

THE FOOL'S SPACE AND TIME

The fool does not stand alone. Although the foregoing three chapters have not addressed issues concerning overarching plot organization and devoted little attention to the other figures on the stage, it would be a mistake to think of the fool either as a wholly autonomous agent or as a mere add-on. The fool only existed through his participation in a larger theatrical affair. That is to say, the structural import of his various strategies for soliciting laughter always arose in tandem with the pieces and patches they accompanied. This encompassing, composite whole is paramount to understanding the fool's part.

Speaking of wholes can summon to mind images of tightly reticulated and causally interconnected unities, of plotlines without adventitious additions or dissevered joints. But this conception is too limited. A more historically sensitive approach has to account for theatrical wholes that are more tightly or more loosely held together, with gradations of unity, instead of presupposing

the existence of a gold standard. What one theatrical culture may regard as integrated can seem tattered to another, and vice versa. Take the example of the unity of place: that a play might switch locations between scenes did not seem controversial to, among others, Elizabethan English playwrights and theatergoers, but contemporary critics inspired by (and, in this respect, taking liberties with the text of) Aristotle regarded such changes as a threat to the internal coherence of a play. Classicizing critics thus advanced principled claims about the requisites of theatrical unity, and in doing so sought to undermine the experience of audiences that clearly felt such plays hung together more than well enough. From today's vantage point, it seems best to avoid the assumption that there is a single yardstick for unity, handed down by classicizing critics, and to forgo use of a crude binary opposition (e.g., open/closed). Rather than supposing there are dramatic or theatrical forms that are, per se, unified or disparate, it is preferable to see theatrical unity itself as a variable and context-specific measure, vulnerable to historical and cultural change.¹ One and the same theatrical performance can appear in one context as disturbingly disjointed and chaotic; in another as gripping *by virtue of* its internal diversity. As has by now become clear, the fool's rupturing of the dialogue, in fact, contributed essentially to the success of theatrical performance.

In the absence of a fixed paradigm for dramatic or theatrical unity, it becomes clear that the *tertium*, the unit for measuring an open form against a closed form, is the moving target in need of a description. A more fine-grained vocabulary would suggest that different theatrical cultures possess varying criteria of openness and closure, as well as varying dramaturgical strategies for satisfying such criteria. By recognizing that the openness or closure of a form cannot be determined independent of historical context, it is possible to avoid simply repeating the critical gestures of a particular theatrical culture. We can then turn our attention to the different standards of unity—of a theatrical performance and, eventually,

1. For an influential formulation of a more restricted notion of unity, see Victor Klotz, *Geschlossene und offene Form im Drama* (Munich: Hanser Verlag, 1960).

a dramatic text—that prevailed under different historical circumstances. The claim that the fool belonged to a whole, with which this chapter began, is meant to suggest only that the fool came into being in connection with envioning utterances, roles, scenes, plot trajectories, and even stage spectacles. The pressing question is, now, how this interlacement was configured. Or, to remain within the same metaphorical register, how taught or slack were the criss-crossing strands?

A key indication of the way in which the fool related to the encompassing whole can be found in the term used to describe him from the turn of the seventeenth century into the eighteenth: *kurzweilig*.² The composite adjective is built out of two lexical components: *kurz*, referring to a short length, and *weilig*, referring to a period of time. To get at the heart of its meaning, it is helpful to think of its opposite, *langweilig*, a word more easily translated into English: “boring.” *Kurzweilig* is not a sophisticated philosophical term, nor is it in any way obscure. But its meaning is nonetheless complex, ranging from “amusing” to “entertaining,” and entailing a diversity or variation in experience. Something that is *kurzweilig* unfolds as a varied succession of appearances in such a way that time itself passes imperceptibly. In the phenomenon of *Kurzweil*, rapid augmentation engenders rapt attention. The word enjoys a privileged place in the description of the fool, because it brings into close proximity two features definitive of his role: deviation from the established course of dialogue and absorption in the present moment. In spite of the potentially cumbersome effect on English diction, I use the German word *kurzweilig* over the following pages. I do so to emphasize the central role of the combination of alternation and presence that describes the fool's place in the encompassing theatrical event.

