

PRACTICE OF STAGE INTERACTION

If the fool appeared under so many guises and as part of so many different plays, what supports the commonsense view of these as just so many realizations of one and the same theatrical form? In the first chapter, I introduced the provisional claim that a figure like Phantasmo from the *Hamlet* adaptation is best identified in terms of characteristic ways of interacting onstage. Now the task is to marshal broad-based evidence for the assertion that the fool should be investigated in terms of his place in the larger fabric of the play. Untangling the threads that hold the fool together with the rest of the fictional world requires responding to two straightforward questions. Are there recognizable patterns to the fool's participation in plays, especially to the sequences of dialogue in which he is involved? And, if so, do these patterns produce similar sorts of (local and global) effects within the respective encompassing play? These are questions of a general scope bearing on crucial methodological issues. At the same time, they avoid a biography-like

account of stage appearance after stage appearance and move beyond self-evident descriptions of the fool as funny or off-color, irreverent or lewd, which may be true but are also uninformative. The above questions, by contrast, isolate the structure of dialogue as the key to grasping the formal element that lends unity to the fool.

The most rudimentary dimensions of the fool's abiding stage presence can be described in terms of a simple paradox. To wit, the fool is uniquely able to participate in the fictional world as a full-fledged member, yet he is also able to step outside it and address the audience directly. Discerning the implications of this rudimentary doubleness—his status as an agent both inside and outside the fiction—will require an up-close look at the fool *in actu*, as he conducts his comic work. The following observations on the fool's comic strategies avoid the search for some buried profundity, instead tracking, as value-neutrally as possible, his effects on environing words and actions. Within the overarching mission of part 1—to understand how and why the fool was featured with such frequency and longevity—this chapter explores the core possibilities that his involvement provided the dialogue. In other words, the present task is to describe the game rules that the fool plays by.

Before laying out the parameters of dialogue within which the fool moves, it is important to register that, in nearly every instance, he stands on a particular rung in the social hierarchy: namely, the position of the male servant. This point is so obvious that its importance can be easily overlooked. The unique possibilities for play available to the fool are based on the fact that, as a servant, he is installed in what the anthropologist A. R. Radcliffe-Browne referred to as a "joking relationship."¹ That is, the fool interacts with others by means of "a peculiar combination of friendliness and antagonism" and of "permitted disrespect."² The fool's place within

1. The term was not originally Radcliffe-Browne's, but he wrote the foundational studies in anthropology on the subject. See A. R. Radcliffe-Browne, "On Joking Relationships," in *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1965), 90–104.

2. Radcliffe-Browne, "On Joking Relationships," 91.

the play is defined by such an exceptional privilege to mock and make fun of the other characters.

Of course, the use of a servant role for configuring a joking relationship was not new to German plays. The comic servant had a long tradition in European theater, extending back to the Greeks and Romans.³ In a radicalization of tendencies that can be found across European theatrical history, the seventeenth-century German tradition sequestered comic play to a single figure, allowing only the fool to strike certain thematic chords: only the wily servant employed scatological humor, referred unsolicitedly to sex, professed his willingness to perform any act for pecuniary reward, and made light of death and suffering. The main elements in his thematic repertoire are all drawn from the corporeal dimension of human activity, including coitus, defecation, inebriation, satiation, and expiration. In addition, the fool is almost always associated with the bald acquisition of money. Furthermore, all of the fool's utterances take place within a stratified social situation, organized around a cleft separating servant from master. A prominent linguistic index of the social distinction underlying the joking relationship, meanwhile, is the fool's use of crude dialect. One of the hallmarks of an entrance into the fool's space of play, however brief or extended, is the abrupt switch in linguistic code. In aberrant pockets of speech, the fool temporarily transports the dialogue to less formalized and more vulgar regions, profoundly altering the verbal register and semantic tenor of the dialogue. Evidence of this verbal discrepancy can be found from the 1590s well into the eighteenth century.

