the room in the south-eastern corner of the building. They represent a fool, a damaged pair of an old man and a girl, a young man, and another old man. The first old man embraces the girl, while it is apparent that the now missing left arm of the girl was grabbing a pouch with money. A fool playing on bagpipes is a clear reference to the foolish behaviour of the old

man. Much more difficult is to reveal the meaning of the two remaining figures. It seems that the young man originally played on some musical instrument, perhaps a flute, as there are some remains around his mouth. Thus the ill-matched couple could have been accompanied by musicians, as is in some other cases.⁶³ However, a lot of uncertainty remains with the identification of these two figures as the second old man on the fourth corbel probably never had any musical instrument.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, the context is always pivotal for the interpretation of the fool. He himself is neither a positive nor a negative figure. Within the picture he embodies the inversion which could be, but did not have to be, realised. Such a position corresponds with Michel Foucault's characteristic of the role of the fool in the European culture: *'a speech given by a fool was in pre-modern Europe either considered as a total nonsense or a hidden truth'*.⁶⁵ Considering the meaning of the figure in the visual arts implies that the fool stands in a strange position on the border of insignificance and

14 / **Fool with drum accompanied by dog and cat**, around 1490
wall painting
Castle Žirovnice, Green Chamber
Photo: Jan Dienstbier



13 / **Hunt — detail with drinkers and a fool leading a pig**, around 1490
wall painting
Castle Žirovnice, Green Chamber
Photo: Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences — Vlado Bohdan



the proclamation of the hidden truth about the context in which he appears.

Some authors argue that there is a difference between the court fool who could utter the hidden truth and a general notion of 'ordinary' folly, which was negative.⁶⁶ Textual and pictorial evidence speak against any such distinctions. The reports about various societies of fools from France or Germany confirm the acceptance of the context of folly, if its wild potential could have been controlled within the social structures of the society. The knightly Order of Fools founded in 1381 by the Count of Cleves, or the famous *Compagnie de la Mère Folle* in Dijon, whose members were rich burghers and even French and Burgundian nobles, show that there was nothing negative in adopting the concept of folly.⁶⁷ Even in Brant's and Erasmus of Rotterdam's works, folly serves more as a tool than as a position — Brant begins his treatise with a condemnation of foolishness but in the following lines also asserts that only someone who sees himself to be foolish can truly attain wisdom.⁶⁸

In medieval art it is difficult to distinguish between the court fool and a 'plain' or 'natural' fool if there are no kings or nobles present in the picture. It is only the characteristic of folly which counts for the form of the figure, thus even the fools among peasants often have colourful clothes with jingle bells which suit court jesters much better.⁶⁹ On the other hand, even seemingly genre depictions of court jesters usually do not depict them as a neutral part of their sovereigns' entourages. The 'Grosser Liebesgarten' by Master E. S. is one of the examples attesting this fact. The presence of a semi-naked fool (his penis is visible under the coat which his female companion loosens) brings disruption and unhinged lust to a garden seemingly filled by courtly love.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the disruption was perhaps not seen as wholly negative and subversive as it seems today or as it was emphasized by earlier literature. It seems that at least in the fifteenth century the meaning could be twofold, the critical stance could be a part of the otherwise positive narrative. Both the criticism and the appreciation could have been present in the picture as an open question posed to the viewer to decide for himself.⁷¹

Another example of this ambiguity is the depiction of the fool in the central relief of the Goldenes Dachl. It is probably not only a representation of the emperor between his court jester and a chancellor as was traditionally proposed, but part of the Morris dance setting itself.⁷² The lady in the middle of the second panel with the figure of the emperor, usually identified as Bianca Maria Sforza, the second wife of Maximilian I, holds an apple in her left hand. That means that in the context of the Morris dance she has the role of *Frau Venus*, or in other words, she is the woman with the prize for the winners of the dancing contest.⁷³ Therefore, the presence of the fool who is turning towards her is not dictated by his social function but rather by his role

in the dance. The presence of the relief of a dance on the balcony has probably much to do with its function; the square below the balcony served as a playground for the tournament and the balcony itself naturally served as a viewing point for important, mainly female, spectators.⁷⁴ The tournament itself is, in the courtly ideology of the *minne*, very close to the dancing contest. As in the dance, the knights compete in the tournament for a prize given to them by a woman; as with the dance, the whole competition was somewhat ridiculed by heralds wearing jesters' clothing and by the emblems used by the knights.⁷⁵

