

*Jonathan S. Meyer-Küpers*

## Disabling fun

# Disabling fun

## *The connection of the bodily and mentally disabled and the profession of fool under the consideration of the benign violation theory of humour*

By Jonathan S. Meyer-Küpers

### Intro

In contemporary society, laughing at individuals with mental or physical disabilities is widely recognised as inappropriate. Historically, this was not always the case. From the times of ancient Egypt and China to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, individuals whose appearances or conditions deviated from societal norms were often employed in courts or households to provide amusement for patrons or guests.

In our modern society, we no longer exhibit individuals with mental or physical disabilities for amusement. Freak shows, once prevalent, are no longer attended and have fallen into history's obscurity. Today, spectators view those who are disabled – whether by nature, accident or through the actions of others – from a more compassionate perspective. This paper aims to investigate why that might be and therefore poses the question: How has the view of disabled people in the context of humour changed?

For that reason, this paper examines, with the help of a new humour theory, the practice of well-documented historical employments of disabled or impaired people as fools<sup>1</sup> and jesters. It also critically analyses contemporary fools and jesters in the form of the clown and traces possible connections and connotations the clown's appearance and performance today may have to its predecessors concerning this area. In extension, this paper will examine what makes the clown funny and unfunny and how its perception may teach us more

---

1) The term *fool* will in the context of this paper be used as a job title for a comedic performer, who in some way, shape or form makes their living by inducing mirth in their audience.

about what we as human beings deem amusing and what not, and if so, why, and possibly how that may have changed throughout societal development.

This research aims to provide a foundation for future investigators, offering conclusions that may inform more in-depth studies on the subject. Additionally, this paper explores a new theory of humour as it relates to fools, jesters, and clowns, and examines how their influence persists today.

## Theory and Method

This paper will examine the employment of fools with a focus on those among the ranks of fools who were mentally or bodily disabled and who are described and documented in great detail through many centuries of history by scholars such as John Southworth, Beatrice K. Otto, or John Doran (Southworth 1998; Doran 1858; Otto 2001), whose writing I have taken as a basis for my historical analysis.

This paper observes the use of such fools under the consideration of the theory of humour developed by A. Peter McGraw and Caleb Warren, titled *Benign Violation Theory* (McGraw and Warren 2010). This paper will use the Benign Violation Theory, abbreviated as BVT, with the critical input of Leo Kant and Elisabeth Norman from their article “You Must Be Joking! Benign Violations, Power Asymmetry, and Humor in a Broader Social Context” (Kant and Norman 2019). In McGraw and Warren’s work, the humour theory known as Benign Violation Theory (BVT) defines the source of amusement as when a violation occurs that is simultaneously perceived as benign.

A violation can seem benign if (a) a salient norm suggests that something is wrong, but another salient norm suggests that it is acceptable, (b) one is only weakly committed to the violated norm, or (c) the violation is psychologically distant. (McGraw and Warren 2010, 1142)

McGraw and Warren claim this to be an explanation for humour overreaching cultural boundaries (McGraw and Warren 2010). Violations can be of different nature; if they are perceived as benign, they could be a source of amusement.

Warren and McGraw mention, among others, “violations of personal dignity (e.g., slapstick, physical deformities)” (McGraw and Warren 2010, 1142), which seems most fitting for the use of the BVT in this paper.

In a later publication, Warren and McGraw also broach the subject of distance in terms of physical, emotional, and temporal, and the difference between real and imagined circumstances in the context of the BVT (McGraw et al. 2012). This attempts to explain the different perceptions of a situation, joke, etc., as funny and laughter-inducing. To be considered funny, a given situation, joke, etc. must be close enough to the audience to care about it, but not too close in order not to offend or evoke a negative reaction (McGraw et al. 2012).

Kant and Norman call the perfect distance for a joke to land the “sweet spot” (Kant and Norman 2019, 1), while they also discuss the power dynamics influencing humour under the consideration of the BVT. They argue for the different perceptions of what counts as *benign* and how power hierarchies can influence social distance, thereby changing the “sweet spot” between two individuals of different ranks, and by that making something amusing for one of them, usually the higher-ranked, and not fun for the lower-ranked individual (Kant and Norman 2019).