The permission to introduce what would have otherwise counted as improper and therefore illicit contents, particularly against the conventions of social hierarchy, cannot be detached from the fool's masculine identity. The fool's rampant impropriety, including the

3. Most famously, of course, Plautus, who will figure in our discussion in part 2. For the foundational discussion of the servant in Plautus, see Eduard Fraenkel, *Plautine Elements in Plautus*, trans. Tomas Drevikovsky and Frances Muecke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 159–172.

sexual debasement and celebration of debauchery, depended on his double role as male and servant. While the social-economic position of underling affords him a vantage point from which he can freely poke fun, the particularly salacious content of his joking is a gendered privilege. The fool invariably treats sex as a form of corporeal satisfaction, with the sole purpose of providing the man with gratification.

Consider how the following two scenes choreograph the relationship between the fool and the other *dramatis personae*. The expositions of the two dramas published in a 1630 collection of plays for traveling acting troupes, *Comedy of the Small Lad Cupid* (*Comoedia und Macht des kleinen Knaben Cupidinis*) and *Comedy of Aminta and Silvia* (*Comoedia von den Aminta und Silvia*), introduce fools with differing names but imbued with an identical ambiguity.⁴ In the first play we have a fool named Hans Wurst; in the second, one called Schrängen. Both plays begin when a member of the nobility happens upon an unknown person, who, in exchange for financial reward, is willing to spend some time as his lackey. In one play, he is called a “funny man” and “fool,” in the other the “servant of all servants.”⁵ In both, the fool enters the fictional world as a figure without family or friends, without a background or personal history. When asked, “Who are you then?” the fool replies with such uninformative formulations as “I am a man” or the Latin equivalent “ego sum homo.”⁶ In yet another play, we see the fool describe himself as “nothing,” sometimes as “totally nothing at all,” and at the very most as “something.”⁷ Such formulations are strategic assurances of the fool’s distinct status among the *dramatis personae*. The fool is neither fully somebody nor merely nobody. He belongs to a general category that lacks for individuating

4. The two scenes I discuss can be found in Manfred Brauneck and Alfred Noe, *Spieltexte der Wanderbühne* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1970), 2:18–25 and 103–107.

5. See Brauneck and Noe, *Spieltexte der Wanderbühne*, 2:20, 22, 106.

6. *Ibid.*, 2:36.

7. See the two servants in *Niemand und Jemand*, reprinted in Willi Flemming, *Deutsche Literatur: Sammlung literarischer Kunst- und Kulturdenkmäler in Entwicklungsreihen* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1931), 3:73–131.

properties; as an everyman, he is poised to curry the favor of every audience member, while also remaining open to continuity with innumerable future embodiments.

In a state of hierarchical diminution and figural indeterminacy, the fool enjoys special license to speak. The key mode in which he exploits his joking relationship is spontaneous and unsolicited interjection. Duke Heinrich Julius exploited this attribute in his *Von der Susanna* (*Tragedy of Susanna*, 1593), which lends the fool a prominent place among the thirty-four total parts. The fool goes under the sobriquet Johan Clant, whose role is listed as the *morio*. In the course of a discussion between the husband and wife concerning the moral instruction of their daughter in “fear of God, honor and virtue, according to the law of Moses,” the fool unexpectedly intrudes on the stage and repeatedly interrupts the conversation.⁸ He inserts his lowly voice into the father’s intricate perorations, tossing in sarcastic remarks about “what a good teaching” the father is offering.⁹ The contrast between the pious discourse of husband and wife, on the one hand, and the fool’s playful interjections, on the other, bifurcates the dialogue, installing a comic view at odds with the father’s moral message.

The fool’s joking relationship with his master, as the next scene in Duke Julius’s play makes clear, detaches the fool’s comic effects from the overarching dramatic plot. Immediately after the dialogue between husband and wife, the fool appears onstage with a lock covering his mouth, which does little to inhibit his ability to cajole father and daughter about the validity of the biblical commandments. He responds, for instance, to the father’s extensive remarks on the observance of the Sabbath by saying, “Well, that is good, because I do not like to work. I wish that it were Sunday every day, because then I would be able to do nothing.”¹⁰ It is

8. Julius Heinrich and Wilhelm Ludwig Holland, *Die Schauspiele des Herzogs Heinrich Julius von Braunschweig, nach alten Drucken und Handschriften* (Stuttgart: Litterarischer Verein, 1855), 6.

9. *Ibid.*, 10.

