

MAKING COMEDY WHOLE

Eighteenth-century German literary drama possesses a notorious origin myth. Like most stories of this variety, it did not appear immediately conspicuous as fantastical or foundational. With enough time and repeated retelling, though, a single story appeared to most writers as the mark of a radical break with the past and the start of something new. The myth in question concerns the moment in which the fool passed from a crowd favorite to the object of derision, indeed the pariah, among an ambitious group of scholars, playwrights, translators, and theater directors. The protagonists in the story are the two central figures in early eighteenth-century German theater, the director and actress Friedericke Caroline Neuber and the professor from Leipzig, Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700–1766).¹ Together, they spearheaded a reform movement that

1. For much of history, the consensus has been that Caroline Neuber was a devotee of Gottsched. She came under his influence in many decisive respects, as

would send shock waves through the decades to follow. They allegedly collaborated in an act that would have been highly improbable just a decade or two earlier, but which epitomized the spirit of the 1730s: they tried to make the most beloved single stage persona in the German-speaking world into an outcast. Neuber was not the first German-speaking actress to take up arms against what she regarded as crass varieties of commercial theater.² But her rumored act of, to put it emphatically, ritual exorcism had particular appeal among her contemporaries. Even more important than the occurrence of the event itself was, to be sure, the way it became a touchstone for historical self-positioning and self-diagnosis over the following years. The myth became a mechanism for reflecting on the order of meaning appropriate to the stage, for assessing its social purpose, its relationship to textual fixity, to the tradition of ancient Greek and Roman comedy, and more. As it was recounted

should become clear over the following chapters. But two key historical details speak against such a view of Neuber's relationship to Professor Gottsched as overly servile. First, she and her husband possessed artistic ambitions that set their traveling troupe apart from others long before they made Gottsched's acquaintance. In fact, in the forty-fourth installment of his journalistic project *Die Vernünftigen Tadlerinnen* from October 1725, Gottsched has nothing but words of praise for the serious quality of their troupe years before he entertains closer involvement with German theatrical culture. See Johann Christoph Gottsched, *Die Vernünftigen Tadlerinnen: Erster Jahr-Theil* (Frankfurt/Leipzig: Brandmüller, 1725), 348–351. In addition, it seems that Caroline Neuber's affiliation with Gottsched and her opposition to the stage fool were both shaped by commercial considerations. Her troupe, which was formed after the dissolution of a prominent acting troupe, the "Hoffmansche Schauspielergesellschaft," did not have an actor well suited to play the role of the fool. The actor responsible for the role, Joseph Ferdinand Müller, joined a rival troupe, and Neuber's decision to perform without a fool figure seems to have been motivated, at least in part, by her desire to give her own troupe a distinctive identity. A good review of the facts and the literature on the subject, albeit with a speculative conclusion, can be found in Daniela Schletterer, "Die Verbannung des Harlekin—programmatischer Akt oder komödiantische Invektive?," *Frühneuzeit Info* 8, no. 2 (1997): 161–169.

2. The other notable case of an actress-director who defended a culturally ennobled concept of the theater was Catharina Elisabeth Velten, who lived from approximately 1650 to 1715. For her defense of the theater, which at the time of its publication enjoyed some acclaim but went without a long-lasting impact, see Carl Niessen, ed., *Frau Magister Velten verteidigt die Schaubühne: Schriften aus der Kampfzeit des deutschen Nationaltheaters* (Emsdetten: H. & J. Lechte Verlag, 1940).

and passed down, the story allowed various authors to reflect on successes and failures of German theater.

So what was the origin story? Around 1737 the actress and director Neuber put on either a prelude or postlude that culminated in the ritual-like ostracism of the fool. Of course, thrashing and chasing the fool off the stage were standard-fare slapstick; but in this case, the episode appeared, or at least was taken as, literal. The exact title or content of the play did not make its way into the historical record, for all that really mattered to contemporary accounts were the skeletal details. Here is the Swiss critic Johann Jakob Bodmer's unspectacular but typical telling of the story from 1743: "In a play, Mrs. Neuber, banished the Harlequin . . . from the stage. From this point on, the Harlequin was never again seen, even in the comedies performed by her troupe."³ Criticism of the fool's role had, in the early 1730s, become commonplace in the pages of critical handbooks and journals, particularly those written by Gottsched himself. With Neuber's intervention, censure of the fool became the subject of a live display and, eventually, lore. Her act of violent exclusion was understood as the founding gesture in a reform project capable of having a lasting impact. The fool's absence ostensibly paved the way for the emergence of a culturally ennobled stage, comparable to its European counterparts and in line with ancient precedent. At first, the story of the fool's banishment was recounted in a triumphant tone; already by midcentury, however, detracting voices made themselves heard. Either way, the story had staying power. In fact, it maintained a formative but largely unexamined role in narratives of the development of German theater throughout the eighteenth century to Goethe's death in 1832, and even today.⁴ In his widely influential study of the carnivalesque in Rabelais, no one less than Mikhail Bakhtin identified the controversy over the fool instigated by Gottsched as "an essential change" for the history of "literature, as well

3. Johann Jakob Bodmer, *Critische Betrachtungen und freye Untersuchungen zum Aufnehmen und zur Verbesserung der deutschen Schau-bühne* (Bern, 1743), 11.