This paper investigates the BVT as a possible explanation for the fascination with disabled individuals and their historical popularity as fools and sources of amusement. It also presents some hypotheses as to why that may have changed by now. It is important to underline, though, that this paper uses a macro approach to the topic of fools and is therefore prone to generalisations. This becomes clear when the developments of societies and cultural consciousness in different countries and parts of the world are considered. Surely, generalising this myriad of cultures of today and the past into being on the same page in relation to the topic discussed in this paper when it comes to the historical, cultural, and practical sectors would be rather irrational. Also, the use of the BVT as a theory of humour must be regarded critically, as it is a proportionately young theory in its field, and therefore its limitations and methodical use have yet to be subjected to critical examination. This is necessary in order to be able to consider its usefulness over older theories of humour and different schools of thought on the matter.

Another limitation of this paper is that the area of handicaps and impairments is so vast and complex to approach that different interpretations of given disabilities and their nature are hardly comparable in some cases, which also points at the generalising affinity in the following pages, which I would like the reader to keep in mind.

Also a wrinkle in terms of generalisation would of course be the definition of handicaps, as some jesters were described as ugly, but without a disabling condition necessarily attached, here they will still fall under disablement.

## Analysis and Observations

John Southworth differentiates in his book *Fools and Jesters at the English Court* (1998) between two categories of fools: On one side, “natural”, and on the other, “artificial or counterfeit” (Southworth 1998, 10). With the *natural*, he refers to the born simple individuals, who, throughout history, have been employed as sources of fun for others. With the *artificial or counterfeit*, he refers to those who, through wit, costume, or acting, assume this laughter-inducing state of being a fool (Southworth 1998, 5).

Southworth calls these “broad categories of fools” (Southworth 1998, 5). I will use this classification, but add to the *natural fools* also those who, through bodily deficiencies, were prime candidates for employment as fools. As it is certainly a gruesome but well-documented fact, that people with mental or bodily disabilities or mutations were employed as fools (Konarska-Zimnicka 2012; Southworth 1998).

We can make this even more clear by looking at Southworth’s own words.

From the earliest times, natural fools, of whom the madman represents an extreme in his near-total loss or abandonment of reason, have provoked a strangely mixed set of responses comprising (in various proportions) fear, pity, contempt, laughter and awe. (Southworth 1998, 48)

In this statement by Southworth, he uses his previously explained definition, but it stands to question if the effect of provoking, especially “laughter and awe”, might be just as present in the physically deformed. Considering the BVT, it can be assumed that the laughter provoked by the given disabled or impaired individuals might be the result of hitting the perfect *sweet spot* between violation, in this instance by mental or bodily norms, and the personal distance of the amused party, which made the violation benign for them at least.

As misshapen jesters can be found at nearly all historical courts, at some period or other from old Egypt over European, Asian (Otto 2001) and even the Aztec courts of at least Montezuma, that had a whole collection of norm-defiant individuals, as Doran points out, citing Brantz Mayer’s work *Mexico, Aztec, Spanish, and Republican* (1850) (Doran 1858, section 80). Sylvia Konarska-Zimnicka, professor at the *historic institute* at Jan Kochanowski University (UJK) in Poland, also points to the common employment of disabled individuals in the profession of the fool or jester. “The role of the jester was often assumed by hideous, disabled individuals, deformed by nature itself and universally perceived as ugly” (Konarska-Zimnicka 2012, 126).

Considering this fact mentioned by Konarska-Zimnicka as being a widely present circumstance, that from a contemporary standpoint might be insensitive, but gave people befallen with such affliction an opportunity to live off their handicap. To not be ostracised by society to the point of not being able to survive, by the grace of a patron that in turn got amusement or at least some degree or form of status or social recognition for having a fool or jester on their payroll. As Doran describes throughout his book *The History of Court Fools*, fools and jesters are as much a status symbol as anything else (Doran 1858). This employment of a fool could last until the patron’s or the fool’s death, or less happily, until the given patron became bored or unamused with his fool (Borbély 2006), or obviously, the financial situation of the given patron became difficult.