10. *Ibid.*, 11.

remarkable that this commentary is made despite the lock, thereby exposing the weak demands for verisimilitude that govern these plays. Particularly important for understanding the structural role of the fool, meanwhile, is what happens immediately after his interjection. That is, upon his demeaning of the holy day of rest, father and daughter continue their dialogue as though nothing unusual had been said. Their piety, in other words, remains immune to the fool's impiety. Like a switch operator, to return to a metaphor from chapter 1, here again the fool flips to a separate and alternative comic voice, while on a parallel line the play goes on as before.

The specificity of the joking relationship means that allowances for such verbal play and code switching are restricted to the fool. Accordingly, there is no instance in the seventeenth-century tradition sparked by the English players, at least that I know of, where the fool's ribaldry and baseness spread to other members of the *dramatis personae*, creating a sort of comic contagion that threatens the seriousness of the main plot. Large-scale devolutions of this sort do happen—but in plays of different artistic ambition and rank than those put on by the traveling players. In this context, the fool's role was, rather, to punctuate the ongoing action with his humor, with interjections that, again in the words of the anthropologist Radcliffe-Browne, "within any other context would express and arouse hostility."¹¹ And yet such hostility remains absent, precisely because the fool's interventions remain encapsulated in the dialogue.

The fool's permission to switch the linguistic and semantic codes that govern the dialogue, to insert a brief interval of play, maintains a loose and associative connection with the main action. His encapsulated moments of play amount to semantic distortions, small-scale interruptions that deflate, even if only temporarily, the significance of the play's events. The sort of momentary deviation that we have just seen in the passage from Duke Heinrich Julius's *Susanna* was, I would claim, the widespread and long-lasting signature of the fool.

11. Radcliffe-Browne, "On Joking Relationships," 91.

Let us focus in on a characteristic scene from the *Tragedy of Julio and Hypollita* (*Tragaedia von Julio und Hypollita*), a play loosely based on Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona* that was published in the first collection of plays associated with the English actors. The play features a fool named Grobianus, who plays a supporting role in the central romantic intrigue. The plot is simple: a prince betroths his daughter to a Roman named Romulus (not the mythical one), who, upon departing to inform his family of his engagement, is betrayed by his friend Julius. When Romulus returns to find his friend Julius and fiancée Hyppolita married, a bloody conflict ensues. The betrayal at the center of the play depends on the fool's cooperation: he is responsible for delivering a fabricated letter to the fiancée Hyppolita, which is meant to convince her to abandon her original lover. When asked to deliver the letter, the fool responds, "Good sir, what wouldn't I do for money? If I could get money for it, I would call my mother a whore and my father a rogue. I will loyally execute your order."¹² And with that, the fool's intervention is complete, and the dialogue returns to its usual level of formality. Again, pointing to the vulgar content of the fool's response cannot fully capture the conventional quality of the episode; it is equally, if not more, important to notice that the ensuing dialogue continues on undeterred, taking no note of a deviation in the stream of dialogue.

Before moving on, there is one further facet to the scene worth noting. Although the fool's remark does not fit with the register of the surrounding dialogue, it does conform to a familiar pattern of communication, namely, request and affirmative response. Keeping this structure in mind, it becomes clear that the scene is internally disjointed: on the one hand, there is the fool's exact verbal formulation, including its semantic content, and, on the other, the skeletal pattern of dialogue it signals for the other members of the dramatic fiction. The distinction between Grobianus's words and their purpose in the flow of dialogue is instructive. It demonstrates that in many instances his utterances are, in a crucial sense, for the audience, and not for the other members of the theatrical fiction, even if he does not

12. Brauneck and Noe, *Spieltexte der Wanderbühne*, 1:435.

address the audience directly. The fool's participation in the dialogue, rather, evinces a doubleness—at once part of the dialogue and radically deviating from it. The fool offers a moment of play that aims at soliciting laughter from the audience, while also sustaining the question-response pattern and thereby advancing the forward march of the plot. This passage makes clear that, although encapsulated as miniature episodes of jest, the fool's utterances maintain a minimal level of structural integration with the surrounding dialogue.