Another example of ambiguity in the representation of a court jester is the image accompanying the calendar for April in the *Breviarium Grimani* (Paris, around 1510–1520).⁷⁶ The images in the calendar of the *Breviarium Grimani* were strongly inspired by another famous manuscript, the 'Trés riches heures du duc de Berry', but the April scene is different and the fool is present only in the *Breviarium Grimani*. The courtiers engaging in a spring feast are probably mocked by the fool as a sign of the transiency of the times and folly of love.⁷⁷ The April scene is notable for its blossoming trees, an ancient symbol for the transiency of human life used in many cultures.

Images where the presence of a fool signals that the whole meaning of the scene should be inverted or seriously questioned are present also in the artistic production of Bohemia. Probably most discernible is the painting of the hunt in the green chamber of the castle Žirovnice (1490–1510).⁷⁸ The large scene covering the eastern wall depicts a large hunt with many details. Some hunters chase deer, some are bringing down wild boars, and part of the hunting company just rides through a countryside dominated by a large city in the background. But there are also signs of conflict within this picture. The scene of the hunt does not occupy the whole width of the wall. It is interrupted on the north by an entrance adorned by illusive architecture with heraldic representation. In the remaining space in the corner there is a picture of a fool, which forms a strange counterpart to the hunters. The damaged fool is either dancing or playing on some musical instrument. Below him are depicted drums and three animals: a hare, which is playing bagpipes, a dog, and a cat. The dog and the cat lie calmly side-by-side. Another fool is present in the hunting scene. He leads a pet, which is notably absurd in the context of the hunt — a boar. Other boars of the same kind are hunted elsewhere in the picture. The gesture of the fool, his raised hand, closely matches the gesture of one of the hunters on horseback. Finally, in the company watching the hunt from the background of the picture, there is a man protecting his goblet from the eager hands of his female companion.

These marginalia were almost omitted in the extant literature, or simply as a curiosity, a pictorial ornament of the same kind as the green vegetation framing the images. However, these elements pose an important question

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about the true nature of this image. The fool with the boar baits the hunters, the woman trying to snatch the goblet is in stark contrast to the young couple riding together on one horse, and finally the dancing (?) fool accompanied by nonsensically behaving animals ridicules the whole picture in a world-upside-down fashion.⁷⁹ The invasion of folly thus inverts and unsettles the meaning of the picture. An enjoyable event from the life of the nobility turns into an allegory. A viewer who notes these references cannot help but puzzle about the foolishness of hunts or the folly of unsettled love deteriorating into shameful lust. Such an interpretation is supported by other pictures assembled on the walls of the green chamber — the Judgement of Paris, a double image of lovers and an evil hag who destroys the love of young husbands in the window, and Judith, who won over Holofernes through his lust. Perhaps this condemnation is not a harsh one, but it is difficult to pretend that it is not there.⁸⁰

The fools from Žirovnice, Hrádek and Most are not devoid of meaning, but their meaning makes sense only in the whole context of the story depicted. The fool himself does not stand for anything. In a strict sense, his own view, or his speech does not exist.⁸¹ Though the presence of the fool is essential: he inevitably twists the meaning of the whole. He is an open question posed to the viewer, who is necessarily cast into doubt — does the image have a sarcastic meaning or is the inconvenient presence of a fool only a marginal joke? The conscious usurpation of the joke undermines our attempts to impose a notion of positivity and negativity on the image. However, the art historian should not close his eyes to such ambiguity. Once again it emphasises that medieval culture should not be seen in terms of binary oppositions.⁸² People in medieval times obviously enjoyed such playful ambiguity and used it to construct and remember the meaning. The late medieval images of the fool I have discussed above attest that such startling polysemy is not just a matter of the West, but that examples of ingenious iconography are present in late medieval art from Bohemia as well.

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NOTES

* This study was supported by the grant COST CZ 208109 New Communities of Interpretation: Contexts of Religious Transformation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Bohemia. The author would like to thank Jan Klípa for his valuable comments and suggestions that greatly improved the manuscript.