Kurzweilig is used as an attribute of the fool in three distinct but related situations. First, other members of the dramatic fiction address him as if he possessed this special quality. When he is

2. For the sake of clarity, I have modernized the spelling of *kurzweilig*. The seventeenth-century spelling is *kurtzweilig*. The importance of the term was observed already in Jean Paul, *Werke* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1973), 5:161.

first beckoned onto the stage in Duke Heinrich Julius's 1593 play, *Vincentius Ladislaus*, for instance, Duke Siluester refers to the fool as his "*kurzweiligen* counsel."³ We see the same sort of description in plays like the 1630 *Aminita and Silvia*, published in the second major collection of English plays, and the 1686 *Virenius*, performed on the emperor's name day in Regensburg.⁴ Each of these scenes is orchestrated in the same way: one character expresses ignorance regarding the identity of a new character entering the stage. The matter is quickly cleared up when the unknown person is referred to as *kurzweilig*, and therewith revealed as the fool. A second context in which *kurzeilig* is an attribute of the fool is the list of *dramatis personae* typically included at the beginning of a printed play. To give an early example, Johan Bannser is listed as the *kurtzweilig* counsel in Elias Herlicius's 1601 rewriting of Duke Heinrich Julius's *Vincentius Ladislaus*. In much the same way, Johannes Riemer (1648–1714) refers to Chambre as the *kurzweiligen* Frenchman in his 1681 tragedy about Maria Stuart.⁵ The third context is the fool advertised as *kurzweilig* in the playbills that were distributed in advance of performances. An adaptation of the great Dutch tragedian Joost van den Vondel's (1587–1679) *Gebroeders* announces that the "*kurtzweiligen* Pickel-Häring" will make an appearance.⁶ A 1671 playbill from the town of Rothenburg ob der Tauber in Franconia promises more of the same.⁷ This list could be expanded to include a legion of additional

3. Julius Heinrich and Wilhelm Ludwig Holland, *Die Schauspiele des Herzogs Heinrich Julius von Braunschweig, nach alten Drucken und Handschriften* (Stuttgart: Litterarischer Verein, 1855), 526.

4. Manfred Brauneck and Alfred Noe, *Spieltexte der Wanderbühne* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1970), 2:103. Anonymous, *Comoedia, Bitittult Der Flüchtige Virenius, Oder Die Getreue Olympia* (Regensburg: Johann Georg Hofmann, 1686), n.p. The latter instance occurs at the end of the second act.

5. Johannes Riemer, *Der Regenten bester Hoff-Meister oder lustiger Hoff-Parnassus* (Leipzig: Weißenfels, 1681), 284.

6. Rudin, "Pickelhering, rechte Frauenzimmer, berühmte Autoren: Zur Ankündigungspraxis der Wanderbühne im 17. Jahrhundert," *Kleine Schriften der Gesellschaft für Theatergeschichte* 34/35 (1988): 30.

7. The playbill is reprinted in Rudin, "Pickelhering, rechte Frauenzimmer, berühmte Autoren," 42, and transcribed on 45.

announcements.⁸ Thus, the denomination *kurzweilig* did more than identify an ordinary character trait; it persisted for the entire seventeenth century as a way of distinguishing the fool's import in the entire theatrical event. For this very reason, advertisements and lists of *dramatis personae* found the term an effective way of identifying the presence and purpose of the fool within the larger tapestry.

Kurzweilig gathers under a single heading the two formal processes that are distinctive of the fool: departure from the main dialogue and investment in the immediately present instant. As chapter 3 showed in detail, the fool relates to the encompassing whole primarily through disjointed, encapsulated interventions. Whether through a single utterance, a short dance, or a brief interlude, the purpose of the fool's involvement was always to introduce a momentary comic effect that, as a delimited sphere of play, runs alongside large-scale plot designs. As a rupture in the tone and meaning of dialogue, the fool transports it, for a brief moment, to a world defined by creaturely desires and pecuniary acquisitiveness. He is woven into the theatrical spectacle as a moment of indulgence and thereby a reprieve from ordinary dealings and concerns. His is a domain of play freed from concerns of past and future, utterly ignorant of moral duty and divine retribution.