Another example from later in the century will help make this unusual economy of continuity and discontinuity clearer. The drama *Der Jude von Venetien* (*The Jew of Venice*, uncertain dating), which loosely draws on Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, is based on a manuscript that was probably written down around midcentury by an actor named Christoph Blümel, a member of the traveling company led by the last English-born manager, George Jolly.¹³ However, the attachment of a name to the manuscript should not distract from the fact that we are dealing with an acting script, which is to say, with a textual artifact resulting from decades of informal circulation. Strolling players put on a German version of Shakespeare's play as early as 1626, and the surviving version is probably the result of approximately forty years of liberal adaptation.¹⁴ Although the play bears traces of the Italian tradition of the *commedia dell'arte*, it employs the fool in a manner closer to the German fool than the comic servant Launcelot Gobbo in Shakespeare's original.¹⁵ Consider the opening of the first act, a conversation between a king and a prince

13. See the discussion of the origin of the German adaptation and its English (re-)translation in Ernest Brennecke, *Shakespeare in Germany, 1590–1700, with Translations of Five Early Plays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 105–110.

14. Ralf Haekel, *Die englischen Komödianten in Deutschland: Eine Einführung in die Ursprünge des deutschen Berufsschauspiels* (Heidelberg: Winter Universitätsverlag, 2004), 111–114. On Blümel's participation in the Jolly troupe, see Robert J. Alexander, "George Jolly [Joris Joliphus], Der wandernde Player und Manager," *Kleine Schriften der Gesellschaft für Theatergeschichte* 29/30 (1978): 32. See chapter 2, above, for a brief discussion of Jolly.

15. For an attempt to treat the play as a blend of English and Italian conventions, see Ralf Böckmann, *Die Commedia dell'arte und das deutsche Drama des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Nordhausen: Verlag Traugott Baut, 2010), 100–105

of Cyprus. In a sequence alien to the English original, the prince asks for his father's leave to warn the Venetian Republic about the recently banished Jews. After the king assents, the fool, under the moniker Pickelhäring, requests permission to accompany the prince on his journey. The ensuing dialogue employs a degree of internal discontinuity that strongly resembles the other examples I have already introduced:

PICKELHÄRING: Oh, yes, Majesty, let me go along. Even if I am a rogue,
I cannot remain at home.

KING: If you cannot, then we must permit it. But take good care of our son, and remain with him at all times, in order to make sure he doesn't fall into bad company.

PICKELHÄRING: I will take care. If he wants to go to church, I'll show him the way to the whorehouse.

KING: Because it is decided, beloved son, you shall not postpone this trip any longer.¹⁶

It is striking that the fool's promise to take the prince to the brothel rather than the church does not rend the fabric of the dialogue. The king understands the fool's outrageous remark, it seems, as an ordinary expression of assent, even though it does not cohere with the register or content of the conversation otherwise. As in the previous example, only the question-response structure of the dialogue remains in place; the exact meaning of his words goes unnoticed.

However easy it is in printed versions of these plays to skip over moments like these, their prevalence can only lead us to believe that we are dealing with an elementary pattern in the fool's comic practice, one of his signature forms of play. In both passages cited above, the integration of the fool into the dialogue preserves the continuity of question and answer, while also allowing for the articulation of linguistically aberrant, comic meanings. The utterances provide evidence of a recognizable structure that seems to have been the cornerstone of the fool's abiding success in engaging the audience's attention.

16. Flemming, *Deutsche Literatur*, 3:211.

The fool's participation in the stage action takes place along two axes. In fact, all communication on the stage—whether gestural or verbal, explicit or tacit, spoken or silent—means engaging in a face-to-face communicative setting in two distinctive ways at the same time. In general, theater takes place via a fiction-internal dimension of dialogue—the back-and-forth among fictional personae—and, at the same time, presents this fiction to an audience via a fiction-external dimension that remains, most of the time, unmarked and inconspicuous. Within the theatrical setting, the whole fiction is *for the audience*—fiction-internal communication is directed, in general, toward the audience, even if this fact is never acknowledged as such. For most of history and within most plays, the fiction-internal axis functions as the primary and uncontroversial means for conjuring theatrical illusion, while the fiction-external dimension of theatrical communication is kept in a state of latency or only utilized at structurally specific moments, such as in a prologue. Denis Diderot's famous "fourth wall" from the mid-eighteenth century, a version of which we will encounter in part 2, can thus be understood as a particularly restrictive approach to the fiction-external line of communication.