1 Michael Rupp, 'Narrenschiff' und 'Stultifera Navis'. *Deutsche und lateinische Moralsatire von Sebastian Brant und Jakob Locher in Basel 1494–1498*, Tübingen 2002. — Clarence H. Miller (ed.), *Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami IV*. — 3, Amstelodamum 1979. For different concepts of folly at the end of Middle Ages see Barbara Könniker,

Wesen und Wandlung der Narrenidee im Zeitalter des Humanismus: Brant-Murner-Erasmus, Wiesbaden 1966.

2 For a general perspective see e.g. Beatrice K. Otto, *Fools are Everywhere*, Chicago 2001; *Der Narr: Beiträge zu einem interdisziplinären Gespräch*, Freiburg 1991 (*Studia ethnographica Friburgensia* Bd. 17); Sandra Billington, *A Social History of the Fool*, Brighton 1985; William Willeford, *The Fool and his Sceptre. A Study in Clowns and Jesters and their Audience*, London 1969; Enid Welsford, *The Fool: his Social and Literary history*, London 1967. For the Middle Ages and Renaissance: Werner Mezger, 'Der Narr — Schlüsselfigur einer Epochenwende', in Christine Strobl and Michael Neumann (eds), *Mythen Europas, Schlüsselfiguren der Imagination, Renaissance*, Regensburg 2006, pp. 197–217; Maurice Lever, *Zepter und Schellenkappe. Zur Geschichte des Hofnarren*, Frankfurt 1992; Jacques Heers, *Fêtes des fous et carnavals*, Paris 1983; Heinz-Günter Schmitz, 'Claus Narr und seine Zunft. Erscheinungsformen und Funktion des spätmittelalterlichen Narren', in Katrin Kröll and Hugo Steger (eds), *Mein ganzer Körper ist Gesicht. Grotteske Darstellungen in der europäischen Kunst und Literatur des Mittelalter*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1994, pp. 385–400.

3 Günther Böhmer, *Die Verkehrte welt: Moral und Nonsens in der Bildsatire*, Amsterdam and London 1985. — Barbara A. Babcock, *The Reversible World. Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, London 1978. — Werner Mezger, *Hofnarren im Mittelalter*, Konstanz 1981. — Idem, 'Ein Bildprogramm zur Narrenidee. Der Ambrasser Zierteller von 1528', in Horst Sund (eds), *Fastnacht in Geschichte, Kunst und Literatur*, Konstanz 1984, pp. 8–113. — Yona Pison, *The Fool's Journey. A Myth of Obsession in Northern Renaissance Art*, Turnhout 2008. — Claude Gaignebet and Jean-Dominique Lajoux, *Art profane et religion populaire au Moyen Age*, Paris 1985, pp. 164–191.

4 Dientz-Rüdiger Moses, 'Ein Babylon der verkehrten Welt. Über Idee, System und Gestaltung der Fastnachtsbräuche', in Sund (note 3), pp. 4–57. — Samuel L. Sumberg, *The Nuremberg Schembart Carnival*, New York 1941. — Maria-Luisa Minio-Paluello, *Jesters and Devils. Florence and San Giovanni 1514*, Morrisville 2008.

5 For Bohemia, a seminal study is still Rudolf Urbánek, 'Jan Paleček, šašek krále Jiřího a jeho předchůdci v zemích českých', in Josef Hrabák (ed.), *Příspěvky k dějinám starší české literatury*, Praha 1958, pp. 5–89.

6 Ibidem, pp. 61–64.

7 The iconography of the fool was briefly considered only in the context of particular artefacts, e.g. green chambers, Josef Krása, 'Nástěnné malby žirovnické zelené světnice', *Umění* XII, 1964, pp. 282–299. The only substantial contribution to visual representation of fools in medieval Bohemia I am aware of is a lengthy chapter in Michaela Ottová, *Pod ochrannou Krista Spasitele a svatě Barbory*, České Budějovice 2010, pp. 131–161.