This can all sound rather exalted, but the signature of this figure was, of course, the utterly mundane. And as deeply rooted in the fleeting pleasures of the here and now, the fool bore the potential for cynical and vacuous denial of meaning. While, in most instances, the encapsulation of his interventions restricted their impact, there are still others where this sequestering is incomplete. Such circumstances allow the meaning of the fool's utterances to emerge more clearly. The most popular and often-performed play of the traveling stage troupes, an adaptation of the German Baroque tragedy

8. See the rich inventory of playbills collected in Bärbel Rudin, "Von Alexanders Mord-Banquet bis zur Kindheit Mosis: Eine unbekannte Kollektion von Theaterzetteln der Wanderbühne," *Daphnis* 35 (2006): 193–261, especially 194, 201, and 209. See also Johann-Richard Hänsel, *Die Geschichte des Theaterzettels und seine Wirkung in der Öffentlichkeit* (Berlin: E. Reuter, 1962), 107 and 277.

by Andreas Gryphius (1616–1664) entitled *Großmüthiger Rechtsgelehrter oder Sterbender Aemilius Paulus Papinianus* (*The Magnanimous Jurist Aemilius Paulus Papinianus*, 1659), possesses a fool figure dislodged from the ordinary joking relationship and imbued with exceptional potency. Importantly, the fool is not in his usual servant role in the adaptation of Gryphius's tragedy. He assumes a position that mirrors, albeit distortedly, that of Gryphius's hero, the chief Roman jurist Papinian. Traraeus, as the fool is called, is referred to as a "spoiled jurist," capable of redoubling and disfiguring the hero's every move.⁹ The transposition from servant role to parallel jurist allows for a more pronounced view of the relationship between the fool's strategies of play and the encompassing whole to which he belongs.

The adaptation was first staged in 1677 and maintained its place until 1745—all told, a nearly seventy-year career in front of audiences. Gryphius's tragedy of the ill-fated and unwaveringly virtuous Roman lawyer makes an odd choice for an adaptation. The author was a jurist himself, with a sound humanistic education and strong Lutheran convictions, and as a result his play is laden with political and religious significance, along with ornate language and copious erudite references.¹⁰ Once the strolling players got their hands on it, however, they disposed of much of this. The adaptation evinces a radical reduction in semantic complexity,

9. Willi Flemming, *Deutsche Literatur: Sammlung Literarischer Kunst- und Kulturdenkmäler in Entwicklungsreihen* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1931), 3:138.

10. For a general overview of the author's career, see the now-classic essay by Conrad Wiedemann, "Andreas Gryphius," in *Andreas Gryphius*, ed. Harald Steinhagen and Benno von Wiese (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1984), 435–472. The Papinian tragedy has been the subject of a number of incisive analyses over recent years. I have found three discussions particularly insightful: Wilfried Barner, "Der Jurist als Märtyrer: Andreas Gryphius' Papinianus," in *Literatur und Recht: Literarische Rechtsfälle von der Antike bis in die Gegenwart*, ed. Ulrich Mölk (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 1996), 229–242; Rüdiger Campe, "Theater der Institution," in *Konfigurationen der Macht in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Rudolf Behrens and Roland Galle (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2000), 258–287; Karl-Heinz Habersetzer, *Politische Typologie und dramatisches Exemplum: Studien zum historisch-ästhetischen Horizont des barocken Trauerspiels am Beispiel von Andreas Gryphius' Carolus Stuardus und Papinianus* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1985).

particularly in the amount of background knowledge required to make sense of the play. Clearly, the traveling players did not demand an elite education of their audiences. Many of the characteristic features of Baroque tragedy—from the elevated status of the hero to the eschatological backdrop and the political message—are suddenly transformed. And, almost as a matter of course, the introduction of a fool establishes an additional strand of significance completely incompatible with the original.