Being part of someone’s collection or personal menagerie for being born differently was probably not a very desirable circumstance, but being a court fool, allowed to feast and drink, and having the right to tell and say what no one else dared might not have been the

worst lot in the labour-intensive agricultural-based societies of, e.g., the European Middle Ages (Stiker 1999b, 70).

Among those of the court fools with physical deformities we often read about hunchbacks and dwarfs (Stiker 1999b, 70), the latter seem to have an especially strong, fascinating draw.

## Dwarfs

Documentations of dwarfs are once again found in the old kingdom of Egypt, nearly 4000 years ago, making their way through history in Asian, American, African, and European traditions until today (Konarska-Zimnicka 2012; Southworth 1998; Doran 1858; Otto 2001).

Some of these were born dwarfs; others were made into dwarfs through truly gruesome methods, and here we can look back on the horrifying tradition of making dwarfs, a practice documented by the Romans, Turks, Aztecs, Chinese, and many more (Otto 2001; Konarska-Zimnicka 2012). But instead of torturing my readers with the numerous, despicable ways of crippling infants, I will just highlight the presence and widespread popularity of dwarfs as amusing purchases and fools. A seemingly long tradition from ancient courts to quite recent ones, considering the memoirs of Count Borusławski (1739-1837), who toured the royal courts of Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and amused regents and aristocrats with his small stature (Borusławski 1820).

We can even name more recent cases. There are countless examples of dwarfs, or rather people affected by dwarfism, in circuses and later even in films. A contemporary example of this would be the comedic roles of the actor Tony Cox, who often plays roles that use his dwarfism in a comical fashion (IMDb.com, n.d.).

This indicates, at least in the context of dwarfism, from Doran's anecdotes of the old Roman's obsession with dwarfs (Doran 1858, Section 40) to today's audiences enjoying actors with dwarfism in comedic roles, that the benign violation of extreme body size in juxtaposition to average-sized individuals is still considered amusing. Otherwise, it seems clear that these phenomena would not be perpetuated to the degree that we see today.

## Freak show

People of unusual heights or lack thereof seem also to have been common attractions for menageries displaying unusual capabilities, mutations, and conditions, which were popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as so-called “freak shows” and “human exhibits” (Bogdan 2014, 10). Here audiences could pay to see and hear about those set apart from others by nature or other factors (Bogdan 2014, 10). Audiences, though, started to dwindle in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Bogdan 2014, ix). Suddenly, bodily deformities no longer seemed “ethically” acceptable sources of mirth. Maybe the many handicapped soldiers of the world wars, or maybe a strengthened sensibility and empathy throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, had ended an age-old tradition, and through the many social movements and shifts towards advocacy for minority groups, also the people suffering from debilitating conditions were integrated into a more diverse society that decades before had called them *freaks*.

In the light of the BVT, I would like to present the following considerations:

The distance between the disabled individuals and the onlookers, which McGraw, Warren, and, in extension, Kant and Norma (McGraw et al. 2012; Kant and Norman 2019) put so much emphasis on, seems to have drastically changed. Using McGraw and Warren’s words “Too Close for Comfort” (McGraw et al. 2012), the world wars, with the returning soldiers to their families of all classes, might have brought the topics of disablism in body and mind “too close for comfort” to laugh about.

In *History of Disability* (Stiker 1999b), these periods after each world war, their aftermath, and the following views on disabilities are titled “The Birth of Rehabilitation” (Stiker 1999b, 121) and emphasise the different view on disabilities that the world wars seem to have fostered and the societal efforts to re-establish or ingrain disabled individuals into societal conformity to various degrees and with various success (Stiker 1999a).

Removed from stereotypes and through social advocacy for the rights and inclusion of disabled people, the emotional and social distance between the individuals suffering from a condition and the broader audience seems to have changed, and thereby the bodily deformity is no longer seen as amusing as it no longer hits the *sweet spot*.