4. For Goethe's remarks in the course of his autobiography *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, see FA I 14:616–617. Perhaps the most influential historical account is Eduard Devrient, *Geschichte der deutschen Schauspielkunst* (Leipzig: J. J. Weber Verlag, 1848), 2:35–37.

as in the field of aesthetic thought.”⁵ For nearly two hundred years, the supposed banishment of the fool has epitomized the zeal of theatrical reform that prospered in the eighteenth century.

The foregoing description of German drama’s founding myth involved a terminological slippage that requires explanation. Versions of the story that circulated in the first half of the eighteenth century often spoke of the Harlequin, rather than employing more general terminology. It might be thus reasonable to suppose, as many critics have, that a comic presence derived from the Italian *commedia dell’arte* and the French *comédie-italienne* provided the flashpoint for early Enlightenment critics. But this viewpoint fails to make sense out of the (admittedly murky) theatrical situation in the early decades of the eighteenth century. To be sure, a three-volume prose translation of Molière, which appeared in 1694, exerted a marked influence on educated writers such as Christian Reuters (1665–1712), and beginning around 1710 the names Harlequin and Arlequino began to appear on the German stage.⁶ While adaptations from the French and Italian encouraged the popularity of the name, there is no evidence that the role was played any differently than other instantiations of the fool figure had been. Indeed, where plays and advertisements from the seventeenth century had announced the presence of a Pickelhering, it now became increasingly common in the early decades of the eighteenth century to perform the same scripts with the name of the fool switched to Harlequin.⁷ There is also evidence of some casts where one and the

5. Mikhael Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 35.

6. For Reuters, see the introduction to Christian Reuters, *Werke in einem Band*, ed. Günter Jäckel (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1965), 5–31. On the transformations around 1710, see Bärbel Rudin, “Der Prinzipal Heinrich Wilhelm Benecke und seine ‘Wienerische’ und ‘Hochfürstlich Bayreuthische’ Schauspielergesellschaft: Zur Geschichte des deutschen, insbesondere des Nürnberger Theaterwesens im ersten Viertel des 18. Jahrhunderts,” *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg* 62 (1975): 179–233, esp. 191–193.

7. See Ingo Breuer, “Wi(e)der die falschen Possen? Zur Rezeption von Luigi Riccobonis theatertheoretischen Schriften bei Gottsched und Lessing,” in *Deutsche Aufklärung und Italien*, ed. Italo Michele Battafarano (Bern: Peter Lang Verlag, 1992), 67–86, esp. 68–74.

same play was sometimes performed with a fool named Harlequin, sometimes with a fool named Hanswurst. Furthermore, the seminal speeches and treatises by Gottsched, which began to appear around 1730, use the term Harlequin as a general category and not as a proper name.⁸ As a consequence, the claim that Caroline Neuber banished the Harlequin from the stage, in the parlance of the 1730s and 1740s, did not mean a specifically French or Italian manifestation of the fool. At stake, rather, was the elimination of the standardized role also known at the time as the comic persona or *lustige Person*.

The early Enlightenment effort to transform the stage, putatively founded in the banishment of the fool, relied on two categories that thus far have been essentially absent from this study: comedy and drama. These are unusual omissions. After all, this study has thus far concentrated on obviously related matters, such as the fool's laughter-provoking effects and multiple dimensions of his integration into the design of a play. I have avoided use of the terms *comedy* and *drama* because they will now describe, in a precise fashion, two strategic dimensions of the early Enlightenment reform project. Comedy and drama, that is, point to decisive formal and media-historical mechanisms that permeated the attempts to alter the theatrical landscape between 1730 and 1750. They were two key mechanisms in the project of "literarizing" the German theater.⁹ This chapter will address the circumstances that assigned the comedic genre a central role. Chapter 7 will then head into the territory of drama. Part 2, on the whole, addresses the integral steps in the large-scale endeavor to make performed theater into a literary enterprise, founded on dramatic texts composed according to strict generic standards. In this respect, the early eighteenth century offered a distinct version of the seismic shift in the relationship

8. Although Gottsched initially entertained drawing a distinction between the German "Hans Wurste" and a more civilized "Harlekin" of French extraction, he abandoned this position by the time he wrote his most influential texts on the theater. For the initial position, see Johann Christoph Gottsched, *Der Biedermann*, ed. Wolfgang Martens (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1975), pt. 2, 136.