8 Zuzana Vsetečková, *Středověká nástěnná malba ve středních Čechách*, Praha 2011, pp. 291–292.

9 Elga Lanc, *Die mittelalterlichen Wandmalereien in der Steiermark. Corpus der mittelalterlichen Wandmalereien Österreichs 2*, Wien 2002, pp. 59–64.

10 See e.g. the usage in Thomas Murner *Narrenbeschwörung*: 'Des selben löffels muoß ich lachen, // der im doch laßt ein menlich machen // und gloubt, was im das wyb glosiert, // so sy in by der nasen fiert.', Susanne M. Raabe, *Der Wortschatz in den deutschen Schriften Thomas Murners, Band 1: Untersuchungen*, Berlin and New York 1990, p. 441.

11 J. P. Filedt Kok (ed.), *Livelier than Life, The Master of the Amsterdam Cabinet or the Housebook Master* (exh. cat.), Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam 1985, p. 198.

12 *The Illustrated Bartsch* vol. 10, New York 1985, p. 95 (number 13). Another example is a bench-end in St Levan (Cornwall, late 15th century), see Malcolm Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages*, Stroud 2002, p. 102. The author however is unaware of the linguistic connections between spoons and stupidity.

13 British Library, Yates Thompson 15, fol. 96r.

14 See murals in Swedish churches, Kröll and Steger (note 2), pp. 24–27, or the carved bench end from Nájera (Spain), Gaignebet and Lajoux (note 3), pp. 165–166. The fool is accompanied by a dog here. His genitalia were later chipped off, but it is still clear that he was naked below his waist.

15 Fool, Hand-drawn card, Italy around 1450, Yale University Library, Beinecke Library, Object ID: 2003021. A similar iconography is reflected by the later Jean Noblet tarot (around 1650). In later versions of this Marseilles tarot family, the fool's nudity is crudely covered and later it disappears altogether; see the reproductions in Robert Swyrin, *The Secret of the Tarot*, Kapaa 2010, pp. 220–221. For the fool's role in Tarot see Karl H. Henking, 'Der Narr im Tarot', in *Der Narr* (note 2), pp. 71–91.

16 British Library, Royal 19 D VI, fol. 267v.

17 Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Français 403, fol. 2v.

18 The illumination depicts Christ before Pilate.

19 Vladimír Denkstein, Zoroslava Drobna and Jana Kybalová, *Lapidárium Národního musea*, Praha 1958, p. 125, Antonín Podlaha and Eduard Šittler, *Soupis památek historických a uměleckých v politickém okrese Karlínském*, Praha 1901, p. 142.

20 Cf. the fate of the bench end in Nájera, see note 14.

21 British Library, Sloane 748, fol. 82v. The manuscript was written in England by Malcolm Ramsay in 1487.

22 Jones (note 12), p. 109; for the obscene meaning of bagpipes see *ibidem*, pp. 269–270.

23 The relief was originally found in the pavement near house no. 21 in Brandýs nad Labem, Denkstein, Drobna, and Kybalová (note 19), p. 125.

24 We have a report about a house in Prague where naked women falling into the laps of sitting church officials were depicted; Jaroslav Pešina, 'Studie k malířství poděbradské doby', *Umění* VII, 1959, pp. 202–203. One can add to Pešina's examples a popular image of a wolf preaching to geese which once adorned a house in Kutná Hora; see Josef Šimek, *Kutná Hora v XV. a XVI. století*, Kutná Hora 1907, p. 225. An important preserved example is the house no. 35 in Soukenická ulice in Český Krumlov, covered with murals which depict, among other images, a horse in a cradle (probably around 1478); see Petr Pavelec, 'Sředověká nástěnná malba v Českém Krumlově', in Martin Gaži (ed.), *Český Krumlov. Od rezidenčního města k památce světového kulturního dědictví*, České Budějovice 2010, pp. 371–424. We have more examples of such iconography in the Netherlands, England and Germany. The meaning of the image is nonsensical inversion in the topsy-turvy world fashion. It appears among other world turned upside down images in a print by Jacobus van Egmont from c.1780, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, cat. no. FMH 3978–76. Therefore, Pavelec's explanation connecting the horse in a cradle with Rosenberg representation through the Rosenberg epitaph is probably not valid. I wish to thank Malcolm Jones for the reference to the print, and the English and Netherlandish examples of a horse in a cradle.