One heuristic benefit of drawing the distinction between fiction-internal and fiction-external axes of communication is that it allows historical differences to emerge into view. A wide-lens look at theater history reveals some situations in which its direct employment is thoroughly uncontroversial; others where only certain figures can freely manipulate it; others where its use is restricted to particular junctures like the prologue and epilogue; and still others where its direct use is proscribed. A second heuristic benefit of the distinction is that it helps us recognize that the fool's distinctive form of play depended upon the regulated use of the boundary between the inside and outside of the fictional world. For he is uniquely able to tarry on both sides, contributing to the ongoing stream of dialogue and also providing it with an external frame for the audience. In virtue of this capacity to step outside the fiction, the fool fostered a unique rapport with the audience, often serving as the onstage advocate for the audience's amusement.

With the distinction between these two communicative axes in hand, it is worth returning to the examples provided above. We have

already seen that the fool's utterances leave the concatenation of fiction-internal utterances intact, despite their deviation from the semantic flow of content, as though the fool's remarks provided plot-driving information. This preservation of the continuous structure of fiction-internal dialogue, irrespective of what the fool actually does, means that the fool's play is encapsulated, and thus separated off from the rest of the action. This bifurcation between fiction-internal and fiction-external axes is illustrated in figure 2.

The division between internal and external communicative axes in a single utterance echoes another of the fool's fundamental comic strategies: the aside. This more familiar form of theatrical speech provides a straightforward mode of communicating with the audience and is the fool's most pervasive device for manipulating the boundary between fiction-internal and fiction-external communicative axes. In fact, the surviving acting scripts record myriad times when the fool turns to speak directly with the audience about a state of affairs currently transpiring or having just transpired.¹⁷ This pervasiveness is attributable

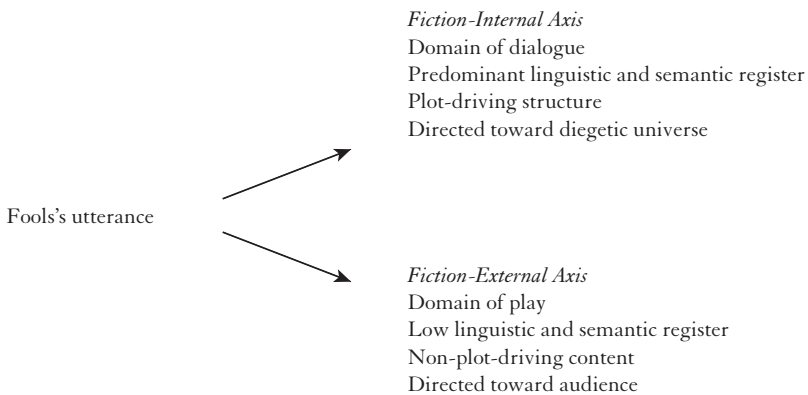


Figure 2. Fiction-internal and fiction-external bifurcation

17. The phenomenon of framing events onstage by means of an aside is extremely common. To just give examples from the first two collections of plays of the English players: Brauneck and Noe, *Spieltexte der Wanderbühne*, 1:11, 28, 29, 292, 344, 525, 526, 529; 2:35, 36, 38, 39, 48, 51, 54–55, 85, 88, 219, 239, 246, 248, 251, 261, 328, 361–362, 376–377.

to the effectiveness of the aside for reflecting on and reframing events taking place onstage. By contrast to the sort of bifurcated utterances schematized above, here there is no question-and-response skeleton, no simulation of a fiction-internal, plot-driving dimension.

This point is illustrated in a very successful play by Johann Georg Schoch (1627–1690), *Comoedia vom Studenten-Leben* (*Comedy of Student Life*), which first appeared in 1657 and was reprinted in 1658, 1660, and 1668.¹⁸ Schoch's deployment of the fool seems particularly noteworthy because it creates a strong dissonance with the play's overall moralizing mission. Ultimately, the play does not need to resolve the relationship between its edifying purpose and the fool's comic interjections. The use of the aside keeps his play within enclosed boundaries.