9. For a valuable discussion of "literarization" processes in general, see Alexander Beecroft, *An Ecology of World Literature: From Antiquity to the Present Day* (London: Verso, 2015), esp. 11ff.

between text and performance that took place across Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and that gave rise to such prominent playwrights as Molière and Marivaux in France and Goldoni and Gozzi in Italy.¹⁰

Whereas these few canonical Italian and French writers, each in his own way, integrated and transformed the tradition of the *com-media dell'arte*, including the beloved Arlequino/Harlequin, the German theatrical reform movement began with an act of radical exclusion. The drastic nature of this founding gesture was not lost on contemporaries, who, over the course of time, inscribed the story of the fool's banishment with ambivalences. Take the following account. Johann Friedrich Löwen, director of the pioneering but short-lived National Theater in Hamburg, remarks in his *Geschichte des deutschen Theaters* (*History of German Theater*, 1766):

Neuber and the Harlequin: *Gottsched* was heavily opposed to this innocent. He demonstrated to *Neuber* that, by virtue of all the rules of good taste, no Harlequin was to be tolerated on a well-constructed and moral stage (*auf einer wohleingerichteten und gesitteten Bühne*). He advised her to exile this wrongdoer from the theater ceremoniously. *Neuber* conceded, and promised *Mr. Gottsched* not just to banish the fool, but even to bury him. What joy for taste, and for *Mr. Gottsched*.¹¹

Everything in this passage hangs on the sarcasm and scorn of the final sentence. To be sure, here Löwen identifies Neuber's harsh treatment of the fool as the founding gesture for the formation of a theater that aspired to meet the standards of good taste. Deriding the fool's banishment as a Pyrrhic victory, Löwen's history of the German stage—probably the first such history in the German language—ultimately acquits the fool of any culpability. A bit later the author goes on to refer to Neuber and Gottsched's act as an “auto-da-fé,” providing a hyperbolically religious framework for

10. For an older discussion of this transformation from which I have repeatedly drawn inspiration, despite some disagreement over details, see Richard Alewyn, “Schauspieler und Stegreifbühne des Barock,” in *Mimus und Logos: Eine Festgabe für Carl Niessen* (Esdetten: Verlag echte, 1952), 1–18.

11. Johann Friedrich Löwen, *Geschichte des deutschen Theaters*, ed. Heinrich Stümcke (Berlin: Ernst Frensdorff, 1905), 30.

the understanding of the fool as intrinsically deleterious.¹² Whereas in the 1730s the fool had appeared a threat to taste, a mere three decades later Löwen describes his banishment as an act of misguided persecution.

In the above passage, Löwen establishes a sense of ambivalent continuity with the fervor that had gripped the protagonists of his story. The flagrancy of his description reveals that he already recognizes the mythic role of the episode. In truth, a single stage event did not irreversibly change the conventions governing an entire stage culture, nor could it have. It was clear already to Löwen that he was dealing with an event that had symbolic value far outweighing the facts of the matter. In its retellings, the story allowed for the articulation of a number of crucial questions. Was the fool an innocent scapegoat or genuine villain?¹³ And, either way, did his banishment encourage the coalescence of a new theater? If a new form of theater was coming into existence, could this happen in a punctual act, just by supplanting old predilections with new ones? Or did theatrical reform necessarily entail a more temporally protracted and gradual process? On a more global level, was the notion of reform advanced by Gottsched and embodied by Neuber and her troupe an innovative advance or a mistaken detour? In order to explore answers to these questions, it is first necessary to lay out the initial design of the reform project.

Neuber's banishment of the fool, under the aegis of Gottsched, is not just of historiographic import; it also brings into relief key methodological issues. The myth, that is, demonstrates the following truism: continuity cannot be taken for granted—not in general, and certainly not when it comes to theatrical conventions.¹⁴ The point is worth making because the fool, as part 1 has shown, was

12. Ibid., 31.

13. The scapegoat structure has been most influentially theorized in Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

14. For particularly insightful remarks on the problem of continuity in literary history, see Jürgen Link, "Was heißt: 'Es hat sich nichts geändert'? Ein Reproduktionsmodell literarischer Evolution mit Blick auf Geibel," in *Epochen-schwellen und Epochenstrukturen im Diskurs der Literatur- und Sprachhistorie*,

the champion of discontinuity on all levels. No level of dialogue or scenic atmosphere was fully fortified against his intrusions. His unique capacity to storm onto the stage, suspending the flow of dialogue and interrupting its course, might lead one to suppose that everything would proceed cohesively if not for his presence. Without this agent of discontinuity, one might suppose, continuity should just emerge on its own. Neuber's myth gains purchase by concretizing the view that exclusion of the fool and institution of a new theatrical culture are two faces of the same coin. But continuity, much like its opposite, has to be produced, and this by means of intermediate steps of various techniques and procedures.

Perhaps the most distinctive hallmark of the intellectual currents conventionally referred to as the early Enlightenment, at least within the theatrical arena, was the institution of continuity on multiple levels.¹⁵ Figures like Gottsched and Neuber, as well as a number of other writers and scholars in their orbit, made it their project to alter the internal cohesion of stage performances. This involved an intricate conception of what a play should be and what the theater was for. According to the traditional philosophical language prevalent among reformers, it was necessary to articulate the "essence of plays" (*das Wesen der Schauspiele*) in light of their "final purpose" (*Endzweck*).¹⁶ Such analytic terms make sense only in light of the view that the theater could be submitted to "a test or examination" at the hands of "the scholar who has philosophical

ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Ursula Link-Heer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), 234–250.

15. The reference to the period between 1730 and 1750 as the early Enlightenment is not entirely unproblematic. In using this term, I have no desire to make an ambitious historiographical claim or to take a stance in ongoing debates about the varied uses of Enlightenment as a periodization term. I use the concept rather thinly, as a tag for a group of advocates for theatrical reform who possess a shared, albeit nonuniform, field of concerns. On the problems plaguing the concept of Enlightenment in contemporary historiography, see Simon Grote, "Review-Essay: Religion and Enlightenment," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 75, no. 1 (2014): 137–160.