25 Hana Jordánková, Irena Loskotová and David Merta, 'Odraz domácí války v produkci brněnských kamnářů druhé poloviny 15. století',

Archeologia historica XXIX, 2004, no. 1, pp. 581–598. — Dana Menoušková and Zdeněk Měřinský (eds), *Krásy, která hřeje. Výběrový katalog gotických kachlů Moravy a Slezska* (exh. cat.), Slovákcké muzeum, Uherské Hradiště 2008, pp. 56–61.

26 Hynek Bítovský of Lichtenburk was an ally of Zdeněk of Šternberk, another important Catholic noble participating in Moravian politics.

27 There were more members of the family important in the Moravian context. The identification is by Jordánková, Loskotová and Merta (note 25), pp. 588–589. Important parts of the tile are missing; for the actual remains and possible reconstructions see Irena Loskotová, *Brněnské kamnové kachle období gotiky* (dissertation), Ústav archeologie a muzeologie FFMU, Brno 2011, pp. 69–71.

28 It could even be a mirror at which the fool sticks out his tongue, cf. Willeford (note 2), p. 35.

29 As far as I know, nobody described thoroughly why the tournament heralds in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries wore the costumes of fools. *Ritter Turnier, Geschichte einer Festkultur* (exh. cat.), Museum zu Allerheiligen Schaffhausen 2014, pp. 55 and 172 speculates that their role was to provoke and bait the opponents of their masters (they are usually clothed in the heraldic colours of the corresponding knights), but according to other depictions, the fools were active even during the preparations when they are depicted dancing wildly around their master, *ibidem*, p. 246. One German glass painting now in *Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, depicts the fools fighting one against another like their masters, Christoph Graf zu Waldburg Wolfegg, *Venus und Mars. Das Mittelalterliche Hausbuch aus der Sammlung der Fürsten zu Waldburg Wolfegg*, p. 57.

30 The only other comparable example I know is the stove tile from Hradec Králové with a half-naked exhibitionist fool/acrobat participating in the tournament (I thank Petr Vachůt for the information about the tile). The fool is showing his genitalia and rises his legs high. The main difference from Brno is the acrobatic position of his legs and the fact that the fool from Hradec Králové is not riding a horse. For the depiction see Dana Cejnková, Zuzana Houbová and Petr Vachůt (edd.), *100 000 let sexu. O lásce plodnosti a rozkoši* (exh. cat.), Muzeum města Brna 2008, p. 138.

31 The crown on the helmet of Lichtenburk knight probably belongs to traditional heraldic representation of the family, and is not a sign of superiority over the Kunštát rider; see the reproduction of a seal in Jan Urban, *Lichtenburkové. Vzestupy a pády jednoho panského rodu*, Praha 2003, p. 382. Conclusions based on the sharp points of the tournament lances are also inconclusive, as both types (pointed and with a small crown) were regularly used during tournaments and depicted accordingly, see *Ritter Turnier* (note 29), pp. 158–159 and 172–173. The precise connections with political events proposed by Jordánková, Loskotová and Merta (note 25), are relativized by other facts as well: the uncertain date of origin, the limited preservation of the heraldry signs, and even possible relations to the general context of folly (see below).

32 Only three out of at least four coats of arms are preserved: the families of Dubé, Šternberk (the first knight), and Kunštát (the second knight). Members of the Dubé and Šternberk families were Catholics and opponents of Kunštát family and other Utraquists. Various annals report uneasy times and famines and refer to countryside plundered by military campaigns, cf. František Palacký, *Starší letopisové čeští od roku 1378 do 1527*, Praha 1941, p. 174 (conditions during 1470).

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33 Such an assertion is necessarily hypothetical as the situation changed with the death of King George. His descendants later became Catholics and even supported King Matthias Corvinus against the heir of their father, Vladislaus II.

34 Ottová (note 7), pp. 131–134 and pp. 164–165.

35 Bernhard Grueber, *Baudenkmale der Stadt Kuttenberg in Böhmen, Mittheilungen der K. K. Central-Commission zur Erforschung und Erhaltung der Baudenkmale* VI, 1861, pp. 281–295.