So, the disabled creature, once a source of amusement as described above, is now a full human being with rights and dignity, too close to the onlooker to be a source of mirth by their appearance alone.

## The Clown

Among many others, Joseph Durwin sees the clown in direct succession of the fools and jesters (Durwin 2004, 4). He also writes, “The English word clown first appeared in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, usually as Cloyne, Cloine, or Clowne- derived from *Colonus* or *Clod*, denoting a farmer, rustic person, a country yokel” (Durwin 2004, 4). In this context, the first clowns seem to be derived from the uneducated, or maybe even seen as simple agricultural societies, who in their rustic ways seemed to be of simple mind, and the clown as a performer was a representation or caricature of such stereotypes, if not genuine article.

Such can be glimpsed in many comedic pieces and farces, among others in the plays of the Danish playwright Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754), who in his comedies often presents the simple ways of thinking of people from the countryside. Later, Joseph Grimaldi (1778-1837) takes inspiration from the *Commedia dell’arte* and English stage fools to create his Joey-character, which had a significant influence on his contemporary and later generations of clowns (Barbieri 2017; Bouissac 2015).

But Andrew McConnell Stott in his article “Clowns on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown: Dickens, Coulrophobia, and the Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi” (2012) not only examines Grimaldi’s work and life but also points at the connection between the clown figure and sadness and depression (Stott 2012), which happens to coincide with our earlier observations concerning the BVT and the imbalance between the performer and their audience/patron as only the latter’s humorous sweet spot must be hit, as their amusement is the core focus of the clown’s work, just like it has been of the jester and fool before. This also sheds light on the clown’s mental situation and health, which will also be considered later in this paper.

Another interesting shift that can be observed, or at least supposed, in developing the clown from the jester would be the nature of the performer. As a clown performer, you must be dependable for the organisers and funny to the

paying customers. The most reliable choice for an organiser would therefore be to employ somebody who is not a simpleton but merely pretends to be one. Here we have the real simpleton, or rather mentally handicapped individual that has previously taken the position as a fool imitated by what Southworth would call an “artificial or counterfeit” kind of fool (Southworth 1998, 10).

Since the beginning of modern circus with Philip Astley (1742-1814) in 1768, the confusion of the order of things and the misuse of tools, the grotesque disorganisation of bodily integrity, and virtuosic cascades of violence have all been associated with the clown character on stage, in fiction, and other media. (Jürgens et al. 2020, 2)

We, as an audience, naturally assume that what we see on stage here is pretended. The clown’s costume is not really filled with a deformed individual with unnaturally coloured hair, overly large feet, and disproportional body parts. Artificial parts are added for the clown to be recognisable as such, for reaching the audience sitting or standing in the back, or to create a comical effect through juxtaposition of bodily forms, as Paul Bouissac points out in his book *The Semiotics of Clowns and Clowning* (Bouissac 2015). The benign violation, which consists of “violations of personal dignity (e.g., slapstick, physical deformities)” (McGraw and Warren 2010, 1142), is funny, and it is benign to contemporary audiences’ sensitivities because it is not real.

The court fool, who could be mentally or bodily handicapped and had undoubtedly been a victim of violence as Doran points out multiple times (Doran 1858), has been replaced by the clown, who pretends to be simple and idiotic, whose clothes suggest they are deformed or at least stupid enough to choose such an outfit for themselves in modern times. The violation that we laugh at has not changed in its core nature, just in the distance with from which we perceive it – the distance that the real vs. imagined/pretended context creates as also described in the BVT (McGraw et al. 2012) – so that the sweet spot can be hit and make us laugh by making the violation benign.

Just supposing that it is not pretended but real would be what shifts the distance and makes the violation no longer benign and would probably create negative feelings instead, such as fright or pity in the onlooker. This becomes

clear when we consider the writing of researchers like Louise Peacock, who argues that what makes horror-clowns scary is their loss of immortal bodies free of consequences (Peacock 2020). Anna-Sophie Jürgens argues for the importance of maintaining the pretence of the clown as removed from being completely human.