16. Both pieces of terminology are from Christlob Mylius, "Eine Abhandlung, worinnen erwiesen wird: Daß die Wahrscheinlichkeit er Vorstellung, bey den Schauspielen eben so nötig ist, als die innere Wahrscheinlichkeit derselben," *Beiträge zur critischen Historie der deutschen Sprache, Poesie und Beredsamkeit* 29 (1742): 297–322, here 297 and 302.

insight into the rules of the arts.”¹⁷ Those possessed of the reform spirit believed themselves able to uncover the theater’s genuine reason for existing, even if its concrete manifestations had thus far fallen short and even if all its constitutive elements required overhaul.

Although harangues of the fool’s “jokes and farces that grieve the Holy Spirit, vex the youth, and plant many harmful things in the eyes and hearts of idle (*mißigen*) spectators” had been voiced before, the interweaving of theoretical and practical endeavor made the early Enlightenment reforms uniquely effective.¹⁸ Their impact was shaped by a broad-based program for the encouragement of scholarly critique, a practice of philosophically and philologically attuned deliberation over successes and failures in poetry.¹⁹ The early Enlightenment practice of critique rested on the assertion that venerated relics of antiquity and untested contemporary works equally rewarded analysis in terms of a canon of poetic principles and regulations. A steady flow of long-form treatises and journal articles, often engaged in a pugilistic back-and-forth, became one of the key mechanisms for the improvement of German poetry. Although minor differences in the conceptual architecture and philosophical genealogy were visible among participants, there was a widespread sense that poetic critique was both the product of and an instrument to “judge the perfections or imperfections of things” (*Vollkommenheiten oder Unvollkommenheiten der Dinge zu urtheilen*).²⁰ Such judgment

17. Johann Christoph Gottsched, *Versuch einer critischen Dichtkunst vor die Deutschen* (Leipzig: Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf, 1730), 2 (of preface without page numbers). Unless otherwise noted, all references to Gottsched’s epoch-making poetic treatise are to its first edition.

18. Paul Jacob Marperger, *Beschreibung der Messen und Jahr-Märkte* (Leipzig: Johann Friedrich Gleditsch and Son, 1710), 2:209.

19. Concentrated analysis of this phenomenon, with heavy emphasis on media-historical dimensions, may be found in Steffen Martus, “Negativität im literarischen Diskurs um 1700,” in *Kulturelle Orientierung um 1700*, ed. Sylvia Heudecker, Dirk Niefanger, and Jörg Weschke (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2004), 47–66. More expansively and with a longer historical trajectory: Steffen Martus, *Werkpolitik: Zur Literaturgeschichte kritischer Kommunikation vom 17. bis ins 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), esp. 113–201.

20. This phrasing, which is indebted to Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten’s aesthetics, is used on multiple occasions in Georg Friedrich Meier, *Abbildung eines Kunstrichters* (Halle: Carl Hermann Hemmerde, 1745). Although it is convention

proceeded on the basis of ostensibly timeless, universal guidelines for the construction of poetic utterances. The insistence on rudimentary but crudely employed rationalist principles for the practice of critique—above all, the principles of noncontradiction and sufficient reason—was more than a game of philosophical analysis. In fact, it fit within a larger media enterprise, aiming at putting German theater on a par with that of other European nations. The project of improving the quality of German theater required the establishment of feedback loops between critical commentary and the composition of new plays. Reformers asserted that such circuitry would be “beneficial for the Germans” by fostering “beauty in speech and thought.”²¹ In order to be successful, the reform movement had to do more than supply abstract theoretical accounts and critical evaluations of individual plays. Progress in “theatrical poetry” demanded that a “lack of printed pieces” (*Mangel gedrückter Stücke*) be dealt with.²² In other words, concepts would not do; a broader practice of composition and publication was required.

The reform project relied on two factors: an increase in the number of plays published according to specific compositional standards and a tighter integration of text and performance. Acting troupes had to put on “pieces that have been learned by heart word for word,”²³ and writers had to attend not just to “the quantity of pieces, but to the kind and good construction of them (*Art und gute Einrichtung derselben*).”²⁴ These ends were pursued within

in literary histories to emphasize the agonistic relationship between figures like Meier and Gottsched, these differences emerged within the shared domain of rationalist critique. I return to some of the philosophical differences between early Enlightenment camps in chapter 9.

21. Meier, *Abbildung eines Kunstrichters*, 1–2.

22. Johann Christoph Gottsched, *Die deutsche Schaubühne nach den Regeln der Griechen und Römer* (Leipzig: Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf, 1741), 2:3–42, here 18. The lack of published German-language plays became a trope repeated countless times across the eighteenth century, but not entirely in line with publication and performance history. See Thorston Unger, “Das Klischee vom Mangel an deutschen Stücken: Ein Diskussionsbeitrag zur Internationalität des Hof- und Nationaltheaters,” in *Theaterinstitution und Kulturtransfer*, ed. Anke Deten, Thorston Unger, Brigitte Schultze, and Horst Turk (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1998), 1:233–247.