36 See e.g. Jaromír Homolka, 'Sochařství' in Jaromír Homolka, Josef Krása, Václav Mencl et. al., *Pozdně gotické umění v Čechách*, Praha 1978, p. 225; for the complete list of references see Ottová (note 7), p. 137, note 501.

37 Ottová (note 7), p. 137 concludes that we know nothing about the origin of this appellation. She states that it was even used by Grueber, c.f. *Ibidem*, p. 135, but I was not able to confirm this.

38 *Ibidem*, p. 133.

39 *Ibidem*, pp. 158–159.

40 Grueber (note 35), p. 291 notes that the first dancer is depicted like 'Schalksnarr mit der Schellenkappe'. However, Grueber's descriptions are not always accurate.

41 'Ornamental Engraving with Morris Dancers', The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Accession no. 31.31.28.

42 The meaning is attested by the text from Nurnberg *Fastnachtspiel* see Pál Péter Domokos, 'Der Moriskentanz in Europa und in der ungarischen Tradition', *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* T. 10, Fasc. 3/4, 1968, pp. 229–311, specially p. 250, see also Dietrich Huschenbett, 'Die Frau mit dem Apfel und Frau Venus im Moriskentanz und Fastnachtspiel', in *Volkskultur und Geschichte. Festgabe für Josef Dünninger zum 65. Geburtstag*, Berlin 1970, p. 585–603.

43 Katja Gvozdeva, *Les rangs et les rondes de la morisque dans le Chastel de joyeuse destinée*, unpublished paper presented during XIIth Colloque de la Société Internationale pour l'étude du Théâtre Médiéval, Lille 2007, <http://sitm2007.vjf.cnrs.fr/pdf/s2-gvozdeva.pdf>, 7.10.2016. Gvozdeva reproduces a Florentine print from around 1470 depicting naked dancers dancing around a woman holding the prize, see Mark J. Zucker (ed.), *The Illustrated Bartsch 24 Commentary Part 2, Early Italian Masters*, Norwalk Connecticut 1995, pp. 141–142. For depictions of the Morris dance in Italy see Beatrice Premoli, 'Note iconografiche a proposito di alcune moresche del Rinascimento italiano', in Robert Lorenzetti, *La moresca nell'area mediterranea*, Sala Bolognese 1991, pp. 43–53.

44 Josef Krása, 'Nástěnná malba', in Homolka, Krása, Mencl et. al. (note 36), pp. 258–314.

45 Johanna Müller-Meiningen, *Die Moriskentänzer und andere Arbeiten des Erasmus Grasser für das Alte Rathaus in München*, Regensburg 1998; Birgit Franke and Barbara Welzel, 'Moriken für den Kaiser: Kulturtransfer?', in Matthias Müller, Karl-Heinz Spieß and Udo Friedrich (eds), *Kulturtransfer am Fürstenthof. Höfische Austauschprozesse und ihre Medien im Zeitalter Kaiser Maximilians I.*, Berlin 2013, pp. 15–51.

46 Many examples are in Eckehard Simon, *Die Anfänge des weltlichen deutschen Schauspiels 1370–1530*, Tübingen 2003, pp. 100 (Deventer), 126 (Bern), 204 (Bamberg), 272 (Lübeck), 326–328 (Nürnberg) but also other cities.

47 Charlotte Gschwandtner, 'Reissen die seltzamisten bossen über alter, als wölten sy den morischken dantz springen' *Moriskentanz/Moresca Nördlich und Südlich der Alpen*, in Martin Zlatohlávek and Magdaléna Nová (eds), *Cultural Transfer. Umělecká výměna mezi Itálií a střední Evropou*, Praha 2014, pp. 17–22. — Domokos (note 42).

48 Simon (note 46), p. 384: 'Item geben dem Paul Moler und andern gesellen 21 gr czu vetrincken von der Maruschko Tancz etc., auch an der vasnacht.' The contributions to 'spielleuten' were regular in Cheb during Shrovetides (*Fastnacht*) but the contents of their plays are mentioned only rarely.

49 Čeněk Zíbrt, *Jak se kdy v Čechách tancovalo*, Praha 1970, p. 380, note to page 196.