Although a protracted comparison between original and adaptation would lead far afield, I would like to draw out some of the salient features of the adapted play, with particular focus on the status of the fool as *kurzweilig*. Of interest is the way in which the adaptation distorts Gryphius's celebratory portrayal of the tragic hero, especially of his culminating deed of tragic gravitas: death. The trivialization of death is not unique to this play; no one, no matter how virtuous or innocent, is immune to his ridicule. Perhaps more importantly, no event, no matter how high it is ordinarily honored, is fortified against the fool's attack on its significance. His belittlement of death is, in particular, a siege on deeply cherished values. To give one noteworthy example, in a gesture that would solicit disdain from the modern Shakespeare enthusiast, we see the fool mocking Juliet's suicide in the surviving acting script of *Romeo and Juliet*.¹¹

The Gryphius adaptation opens with two parallel monologues. In the first, the noble jurist Papinian enters the stage lamenting his unwarranted vulnerability for having scaled "the paramount peak of honor." In the other, the fool steps out onto the stage announcing, with a proverbially puffed-up chest, the sight of "justice riding into the horizon of my erudition." The self-inflating and celebratory proclamation of one jurist reverses the desperate cry of the other.¹² By counterposing these two figures—one suffering at

11. Albert Cohn, *Shakespeare in Germany in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: An Account of English Actors in Germany and the Netherlands and of the Plays Performed by Them during the Same Period* (London: Asher & Co, 1865), 391–394.

12. Compare Flemming, *Deutsche Literatur*, 3:140–141 and 144–145.

the hands of injustice, the other diminishing the import assigned to justice—the adaptation is able to transform even the most austere moments in Gryphius's tragedy into risible spectacle. A good example of this is a scene featuring a soothsayer named Thrasullus. In the original, the royal prophet paints a picture of the potential doom for the Roman Empire born by the internecine conflict between the two coemperors. In the adaptation, meanwhile, the fool interrupts the soothsayer's rumination, pestering the diviner to let him in on his future chances for marriage and wealth.¹³ As one would expect, the soothsayer is unperturbed, even offering genuine prognostications in response to the fool's petty questioning.

These sorts of moments run throughout the play. None is more striking than the fool's remarks when he intrudes on one of the coemperors of Rome lying dead on the floor. The fool storms onto the stage in response to a desperate cry for help, but he has little assistance or consolation to offer. Standing over the emperor's corpse, he pronounces with stinging mockery, "So who strangled the poor devil? He is lying there and is bleeding like swine. He's got four or five wounds; there is no pulse. He's given up the ghost."¹⁴ In keeping with the fool's signature encapsulated play-structure, the dialogue then moves forward as though the fool had not uttered a word. The other figures on the stage continue their cries of lament—"Murder, murder! We are betrayed!"—while the fool makes light of the horror they feel. The scene relies on a clean-cut opposition between the fool's play, on the one hand, and the acute sense of political and personal catastrophe, on the other. This internal duplicity is completely consistent with the earlier discussion with the soothsayer. In this case, though, the death of the emperor—an event of chief political and religious significance in Gryphius's play—is not simply made light of; it is recast in the most brutal terms. When the emperor's murder is described as the expiration of the lowliest creature, it is robbed of all its imperial gravity and reduced to a banal corporeal occurrence. By the same token, the repercussions of the emperor's death for the future of

13. *Ibid.*, 3:154–156.

14. *Ibid.*, 3:160.

Rome are inconsequential to the fool. He introduces a comic frame incongruous with the somber scene, one that expresses indifference to what has already transpired and what is yet to come. It amounts to a radical deflation of the value of life itself.

The subsequent section of the scene is equally noteworthy. In an especially grotesque description, the fool remarks that the emperor Bassian fleeing the stage, having just killed his coemperor, looks "as if he had gorged himself on ten peasants [*sic*]." ¹⁵ Immediately thereafter, the dead emperor's mother falls unconscious on the stage, stunned by her son's death. The fool, meanwhile, is unaffected by the violence and the distraught mother. Staring at her unmoving body on the ground, he again introduces commentary that robs the scene of all gravity: he observes, "Even more foolish antics (*Narrenpossen*)."¹⁶ As he then takes stock of the tragic turn of events, his appraisal shows no sensitivity to the potential impact of the death of the co-emperor or the unconscious queen. "What should we do now?" he asks. "This thing is going to be crazy."¹⁷ The fool's running commentary, laced with the usual derision, unfolds according to a telling structure. He recasts the protagonists as fools and the events as folly. Within the circumscribed domain of his commentary, he inverts the relationship between earnest and frivolous, the pathetic and the comic. Since the fool acts as a doppelgänger of the protagonist Papinian—one might say, crisscrossing the comic track with the tragic plot—he interferes more than is usual. To be more exact, he redoubles the patterns of significance that run through the tragedy, offering the spectator the occasion to see things in a tragic as well as in a comic light. This sort of redoubling, which produces interferences between comic and tragic registers, will become essential in part 4 of this study, when we turn to literary dramas by Goethe and Kleist.