23. Gottsched, *Die deutsche Schaubühne*, 2:25.

24. *Ibid.*, 2:29.

the bounds of a learned society, in speeches and pet journalistic projects, but also by acting troupes like the Neubers'. Although some attention was paid to the practices and training of actors, the reform project had at its foundation a conviction in the transformative power of texts.²⁵ We can see as much in the diagnosis of a particularly prevalent ailment, namely, the fact that the "poets are guilty" of making the audience "laugh, when one cries, and cry, when one laughs."²⁶ And so a canon of rules had to be drawn up—rules that would ensure that plays treated two opposing varieties of human expression, laughter and tears, more felicitously. Indeed, for much of the eighteenth century, whenever there was a desire to demonstrate the "essence and specific character" (*Wesen und eigentümlichen Charakter*) of comedy and tragedy respectively, this generic difference was supported by a sanitary effort to "establish the ground (*Grund*) from which on the one side the necessity of laughter, and from the other the necessary permissibility of tears could flow."²⁷ Following the "rules and examples of theatrical poetry"²⁸ could control the flow of laughter and tears, thereby ensuring consistency in the meanings produced in a play and the emotional responses afforded the spectator. Within this model, rigid generic boundaries should serve to distinguish different varieties of affect and to contain them within separate domains. And with the institution of a purified comedy and tragedy, there would then be no room for the "Harlequin and Hans Wurst, who, with their ridiculous farces and undignified banter have spoiled everything that could have been in accord with the rules."²⁹

25. Acting reforms played a more significant role in the latter half of the eighteenth century. See Alexander Kosenina, *Anthropologie und Schauspielkunst* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1995).

26. Heinrich Samuel von Brück, "Gedanken von der Dichtkunst überhaupt," in *Der deutschen Gesellschaft in Leipzig eigene Schriften und Uebersetzungen* (Leipzig: Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf, 1735), 1:2–31, here 20.

27. Christian Ernst Schenk, *Komisches Theater* (Breslau: Carl Gottfried Meyer, 1759), 7–8.

28. Anonymous, "Nachricht von der uefnter der Presse befindlichen deutschen Schaubühne," *Beyträge zur critischen Historie der deutschen Sprache, Poesie und Beredsamkeit* 23 (1740): 521–526, here 525.

29. This quotation is from a review of a widely circulated translation of a French speech and newly written treatise on the value of a rehabilitated stage. See

One of the chief mechanisms for the transformation of the stage was comedy itself. But comedy was more than just a conventional form. Consider what Neuber and her husband wrote in a 1737 application for a license to perform in the city of Hamburg: "Comedy seeks to make evident the difference between virtue and vice, and to reveal the necessary consequences of both."³⁰ The content of the definition is not as important as the context in which it is provided. The Neubers introduce poetological principles—in particular, those concerning the general usefulness of comedy—in the hope of recruiting the support of the city council. The deployment of a morally inflected conception of the comedic genre meant to assure the municipal authorities that the troupe's performances would further the effort "to purify the German stage of all its mess (*von all dem Wuste zu reinigen*)."³¹ To be sure, the Neubers' general sense of purpose as well as their specific attunement to genre owed quite a bit to the theoretical head of the reform movement, Gottsched. The first version of his expansive poetic treatise *Versuch einer critischen Dichtkunst für die Deutschen* (*Attempt at a Critical Art of Poetry for the Germans*, 1730) contains a kindred characterization of comedy as the "imitation of a vicious action, which, by virtue of its risible essence, can amuse the spectator at the same time that it edifies him" (*Nachahmung einer lasterhaften Handlung, die durch ihr lächerliches Wesen den Zuschauer belustigen, aber auch zugleich erbauen kan*).³² In alignment with his broader approach to generic divisions, Gottsched defines comedy in terms of a representational content (human vice) and spectatorial response (laughter).

But relying from the start on a statement bearing on content and response risks obscuring the reasons why genre became an

Anonymous, "Des berühmten französischen Paters Poree Rede von den Schauspielen: Ob sie eine Schule guter Sitten sind, oder seyn Können? übersetzt. Nebst einer Abhandlung von der Schaubühne, heraus gegeben von Joh. Friedrich Meyer," in *Beyträge zur Critischen Historie* 9 (1734): 3–29, here 22.

30. Letter reprinted in Friedrich Johann Freiherrn von Reden-Esbeck, *Caroline Neuber und ihre Zeitgenossen: Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Kultur- und Theatergeschichte* (Leipzig: J. A. Barth, 1881), 204–207, here 205.

31. *Ibid.*, 204.

32. Gottsched, *Versuch einer critischen Dichtkunst*, 594.

attractive way of conducting the business of theater.³³ It is important to shift from the standard question, What is a comedy? to the more practice-oriented question, What does calling something a comedy accomplish? Orienting the discussion in this way allows us to investigate what the concept of genres, including comedy, does. And it also focuses attention on the concrete circumstances that made the comedic genre into an organizing concept for the theatrical reform movement. Included among these circumstances is the contrast between the use of genre as a means for the “purification” or *Reinigung* of the stage in the early eighteenth century and the altogether different, more chaotic approach to genre in the seventeenth.³⁴

Considered abstractly, genre distinctions function as a classificatory mechanism for achieving the semblance of coherence on two levels: both in the composition of individual plays and in the (prospective as well as retrospective) classification of multiple plays into a group. The concatenation of elements in a play and the formation of a classificatory standard are ultimately both procedures for creating, among other things, consistent patterns in plot organization, character deployment, and verbal register. The difference between these two levels is ultimately one of scale: the one bears on the individual; the other, the class.