50 See the limited bibliography in Kateřina Klementová, *Renesanční tanec: zrcadlo kultury raně novověké společnosti* (dissertation), Ústav etnologie FFUK, Praha 2015. — For visual representations of dances with some citations from later Czech sources see Andrea Rousová (ed.), *Tance a slavnosti 16.–18. století* (exh. cat.), Národní galerie v Praze 2008 but there is only limited attention devoted to late medieval dancing. The Morris dance is briefly mentioned in a general context, *ibidem*, p. 93, but the authors are not aware of its specific meaning and role in late medieval culture, cf. *ibidem*, p. 14.

51 František Šmahel, 'Středověké slavnosti, svátky a radostné chvíle', *Documenta Pragensia* XII, 1995, pp. 33–44. Jan Rokycana condemned mainly excessive drinking and eating during Shrovetide but he did not omit tournaments and dancing: 'A kdy většší rozpustilosti než nyní? — ano kolby, ano tancové, smilstva, hry, neřádi, ano obžerstva, opilstava, a obecně říkají: "Masopust své právo má!" Čertovoť jest to právo, z horaucieho pekla!', František Šimek, *Učení M. Jana Rokycany*, Praha 1938, p. 139, note 1; or 'Nebo mnozí lidé, nechajíce nyní díla tělesného, tohoto času masopustního běží k tancuom a ke mnohému zlému; to již jedno dílo ďáblovo', František Šimek, *Postilla Jana Rokycany, Díl 1*, Praha 1928, p. 311

52 Státní okresní archiv Kutná Hora, fond archiv města Kutná Hora, book no. 16, Book of the Municipal Council 1548–1551, fol. 180 and fol. 536. I am grateful to Vojtěch Vaněk for this reference. The notes are from years 1549 and 1551.

53 Ottová (note 7), pp. 144–158.

54 Huschenbett (note 42), pp. 589–591 gives the numbers of participants in the different depictions. Mostly there were 4 to 6 dancers. There are even smaller groups such as in marginal illumination in The Pierpont Morgan Library New York, MS 157, fol. 119, where there are only two dancers, a girl and a dancing musician, see Walter Salmen, 'Zur Choreographie von Solotänzen in Spielen des Mittelalters', in Kröll, Steger (note 2), p. 355, Abb. 162.

55 Ottová (note 7), pp. 44–45; there were more alterations which concentrated on the appearance of the main entrance just below the dancers.

56 *Ibidem*, p. 182.

57 Jan Royt, *Gotické deskové malířství v severozápadních a severních Čechách 1340–1350*, Praha 2015, pp. 169–171.

58 Jan Dienstbier, 'Znovu nalezení objednavatelé? Heraldické památky a malby v Krušnohoří', in Aleš Mudra and Michaela Ottová (eds), *Trans montes, Podoby středověkého umění v severozápadních Čechách*, Praha 2014, pp. 217–219.

59 Another example for this context is the fool depicted in Cornelis Engelbrechtsz's 'Cleansing of Naaman' (shortly after 1500), now in Kunsthistorischen Museum, Vienna. The fool stands next to the general bathing in the river. The position of the fool is opposite the man holding Naaman's clothes (probably the prophet Elisha himself), see Mezger, Hofnarren (note 3), pp. 20–21.

60 The two corbels on the Old Town tower of the Charles Bridge are probably one of the earliest Czech examples. However, these statues were interpreted differently by various researchers: see Ivo Hlobil, 'Challenge

and Risk: The Parlerian Statues on the Old Town Tower of Charles Bridge. A Reinterpretation', *Umění* LXII, 2015, pp. 2–33. The early depictions of the iconography in Czech art are often neglected, cf. the stove tile *Krásá, která hřeje* (note 25), p. 68, no. 202. The young man embraces an older woman and puts his hand into a pouch she offers him. The tile was incorrectly interpreted as the parting of a mother and her son, *ibidem*, p. 59.

61 'The Old Man and the Courtesan' (after Lucas van Leyden?, c.1530–1550), British Museum, inv. No. 1845,0809.1012. This role of the fool as someone indicating the hidden meaning of the picture is sometimes called 'commentary fool', Jones (note 12), p. 119.