The opening scenes introduce, as was usual, the hierarchically structured joking relationship. The fool is given by a merchant and a nobleman as a servant to their two university-bound sons.¹⁹ The play makes clear that the father intends for the servant to keep the young men in line, a charge that is radically at odds with his comic personality. For example, immediately before their departure for the university town, the fool accompanies one of the adolescent noblemen, Floretto, as he pays a visit to his beloved. When the young woman invites the nobleman to say his farewell, the fool speaks an aside concerning the young woman's ardent desire to embrace her beloved one last time: "Go on, you are on the right path, you poor simple pet."²⁰ These words, shared only with the audience, provide a fiction-external frame for what had come before and what will ensue. In the course of his remarks to the audience, the fool goes on to deride the girl's affection and boast about his master's sexual prowess: "My master arranges things, so that he can spoon out his

18. I refer to the 1658 edition, a digital copy of which is available through the Deutsches Textarchiv (<http://www.deutschestextarchiv.de>).

19. Johann Georg Schoch, *Comoedia vom Studenten-Leben* (Leipzig: Johann Wittigauen, 1658), 26.

20. *Ibid.*, 47. For a similar episode, see p. 83.

desire and pleasure.”²¹ The fool uses the aside to encode his master’s acts as emotional (and, it is implied, sexual) manipulation. In so doing, the fool also draws attention away from questions of moral culpability, offering the audience a moment to relish the moral transgression as it transpires on stage. In Schoch’s drama, then, the fool propounds the very sort of moral dereliction that the drama otherwise works to contain. However, because this advocacy is restricted to the fool and, in this instance, to the aside, the fool is not unmasked as deserving of the audience’s disapprobation. His role in Schoch’s comedy is far too central and his portrayal far too endearing to support such a view. It makes more sense to think of these asides as momentary allowances for self-contained play that do not make the fool into an object of general derision. In other words, the fool exploits his liminal status in the dialogue to introduce a moral transgression that the course of the drama means to exclude. The term *liminality* accurately describes the sense in which Pickelhering’s words or actions fall outside the scope of transgression that the play seeks to expose as morally depraved. When sequestered within the confines of the joking relationship, the fool’s remarks and gestures create moments of licit (because restricted) enjoyment of the ordinarily illicit.

Comments by the fool, directed toward the audience and bearing on events within the drama itself, introduce what one might call a thin layer of self-reflexivity. I say *thin* because the act of framing does not undermine the simulation of a fictional world on stage, but rather intensifies it. The fool can restate for the audience what is going on, and such fiction-external reflection on fiction-internal communication remains unproblematic. For this reason, when the fool draws attention to events transpiring elsewhere onstage, this act of self-reference sidesteps paradoxes of drama-within-the-drama. Instead, it uses direct communication with the audience to encourage the spectator’s sustained engagement with the performance.

21. Schoch, *Comoedia vom Studenten-Leben*, 47.

The privilege of liminality is clearly evident in the frame for the entire play that Pickelhering later provides. Although the concluding scenes had sought to show that the sons will have their moral integrity restored once they return home, the final words by the fool are an announcement of his own unflagging commitment to pleasure:

So I will go along inside and rejoice too that I also made it back. I want to get so drunk that it will be a disgrace and sin. (*ad spectatores*) My good sirs! the fun is now done. If you didn't like it, I can't do anything about it. Nonetheless, I'm going to go have a fresh drink poured inside. Surely, we'll see each other again. And excuse my politeness, even though you haven't exactly seen much of it.

So werde ich auch mit hinein gehen / und mich auch freuen / daß ich selber bin wieder kommen / ich wil mir zu sauffen daß es eine Schande und Sünde seyn wird / (*ad Spect.*) Jhr Herrn / die Lust wehre nun aus / hats euch nicht gefallen / ich kann nicht dafür / ich wil mir indessen drinnen ein frisches einschenken lassen. Wir wollen noch wohl wieder zusammen kommen / und verzeihet meiner Höffligkeit / ihr habt ihr aber nicht gar viel gesehen.²²

Unlike the debauchery of the students, the fool's play is sanctioned. In being afforded the final word, he is nominated as a representative of the play. The fool's vow to return on another occasion, meanwhile, points to the serial or iterable quality of the fool. Because there will be subsequent plays, so too will there be subsequent fools in them.