The nature of clowns allows human beings to treat them inhumanely. In its most grotesque, (non)funny form, the clown can thus become a target of sadistic passions, expressed, for instance, in the laughter of an audience. (Jürgens et al. 2020, 3)

The clown, ergo, is only funny when she/he is within the bounds of pretending to be a clown.

Clowns, though, have the tendency to transgress the boundaries of norms, expectations, and rules, as it is their core essence to do so in order to be clowns (Weihe 2016; Durwin 2004). They must *violate* expectations, norms, and borders; if the violations are perceived as benign, they are funny and have therefore reached their goal; if those transgressions are not perceived as benign, the clown becomes scary. Or as Jürgens and her colleagues formulate it, “The clown – at first glance the epitome of humour – has thus an innate potential to turn into a tragic, lonely, and even violent figure. This is why ‘horror clowns’ are a logical continuum of clownery” (Jürgens et al. 2020, 4).

### **The power and the mask**

“Today, clowns have evolved from horror and slapstick comedy to an entire identity rooted in fashion and makeup” (Pradeep 2022). In other words, the clown as a cultural figure has become a uniform, a costume that embodies the clown’s core aspect of being transgressive, of violating social norms, rules, and expectations, of bringing anarchy or simply breaking out of established frames (Jürgens et al. 2020; Durwin 2004; Weihe 2016; Bala 2010).

Such violations can be benign or unbenign and might be perceived differently by different people according to a study in *Frontiers of Psychology* titled “Fear of clowns: An investigation into the aetiology of coulrophobia”

(2023) that finds that, besides “media influences”, the “uncertainty of harmful intent” and “unpredictability of behaviour” are strongly related to coulrophobia (the fear of clowns) (Tyson et al. 2023, 1).

These findings suggest a shift in power dynamics between audience and performer.

Suddenly, the audience member, before the person in power and laughing at the pitiful clown, is now afraid of the violations the clown might commit. As Kant and Norman note, this changes the social distance between the sweet spots, as the person in power or higher hierarchical standing is more likely to consider a violation as benign, than the person in lower standing will (Kant and Norman 2019).

This leads to the clown performer possibly assessing a violation as benign, which the audience does not. In the case of the court jesters and fools of old times, such a violation was punished by the person in power. Now that the clown performer is at least of equal standing or even higher standing, as she/he is in control of the situation and space, this obviously changes the perception of the clown.

“Fear of clowns: An investigation into the aetiology of coulrophobia” (2023) also finds that “There are also multiple features of clown appearance which produce a negative experiential state and a sense of a direct threat” (Tyson et al. 2023, 1). Part of this is also what Barbieri points out in Grimaldi’s make-up: that it became too much of a mask, hiding the clown behind it (Barbieri 2017, 84). This also led to a form of anonymity among clown performers, which, as Barbieri suggests, might have led to their adoption of scary figures in cinema (Barbieri 2017, 84).

Obviously, this anonymity and the uncertainty of who is behind the make-up and what their intentions are – if they just want to make you laugh or if they have more sinister things in mind – also influence the power dynamic between audience and clown.

Anybody could be behind the heavy make-up, even somebody who might be suffering from a mental condition, somebody who could be considered criminally insane. Popular media has been perpetuating this image for many decades, as e.g., pointed out by Ruth Richards (2020).

The connection between the mentally disabled and the clown figure seems, based on this, to still be intact.

A *natural fool* does not have the option of taking off a mask, though. A clown can take off their nose, their make-up, and their colourful outfit. An option, the dwarfs, the mentally or physically disabled *natural fools* of the past, did not have.

With the before-mentioned disappearance of the freak shows, the clown or fool became a uniform, that could be worn by those who were interested in being fools for the time they wore the costume. As the body has become an important vessel for modern identity and the expression of it, as also Laura T. Di Summa argues for in her book *A Philosophy of Fashion through Film* (Di Summa 2022, 55), bodies seem no longer to be directly influential in the western, contemporary, comedic expression. Di Summa praises the reduction of stereotypes and discrimination against disabled bodies, but at the same time, she criticises the beauty standards anchored in our western, contemporary society. In all this, it seems that the body as a comedic expressive tool or hanger for such tools is often no longer used. As human bodies, even if diverse, are too close and through body-positivity and inclusiveness campaigns, thereby not hitting the sweet spot and ergo not in the realm of modern humour anymore, according to the Benign Violation Theory of humour (McGraw et al. 2012).