Genre distinctions play a decisive role in two distinct communicative settings. They appear as self-ascriptions—for instance, as paratextual markers—and, in addition, as second-order distinctions in the discourse about poetry. In both instances, genre works to establish similarities or equivalences. Obvious though it may sound, classification depends on naming, which provides for the formation, iteration, and recognition of distinct groups. It may be natural to suppose that comedy and tragedy constitute standard

33. The pioneering discussion for my own approach to questions of genre is Wilhelm Voßkamp, “Gattungen als literarisch-soziale Institutionen,” in *Textsortenlehre—Gattungsgeschichte*, ed. Walter Hinck (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1977), 27–43.

34. The use of cognate forms of the verb *reinigen* (purify) by and with reference to the reform movement is so widespread that any reference to a single instance would be misleading.

rubrics that, even if not always uniform in content, consistently provide the parameters for dividing up the field of plays and play-making. This intuition is supported by the widespread use of the two lexemes *die Komödie* and *das Lustspiel* in German, not unlike the use of *comedy* in English. While the lexical connections and connotative linkages to the Roman and ancient Greek nomenclature and *comedy*/*die Komödie* may not always be evident to modern speakers, their origin is less than mysterious. In both languages, words are coordinated with themes, objects, and affects, thereby orienting the expectations of writers, readers, listeners, and spectators of plays and standing in a latent opposition to *tragedy*/*die Tragödie*/*das Trauerspiel*. But from a historical perspective the categorizing function of such terminology is surprisingly unstable. Indeed, the imposition of onomastic consistency—particularly on the level of first-order paratexts—is a major innovation of the early Enlightenment.

To bring this historical point into relief, consider the situation in the seventeenth century. Among the traveling players of the seventeenth century, genre distinctions figured prominently in advertisements or *Theaterzettel*.³⁵ Itinerant companies possessed an overwhelming penchant for identifying their plays as *tragedies*, even though the use of this term was by no means systematic. In other words, the term *tragedy* did not form part of a larger generic order. Within this context, there was no consistent differentiation of the social rank of the characters appropriate for the various genres, nor a distinction among different modalities of speech, nor a distribution of thematic foci. Traveling players may have called their plays tragedies, but the utility of the term lay in its vague associations and allure rather than in any classificatory stringency.

Plays published by learned playwrights attest to an even more unsystematic approach to genre distinctions. The proliferation of paratextual markers gives an impression of a hodgepodge of genre names lacking for rhyme or reason. In the plays written by Andreas

35. See the discussion in Johann Richard Hänsel, "Die Geschichte des Theaterzettels und seine Wirkung in der Öffentlichkeit" (PhD diss., Freie Universität Berlin, 1962), esp. 103–155. See also George W. Brandt, ed., *German and Dutch Theater 1600–1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 71–73.

Gryphius and Christian Weise (1642–1708), for instance, we find such unfamiliar terms as *Schimpff-Spiel*, *Schertz-Spiel*, and *Ein lächerliches Schau-Spiel*.³⁶ Other unfamiliar names that enjoyed currency include *Misch-Spiel*,³⁷ *Freudenspiel*,³⁸ and *Lust oder Freudenspiel*.³⁹ Despite appearances, this list does not attest to a byzantine system of nomenclature; it rather indicates an unexact approach to genre distinctions as well as a comfort with unorthodox terms.

The contrast between the seventeenth-century onomastic conventions and those of the early Enlightenment could not be starker. Beginning around 1730, a single terminological equivalence—between *die Komödie* and *das Lustspiel*, between Greek and German nomenclature—became a crucial mechanism in the overhaul of compositional and performance practice. Reformers believed that the development of a homogeneous terminology and a restricted notion of genre could prove vital in the effort to fuse text and performance. A unified notion of comedy—one entailing the “imitation of vices worthy of laughter” (*Abbildung auslachenswürdiger Laster*)—could help make sure that theater fulfills its final purpose of providing for the “edification of spectators.”⁴⁰

Reformers like Neuber and Gottsched aimed to replace the comic practices sponsored by the fool by publishing generically uniform texts. They argued that printed comedies could form the

36. On Gryphius's use of the term *Schimpff-Spiel* in the title to *Absurda Comica. Oder Herr Peter Squentz*, and its possible connection to Hans Sachs, see the commentator's notes in Andreas Gryphius, *Dramen*, ed. Eberhard Man-nack (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1991), 1138ff. Gryphius gives the title *Schertz-Spiel* to *Die geliebte Dornrose* (1661) and *Horribilicribrifax* (1663) contained in the same volume. The name *Ein Lächerliches Schau-Spiel* is used by Christian Weise for a very lengthy interlude first performed in 1685 and then published in 1700. See Christian Weise, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Hans-Gert Rol-off (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991), 2:249.