Such jest was, it bears emphasizing, by no means limited to the verbal aside. It also included playful displays of bodily movement, from the isolated gesture to the more protracted comic dance. The interpolation of dance within scenes, much like the aside, stopped the fiction-internal flow of dialogue, allowing for the opportunity to frolic briefly before—and for—the audience. It is unfortunately difficult in most cases to say with certainty when these moments were inserted. Many plays from the seventeenth century, particularly those used by traveling players, lack stage directions entirely, which seems to indicate that the duration and exact placement of such dance numbers were the actors', or at least the troupe

22. Ibid., 192.

manager's, prerogative. That being said, the surviving playscripts have some trace indications of their presence. Textual markers exist, for example, in the play *Fortunatus*, an adaptation of Thomas Dekker's *Old Fortunatus* from 1599. In the German version, included in the 1620 collection of plays by the English traveling players, the text indicates three times that the fool, who is not included in Dekker's original, should interrupt the ongoing stage dialogue and provide some sort of visual amusement. The surviving text simply indicates: "At this point Pickelhering acts (*agieret*)."²³ While we cannot know exactly what these dances looked like, all three occur at key transitional moments, when there is a certain gap or the possibility of momentary relief. Such dance numbers, then, probably functioned as miniature intermezzi, when the audience could reduce its attentive effort and just enjoy the show.

To gain a slightly richer sense of the implications of interpolated dance episodes, let us return to the play about student life, with its fool called Pickelhering. Remember that this play was written in 1657, almost forty years after the English plays were first collected, and comes at a historical juncture when the conventionalized antics associated with the fool had already achieved widespread acclaim. Before the fool departs with the two sons for university, the merchant's wife provides the fool with two large sacks of money and beseeches him to use the funds wisely. She tells him to "take good care of the two / and let [her] know / if they are not pious." At this point her interlocutor responds with verbal affirmation. However, the sparse stage instructions indicate that mother's mention of potential improprieties rouses the fool's interest. In addition to seemingly harmless affirmation, he responds with a brief frolic. Of course, the contrast between verbal and gestural levels of expression is the key to the scene's comic effect. What is more, the division between fiction-internal and fiction-external axes of communication becomes visible here. That is, the mother does not notice or take umbrage at the fool's

23. For the *Fortunatus* adaptation, see Brauneck and Noe, *Spieltexte der Wanderbühne*, 1:128–209. The three points in the play where Pickelhering dances can be found at 150, 154, and 159.

bodily movements. If she had, she would not go on to entrust the fool with her son's well-being. The dancing moves exclusively along the fiction-external axis of communication, whereas his verbal affirmation utilizes the fiction-internal dimension of communication.

The aforementioned varieties of discontinuous verbal and gestural communication disclose a comic view on the drama's events that is shared only with the audience. One must keep in mind, though, that these are not instances of coloring outside the lines; such forms of direct address are uncontroversial. On the whole, that is, the interruption of dialogue by the fool's utterances fits comfortably within the stage fiction; the theatrical world to which the fool belonged was not equipped with an impregnable communicative-ontological boundary between plot events and the audience. The boundary separating the fiction and the real—stage and audience—is selectively permeable, allowing for the fool to switch back and forth across it without endangering the viability of the whole fiction. Indeed, this boundary became salient in the seventeenth century *as* the site for the fool's play. The fool utilized the fiction-external axis of communication to introduce a thin layer of self-reflexivity, which often served to enhance the audience's awareness of or to shape its attitude toward something happening onstage. And he also used short dance numbers to provide momentary respite.

In the pieces-and-patches construction that made up the performances by traveling players in the seventeenth century, the fool's interventions used the element of surprise as a key comic ingredient. In no small part because of this constant possibility of interruption, theatrical performance in this context tolerated a high degree of discontinuity in its simulation of a fictional world. The fool's antics could be as brief as an aside or short dance and could also extend into larger-scale comic improvisations and short dramatic sketches. His star role in interludes and postludes—referred to as *Zwischen-spiele*, *Unterhandlungen*, *Aufzüge*, and *Nachspiele*—made them an essential ingredient in theatrical performance.