62 For the sculptures in Hrádek and the literature about them see the recent survey by Milan Matějka, *Pozdně gotické architektonické sochařství na Hrádku v Kutné Hoře* (bachelor thesis), Ústav pro dějiny umění FFUK, Praha 2014. I wish to thank Milan Matějka for the unpublished photographs and interesting discussion about the corbels.

63 This is the case of the painting from the workshop of Jacob Cornelisz van Oostanen sold by Christie's in 2007, depicting two ill-matched couples with a fool and musicians in the background.

64 The young man could also be the young woman's fellow cheat. Such duality is fairly common in the depictions of ill-matched couples, but the young man and woman usually directly rob the old fool of his money.

65 Michel Foucault, *L'ordre du discours*, Paris 1971, pp. 13–14.

66 Maciej Gutowski, *Komizm w polskiej sztuce gotyckiej*, Warszawa 1973, pp. 54. — Mezger, Hofnarren (note 3), pp. 16–19. — Ottová (note 8), p. 137, 142 and pp. 160–161.

67 Lever (note 2), pp. 65–78.

68 Sebastian Brant, *Das Narrenschiff*, Basel 1521, fol. 2r 'Ouch zuo verachtung vnnd straff der narrheyt / blyntheyt / yrrsal vnd dorheyt / aller staet / vnd gschlecht der menschen.' and *Ibidem*, fol. 2v, 'Dann wer sich für eyn narren acht // Der ist bald zuo eym wisen gemacht'

69 Hans Joachim Raupp, *Bauernsatiren. Entstehung und Entwicklung des Bäuerlichen Genres in der deutschen und niederländischen Kunst ca. 1470–1570*, Niederzier 1986, pp. 226–228.

70 Allmuth Schuttwolf (ed.), *Jahreszeiten der Gefühle. Das Gothaer Liebespaar und die Minne im Spätmittelalter*, Gotha 1998, p. 117, cat. no. 56 (Doris Kutschbach). The subversive element of the fool is emphasized by Keith Moxey, *Master E.S. and the Folly of Love, Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History* Vol. 11, No. 3/4, 1980, pp. 125–148.

71 Stefan Matter, 'Konversationsstücke des 15. Jahrhunderts.

Überlegungen zu einigen Minnegarten-Stichen um Meister E. S. vor dem Hintergrund literarische minnediskurse der Zeit', in Birgit Ulrike Münch and Jürgen Müller (eds), *Peraikos' Erben. Die Genese der Genremalerei bis 1550*, Wiesbaden 2015, pp. 337–357.

72 The traditional explanation is described in Mezger, Hofnarren (note 3), pp. 9–10.

73 Simon (note 46), p. 327, identifies the lady as Bianca Sforza but confirms the reference to the Morris dance. See also Huschenbett (note 36), p. 595.

74 Franke and Welzel (note 46), pp. 18 and 42.

75 See the scene from a Netherlandish book of hours reproduced in Mezger, Hofnarren (note 3), p. 57 depicting two jousting knights, two ladies and the fool. For the emblems of jousting knights and their connection with the concept of folly see Ritter Turnier (note 29), pp. 204–213.

76 Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice, Ms. lat. I 99, fol. 5v.

77 Mezger (note 3), p. 42. The iconography is not an unusual one. The fools accompany lovers in calendar illuminations of April and May also elsewhere, see e.g. Pamela Porter, *Courtly Love in Medieval Manuscripts*, Toronto 2003, p. 38.

78 Krása (note 7). — *Idem* (note 44).

79 Riding together on one horse is a clear allegory of true love attested by other examples, Herbert Bald, *Liebesjagd. Eine Wandmalerei de 15. Jahrhnderts im Schloß zu Lohr am Main*, Würzburg 2011, pp. 20–23 and 50–60.

80 I shall publish a more detailed analysis of the Žirovnice paintings in a separate paper.

81 Foucault (note 65), p. 14.

82 Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1992, p. 29.

83 This study was supported by grant COST CZ 208109 New Communities of Interpretation: Contexts of Religious Transformation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Bohemia. The author would like to thank Jan Klípa for his valuable comments and suggestions that greatly improved the manuscript.

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