## Discussion and conclusion

This paper, as mentioned before, uses a macro approach; it looks at many centuries-old traditions and circumstances concerning the employment of jesters and humorous entertainers under the job description of *fool*, often taken up by people with certain conditions or handicaps.

This paper introduces the BVT as an analytical tool to this quite complex and nuanced area that requires so much more attention. This paper is not meant to exhaust this area of research but to invite attention to it and maybe serve as a steppingstone for other more profound endeavours in this territory.

What this paper has accomplished is to set the BVT in relation to the subject matter of historical fools, jesters, and clowns. The latter is even considered in contemporary circumstances. In this way, this manner of

investigation can be added to the toolbox of other researchers of the here examined areas of study.

The BVT is a theory of humour and therefore needs to be pitched against, not only what is considered generally humorous today but also considered in a historical context, with what can be seen as historical sources of humour and amusement, which among other things included the disablement of our fellow human beings.

Now, let us return to the beginning of this paper and ask: How has the view of disabled people in the context of humour changed? It can be said that the fascination of the human body and deviations from what is deemed normal have historically been a source of amusement for many around the world and across cultural boundaries. It can also be concluded that this has had considerable influence on the said disabled or impaired individuals, both in a negative and positive sense. This corresponds with the BVT, where we observe a violation – of body and mind – through divergence from established norms and expectations that is perceived as amusing. Partly, this amusement seems to derive from the higher standing of the audience member, which leads to a higher probability of being amused by a given violation, as it is more often deemed benign. We observe a gradual change in the amusement over disabled people in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and thereafter. This shift is likely due to the gradual dissolution of former hierarchical systems, the great number of disabled soldiers returning from the world wars, and a change of perspective on disability shifting the *distance* between the topic and the audience, which according to BVT is so important to consider in order to make something humorous for the audience.

Whether our contemporary society has risen completely above deriving amusement from impaired or disabled people, is debatable, not least through an analysis of modern clowns. The clown's costume seems reminiscent of deformed bodies; this might not always be the intended effect, but it is a factor; furthermore, clowns in some way, not exclusively but often, represent figures that are mentally and in terms of intelligence deviant from the norm, to create amusement. This is not to say that a clown is meant to represent a mocking of a handicapped person; it is just to consider what it is that we, as an audience, laugh about in a clown performance.

In the context of BVT, we, as an audience, see bodily and social violations, which can be deemed benign because they are part of a performance and *imaginary* in the context of the clown as a performer. If we, as an audience, did not see these acts as imaginary, we would not see clowns as funny, as numerous works on the horror clown seem to suggest.

A concluding answer, based on these findings, is hard to give, and it must also consider the cultural, social, personal, and hierarchical variation in the context of disability and the distance to it by a given audience.

The contemporary depiction and perception of clowns remain intertwined with themes of disability, conditions, and illness. The emotional responses elicited from these associations are highly individualised and warrant further research. However, it is noticeable that there has been a shifting perspective regarding physical disabilities and the role of these individuals in evoking amusement. As society becomes increasingly aware of mental health issues, it is reasonable to speculate that this awareness might influence future perceptions of clowns. However, this remains speculative at this stage.