37. Kaspar von Stieler, *Ernelinde oder Die Viermahl Braut* (Rudolstadt: Caspar Freyschmidt, 1665).

38. Justus Georgius Schottelius, *Neu Erfundenes Freuden Spiel Genandt Frie-dens Sieg* (Wolfenbüttel: Conrad Buno, 1648).

39. Johannes Rist, *Depositio Cornuti Typographici, D.i. Lust-Oder Freuden-Spiel* (Lüneberg: Stern, 1654).

40. Mylius, “Eine Abhandlung, worinnen erwiesen wird,” 302.

foundation for a theater that could “amuse” in a “rational and purified manner” (*vernünftige und geläuterte Art*).⁴¹ Comedy was deployed to combat a figure so “devoid of good gags . . . that he could not say anything funny without injuring the rules of respectability.”⁴² Generic purity required the elimination of “jokes and grimaces,” which had no place in the pen of “a true author of comedies” (*eines wahren Comödien-Schreibers*),⁴³ who instead should adhere to the “rules of the . . . masters” and make the stage “moral.”⁴⁴ Comedy thus became an instrument for insuring continuity on the level of text as well as performance—indeed of using textual continuity as the basis for performative continuity. The *comic play* of the fool had to be harnessed by means of the *comedic genre*. Or, put differently, the large-scale continuity of the comedic genre—the unity of the individual play with a governing class—should ensure the small-scale continuity in the individual performance. Importantly, using a unified comedic genre for the “improvement of the German stage” amounted to the imposition of what would, in the course of the eighteenth century, become the kind of play audiences cherished most.⁴⁵ In the latter half of the century, comedies amounted to by far the majority of the repertoire of essentially every major acting troupe. In some troupes, comedies were performed five times as often as tragedies and up to three times as often as the increasingly popular opera.⁴⁶ As popularity increased, the designation remained consistent from troupe to troupe and year to year.

The fusion of text and performance under the aegis of comedy depended on a close connection between first- and second-order use of genre distinctions. Printed plays, that is, had to accord with

41. Gottsched, *Die deutsche Schaubühne*, 1:21.

42. Gottsched, *Der Biedermann*, pt. 2, 136.

43. *Ibid.*, pt. 2, 178.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Gottsched, *Die deutsche Schaubühne*, 2:9.

46. See the statistics in Reinhart Meyer and Rainer Gruenter, “Der Anteil des Singspiels und der Oper am Repertoire der deutschen Bühnen in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts,” in *Das deutsche Singspiel im 18. Jahrhundert* (Heidelberg: Winter Universitätsverlag, 1981), 27–76.

formal and terminological distinctions used in theoretical discourse. The importance of generic distinctions can be gleaned from the basic structure of Gottsched's *Versuch einer critischen Dichtkunst*: it consists of two parts, the first devoted to a philosophically oriented account of the nature of poetry and the poet, the second to the elaboration of the poetic genres. Meanwhile, the title of the eleventh chapter of the second part, "Von Comödien oder Lustspielen," points to the decisive terminological equivalence between ancient and modern paradigms, and its place within a systematic framework is evident in the fact that it follows immediately after the chapter "Von Tragödien oder Trauerspielen." Underlying this division is the recursive structure of critique. Gottsched's elaboration of the fundamental concepts of poetic activity and its constitutive forms serves the express purpose of guiding contemporary and future poets, whose works could, in turn, become the subject of subsequent critical discourse. In order to fulfill this charge, he subdivides his discussion of the comedic genre (and all others respectively) into "historical-critical" and "dogmatic" portions.⁴⁷ Whereas the first section assesses the shortcomings and accomplishments of various instantiations of comedy beginning with its putative origin in archaic times up to the present day, the latter part provides a more abstract discussion of formal characteristics, peppered with a small number of examples.

The implications of this subdivision will come into sharper focus over the next three chapters. For now, it is important to note its connection to the epoch-making interlacement of text and performance. The purpose of the historical-critical section of Gottsched's text is, as the name indicates, to assess concrete manifestations of comedy—and yet this appraisal is founded on formal principles elaborated in the dogmatic section. The author well realized that as contemporary poets engaged with his treatise, he would have to revisit the historical-critical discussion. In other words, he designed his treatise taking into account potential

47. Although introduced earlier in the treatise, the distinction organizes the chapter devoted to comedy. See Gottsched, *Versuch einer critischen Dichtkunst*, 548.

feedback loops between his critical discussion and future poetic production—and, accordingly, he continued to revise and expand his treatise through its fourth edition in 1751. In this final version, for instance, he pivots from critical to dogmatic observations with a word of praise for the role of “a small theatrical library of printed plays” (*eine kleine theatralische Bibliothek gedruckter Schauspiele*) in the steady improvement of the German stage.⁴⁸ The placement of this remark at the turning point in the chapter underscores the sense in which the critical reflection continuously tracks and adapts to the treatise’s reception by playwrights. But the publication of plays alone was not enough to satisfy his reform aspirations. Generic purity can be accomplished, in Gottsched’s view, only once a supply of strictly constructed plays has entered into print circulation and is “being dutifully performed” (*fleißig aufgeführt*).⁴⁹