At present, it is worth taking a look at an additional scene that explodes tragic conventions. In the final scene of the play, the fool provides commentary on the death of the tragic hero, Papinian.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., 3:161.

17. Ibid.

It must be kept in mind that in Gryphius's tragedy, Papinian is distinguished by his steadfast virtue, resistance to courtly intrigue, and fidelity to the letter of the law. The original play is organized around the ambition to demonstrate Papinian's time-transcendent exemplarity. In the version featuring the fool, however, the hero's death is reduced to base everydayness. This debasement comes out in the fool's take on tragic death:

The case between the emperor and Papinian has come to a bloody close. Whether it occurred *per fas* or *nefas* I'll leave to the jurists to decide. Not the great *capitolium*, not the councilors of Rome, not the garrison cut off his neck but rather the emperor. But I know he regrets it: he was a bit of furious. I feel bad for the good Papinian. But what's it matter? My laments can't bring him back to life.

Dieser Proceß zwischen dem keyser und Papiniano hat ein blutiges end genommen / ob es *per fas* oder *nefas* geschehen, laß ich die Herren Juristen urteilen / nicht das große *Capitolium*, nicht die Rathsherren zu Rom, nicht das Lager hat ihm den haß abgesprochen, sondern der keyser / aber ich weiß das es ihm gereuet: er ist etwas furiös gewesen / der gute Papinianus trauert mich, aber was hülffts, ich kan ihm mit meinen klagen nicht wieder lebendig machen.¹⁸

In this passage, the fool employs forensic vocabulary—Latin legal terms meaning “by right or wrong”—in the interest of undoing the identification of Papinian with the principle of justice. The question of whether the emperor's execution of Papinian conformed to justice is introduced only to be dismissed as a vain inquiry. His remarks do not locate culpability beyond the scope of the knowable so much as they treat questions of responsibility as unworthy of serious consideration. He sees no need for eternal lessons in justice or for reflection on the past. The fool's commentary reduces the transpired events to theater in the purest sense—to a fleeting spectacle, after which life simply goes on.

This final passage of the *Papinian* adaptation showcases the temporal order furnished by the fool, what I earlier called immersion in the present moment. For him, there are no enduring

18. *Ibid.*, 3:199.

questions, no timeless moral lessons, no death lament, no tragic gravitas—just the indulgence in the now and the pleasure of switching, however briefly, to a viewpoint of unalloyed frivolity. In his intrusions and commentaries, his dances and gesticulations, he tears asunder the stream of dialogue, the accretion of meaning, the heightening of tragic pathos. The solace offered in his play is the pleasure of the here and now. The fool inhabits the onrushing present, the vanishing interstice into which he can cast his comic light all about.

In another one of his plays, Gryphius includes the advice that the fool should “adorn the play like sauerkraut does the bratwurst.”¹⁹ The image is a brilliant comic reversal. In order to understand it, one must recall that, contrary to modern-day baseball-game gastronomy, the bratwurst traditionally sat atop a bed of sauerkraut. Gryphius here seems to indicate that the fool can be thought of only as a supplement, insofar as he, qua foundational element, undoes the very logic of supplementation. His comic interventions may be parasitic upon the main body of the play, deviating from and often radically altering its significance, but these supplementary interventions are also the foundation upon which the play as a whole is built. In the seventeenth century, the fool's presence defined an entire theatrical culture, one that depended upon his machinations to secure the interest of audiences night after night, in town after town, year after year. Under conditions of relentless travel, with the ever-present need to attract a paying audience, theatrical players had to make sure that the experience of theatergoing would provide delight for the duration of a performance. The fool's name was disseminated in advance, and he played an important role within scenes, between scenes, and at the end of the show. He was the sideshow that essentially ensured the success of the play, as he ushered the burdens of quotidian life into the background and enchanted audiences with the evanescent rapture of the profane.

19. “Er muß das Spiel zieren / wie die Bratwurst das Sauerkraut.” Andreas Gryphius, *Dramen*, ed. Eberhard Mannack (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1991), 587.