## References

- Bala, Michael. 2010. "The Clown: An Archetypal Self-Journey." *Jung journal* 4 (1): 50-71. doi: 10.1525/jung.2010.4.1.50.
- Barbieri, Donatella. 2017. *Costume in Performance: Materiality, Culture, and the Body*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Bogdan, Robert. 2014. *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Borbély, Ștefan. 2006. "The Court Jester: Anthropology and Power." *Caietele Echinox* (10): 275-281.
- Borusławski, Józef. 1820. *Memoirs of Count Boruwlaski. Containing a sketch of his travels, with an account of his reception at the different courts of Europe*. London and Durham: Francis Humble and Co.
- Bouissac, Paul. 2015. *The Semiotics of Clowns and Clowning: Rituals of Transgression and the Theory of Laughter*. United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Di Summa, Laura T. 2022. *A Philosophy of Fashion Through Film: On the Body, Style, and Identity*. First edition. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Doran, John. 1858. *The History of Court Fools*. Vol. 1. Project Gutenberg. URL: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/59618/59618-h/59618-h.htm>

- Durwin, Joseph. 2004. "Coulrophobia and the Trickster." *Trickster's Way*, Vol. 3 (1), article 4. <https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/trickstersway/vol3/iss1/4>
- IMDb.com, Inc. n.d. "Tony Cox, Imdb Page." Accessed January 23, 2024. <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0185272/>.
- Jürgens, Anna-Sophie, Jarno Hietalahti, Lena Straßburger, and Susanne Ylönen. 2020. "Schlock horror and pillow punches: Introduction to the dialectics of the violent clown – and this special themed journal issue." *Comedy studies* 11 (1): 1-11. doi: 10.1080/2040610X.2019.1692537.
- Kant, Leo, and Elisabeth Norman. 2019. "You Must Be Joking! Benign Violations, Power Asymmetry, and Humor in a Broader Social Context." *Front Psychol* 10: 1380. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01380.
- Konarska-Zimnicka, Sylwia. 2012. "Ugly Jester – Funny Jester? The Question of the Comic Nature of Ugliness in the Middle Ages and Renaissance." *Holy cross University Periodic Publication* 4 (29): 125-134.
- McGraw, A. Peter, and Caleb Warren. 2010. "Benign violations: making immoral behavior funny." *Psychol Sci* 21 (8): 1141-9. doi: 10.1177/0956797610376073.
- McGraw, A. Peter, Caleb Warren, Lawrence E. Williams, and Bridget Leonard. 2012. "Too close for comfort, or too far to care? Finding humor in distant tragedies and close mishaps." *Psychol Sci* 23 (10): 1215-23. doi: 10.1177/0956797612443831.
- Otto, Beatrice K. 2001. *Fools are everywhere : the court jester around the world*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Peacock, Louise. 2020. "Battles, blows and blood: pleasure and terror in the performance of clown violence." *Comedy studies* 11 (1): 74-84. doi: 10.1080/2040610X.2019.1692549.
- Pradeep, Malavika. 2022. "Inside clowncore, the aesthetic reclaiming our love for clowns with vibrant humour." *Screenshot-Culture-Internet-Culture*, 25 April.
- Richards, Ruth. 2020. "Transgressive clowns: between horror and humour." *Comedy studies* 11 (1): 62-73. doi: 10.1080/2040610X.2019.1692544.
- Southworth, John. 1998. *Fools and jesters at the English court*. Stroud: Sutton.
- Stiker, Henri-Jacques. 1999a. "The Birth of Rehabilitation." In *A History of Disability*. University of Michigan Press.
- Stiker, Henri-Jacques. 1999b. *A History of Disability*: University of Michigan Press.
- Stott, Andrew McConnell. 2012. "Clowns on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown: Dickens, Coulrophobia, and the Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi." *Journal for early modern cultural studies* 12 (4): 3-25. doi: 10.1353/jem.2012.0044.
- Tyson, Philip John, Shakiela K. Davies, Sophie Scorey, and William James Greville. 2023. "Fear of clowns: An investigation into the aetiology of coulrophobia." *Frontiers in psychology* 14. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1109466.



Weihe, Richard. 2016. "Die Paradoxie des Clowns — sieben Spielformen: Schlussbemerkungen." In *Über den Clown* by Richar Weihe. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.

---

**Jonathan S. Meyer-Küpers** has an M.A. and B.A. degree in Dramaturgy from Aarhus University and is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Rhetorics. In his Master thesis, he has explored the cultural status and perception of the clown and their predecessors.

---