Gottsched’s theoretical articulation of the comedic genre might seem nothing more than another instance of the sort of handbook for poetic composition that had enjoyed strong currency since the Renaissance. In truth, though, it subtly breaks with this lineage. Beginning with Martin Opitz’s *Buch von der deutschen Poeterey* (*Book on German Poetry*, 1624) and continuing until Magnus Daniel Omeis’s *Gründliche Anleitung zur teutschen accuraten Reim- und Dichtkunst* (*Fundamental Instruction in the Art of Accurate German Rhyme and Poetry*, 1704), scholars drew on structures from the art of rhetoric in order to account for poetic forms. Remarks on how to make a play commenced with a concern for proper method for finding its objects and themes (*inventio*), arranging them (*dispositio*), and then putting them into verbal formulation (*elocutio*). Within this tradition, discussions of genre constituted the transitional point between the first two elements in this list and the third—that is, between finding the proper words (*verba*) for the referential objects (*res*) of a play.⁵⁰ We see this alignment clearly in Opitz, when he uses the term *comoedia* as a heading for

48. Johann Christoph Gottsched, *Versuch einer critischen Dichtkunst vor die Deutschen* (Leipzig: Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf, 1751), 643.

49. *Ibid.*

50. On the importance of the *res-verba* distinction, see Ludwig Fischer, *Gebundene Rede: Dichtung und Rhetorik in der literarischen Theorie des Barock in Deutschland* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1968), 101ff.

a genre defined by the persons and events that appear in the poem; comedy is the genre of the lowly and quotidian. Because it deals with topics like betrothal and marriage, servant intrigue, and the shortsightedness of youth, the gravest error among those “writing comedies” is that they have “introduced emperors and rulers,” who have no place in poems dealing with such base matters.⁵¹ For Opitz, genre amounts to equivalence between the social rank of the persons depicted on the stage and the style of writing employed, a long-standing approach founded on the rhetorical principle of *decorum*.⁵² Preoccupied with the question of how to compose a “poetic play” or *ein poetisches Schauspiel*, to use a phrase of Georg Philipp Harsdörffer’s, seventeenth-century handbooks actually showed little interest in performance practices.⁵³ Comedy, in their hands, was not a device for the transformation of stage practices, but instead a time-transcendent, immutable form. For this reason, very little attention was paid to contemporary stage practice in the elaboration of the compositional rules organizing *comoedia*.⁵⁴ Second-order discourse on comedy in the seventeenth century, to borrow Gottsched’s terminology, was entirely dogmatic.

51. Martin Opitz, *Buch von der deutschen Poeterey*, ed. Wilhelm Braune and Richard Alewyn (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1963), 20.

52. Ursula Milden and Ian Rutherford, “Decorum,” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, ed. Gert Ueding (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1994), 2:423–452.

53. Georg Philipp Harsdörffer, *Poetischer Trichter: Die Teutsche Dicht- und Reimkunst, ohne Behuf der lateinischen Sprache*, in *VI. Stunden Einzugiessen* (Hildesheim/New York: G. Olms, 1971), 2:78.

54. To outline the standards of a *poetic play* was to engage in an enterprise entirely separate from the “people who make their profession with wanton and vexing plays, and make money by feeding vice into the hearts of people through their eyes.” The original text reads: “die Leute / so von solchen liederlich- und ärgerlichen Schauspielen Beruf machen / und um das Geld den Leuten die Laster durch die Augen in das Herz spielen.” Magnus Daniel Omeis, *Gründliche Anleitung zur teutschen accuraten Reim- und Dichtkunst* (Nuremberg: Wolfgang Michahelles und Johann Adolf, 1704), 248–249. This harangue by Magnus Daniel Omeis (1646–1708) is not a further installment in the long line of Christian-inspired attacks on all forms of theatrical spectatorship; it is a dismissal of the particular “nasty jokes and antics which often transform a theatrical play into swine’s play.” In talking about the presence of the fool in comic interludes, he writes, “Ich sage Scherz-Reden; und vertheidige nicht die garstige Zotten und Possen / welche öfters die Schau-spiele in Sau-spiele verwandeln” (236).

But its dogma is without the early Enlightenment philosophical underpinnings and imputation of a final cause.

As the collaboration between Neuber and Gottsched makes clear, the unity of first- and second-order conceptions of comedy in the early Enlightenment was programmatic. Its telos was the extension of the empire of texts onto the stage. In order for the reform enterprise to succeed, intractable theatrical forces—above all, the fool—had to be contained. The utility of the myth with which this chapter began consisted in showing that the elimination of the fool, which in the mid-1730s was just a theoretical possibility, could also lead to the transformation of stage performance and textual composition. Johann Christoph Gottsched launched the reform movement at that time in a cascade of speeches and published texts championing the need for terminological rigor, a new discipline for the production of comic effects, and a new practice of textual composition and performance. His ideas spread, playwrights composed according to professed standards, and Neuber provided the endeavor with theatrical legitimacy. Even though over time, the early Enlightenment conception of theatrical reform became subject to scrutiny and revision, one thing remained true over the decades to come: the name of the game was comedy.