While the presence of such playlets surely reaches back to the predominately gestural performances of the earliest English acting

troupes, the practice of embedding short song and dance or dramatic numbers in performances remained nearly ubiquitous over the ensuing decades. The historical record suggests that the interspersed mimic relied predominately on an originally Scottish song and dance known in London as the jig.²⁴ Etymological features of the term have led scholars to speculate that it first referred to “a type of dance in which whirling and turning on the toe was a conspicuous feature.”²⁵ The popularization of this dance in London during the second half of the sixteenth century led to the application of the name to a broad swath of ballads that were performed with a dance. The jigs usually consisted of one to three persons singing rhymed couplets, but the number of participants peaked at five. In England, jigs were usually inserted into the middle of plays, especially between acts. When they were imported to the German context, such numbers gained even more prominence, initially as a way of dealing with the linguistic barrier and eventually as a response to widespread enthusiasm.²⁶ Essentially every playbill from the seventeenth century advertises the fool’s capering “start to finish”²⁷ as well as in a *lustiges Nachspiel*, or amusing postlude. Long after their origin had been forgotten, the improvisational song-and-dance numbers appended to and inserted in plays remained popular in the German-speaking world.

In the interludes and postludes, the fool’s play was allowed free rein in a way that would have been impossible in the main body of the drama. Sequestered from the main body of the play, the fool became the ill-fated or triumphant hero of his own story, often in

24. On the tradition of the English jig, see the foundational study of Charles Read Baskervill, *The Elizabethan Jig and Related Song Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929). This volume also contains materials relevant to the German tradition, beginning on p. 491. Baskervill drew many of his sources from the earlier study of Johannes Bolte, *Die Singspiele der englischen Komödianten und ihrer Nachfolger in Deutschland, Holland und Skandinavien* (Hamburg/Leipzig: Voss, 1893).

25. Baskervill, *The Elizabethan Jig*, 15.

26. A number of interludes and postludes related to the tradition of the English jig have been gathered in Baskervill, *The Elizabethan Jig*, 491–589.

27. See the Faust playbill in Flemming, *Deutsche Literatur*, 3:203.

a tale of love or romantic intrigue. At the same time, the hierarchical social construction of the joking relationship persevered in veiled form. Rather than the lowly servant-fool coupled with a noble master, here the fool often appeared in a rustic milieu, set off from the urban population that typically frequented the performances by traveling players. The scenes seek to reconstruct a skeletal, typological picture of rural life, as evident in the appearance of the fool alongside a figure simply referred to as “the neighbor.”²⁸ In a small-scale and intimate town context, the fool gets caught up in the sort of romantic intrigue and financial wrangling that seems to have possessed nearly universal appeal. For instance, a characteristic interlude explores the domestic life of the fool, casting him opposite an imperious and upbraiding wife. Others explore his sexual prowess.²⁹

One instance of the interlude that enjoyed an unusually long career was known in English as *Singing Simpkin*, until it became popular in German under the title *Pickelhering in der Kiste*.³⁰ The example is informative in a few key respects. First, it provides an indication of how popular these playlets featuring the fool were. For instance, a Dutch version of the same interlude, penned by Isaak Vos, appeared in 1705 on the basis of performances at the Amsterdam city theater, the Shouwburg. This means that the Dutch were still performing the piece one hundred years after the German version first appeared in print. Aside from a few variations, the surviving English and German texts are alike. Both tell the story of a woman with an insatiable sexual appetite who hides her two lovers from each other and disguises both from her husband. In the English version, the clown, named Simpkin, plays one of the duped lovers. But the example is also revealing because of a major change that takes place in the switch from English to German. In

28. See, for instance, the dramatic interlude in *Schoch, Comoedia vom Studenten-Leben*. See also Brauneck and Noe, *Spieltexte der Wanderbühne*, 1:581–639. A very similar social scheme is also at work in the song interludes reprinted in Brauneck and Noe, 2:402–449.

29. Brauneck and Noe, 1:559–580.

30. For a facing-page bilingual edition, see Bolte, *Die Singspiele der englischen Komödianten*, 50–62.

the adapted version, the fool is no longer beaten off the stage by the woman's husband. Instead, the fool triumphs over the other lover and the husband, and the piece ends with him headed to bed with the woman. Perhaps unlike any other example, this one shows just what the different dimensions of the fool's comic practice collectively aimed for: the licensed, because contained, pleasure in the illicit. Whether hinted at in the form of an aside or acted out in a supplementary play, the fool provided a temporally and narratively circumscribed indulgence of the audience's desire to experience otherwise forbidden pleasures. Because everything he said and did was in jest, his transgressions against social norms could be written off as the source of harmless pleasure.