

POLICEY AND THE LEGITIMACY OF DELIGHT

As we turn to the latter half of the eighteenth century, the conceptual focus expands to include a larger nexus of issues. The following chapters are concerned, in the most rudimentary formulation, with the ligature connecting the theater with life. These chapters look at changing attitudes concerning the relationship of the theater and its surrounding environment—in other words, at the social ontology of the theater. By this, I mean the diverse interchanges between the theater and the social world around it—on individual and collective, municipal and state levels—that define the theater as an institution. The point of departure in chapter 9 is a pivotal challenge to moral instruction as the key function of theatergoing. That will directly lead, in chapter 10, to debates over the propitious social effects assigned to the experience of laughter, particularly of laughter solicited by the fool. The revaluation of the pleasurable experience of laughter in the decades around 1750 is deeply connected to the central theme of chapters 11 and 12, namely, the

establishment of a distinctively German comic theater. The identification of comic theater's salubrious effects, it shall become clear, goes hand in hand with the claim that comic theater, much more than its more heavy-handed theatrical sibling, speaks to the idiosyncratic features of a cultural group. Part 3 argues that the putatively native tradition of the stage fool provides one of the foundational elements in the effort to develop a culturally specific German theater, equal to its European counterparts.

Before shifting to the decades after 1750, it is worth taking note that critics of the first half of the eighteenth century were also focused on the potential utility of the theater for social life more broadly. While the most obvious evidence of this dimension is surely the programmatic reliance on the traditional injunction to instruct, a subterranean but equally impactful set of concerns can be tracked in the use of the expression *Aufnahme des Theaters*. This phrase, which became a ubiquitous and unproblematic component of the reform jargon, refers to both the *reception* of the theater and to its concrete *implementation*.¹ Within the predominant theoretical model of the early Enlightenment, ennoblement proceeded with a two-pronged approach. Critics asserted that if only actors and dramatists would adhere to stricter standards of taste, then the Germans would "soon be able henceforth to boast" of a theatrical culture "that need not fear the harshest critique and most unfair foreigners."² On the most obvious level, this remark by the ambitious duo Lessing and Mylius is about creating collective self-identification and communal pride by improving the conventions of stage performance. A reformed stage would, they claimed, be fortified against critique from non-Germans, especially groups like the French and English, who already enjoyed a proud

1. Two programmatic instances beyond Gottsched are Johann Elias Schlegel, "Schreiben von Errichtung eines Theaters in Kopenhagen" and "Gedanken zur Aufnahme des dänischen Theaters," in *Werke*, ed. Johann Elias Schlegel (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1971), 3:251–258 and 261–298. With a greater historical resonance: Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Christlob Mylius, *Beyträge zur Historie und Aufnahme des Theaters*, vols. 1–4 (Stuttgart: Johann Benedict Metzler, 1750).

2. Lessing and Mylius, *Beyträge*, 1:2.

theatrical tradition.³ At the historical juncture when Lessing and Mylius made these remarks, around 1750, the theater to be received and implemented was a theater built around strict standards of compositional unity and verisimilitude. In other words, it was a theater founded on principles supposedly with universal applicability.⁴ Advocacy for rule-governed drama, in a time- and place-indifferent sense, went hand in hand with the desire to attract and address “learned, upright, and artistically adept men.”⁵ This would be possible if the theater were guided by the faculty of reason, rather than the errant and unreliable senses. Only in the years after 1750, as this universal faculty forfeited its role as the organizing principle for the drama-theater dyad, did it become possible to ask a broader set of questions about the integration of theater with a regionally and temporally bound form of life—which is to say, with a culture.

In general, the pursuit of theatrical reform was connected to the desire to establish and maintain social order. A major potential benefit of playmaking, reformers claimed, was the production of moral, and thus social, conformity. There were theological dimensions to the moral enterprise, as one would expect, but the particular power of the theater consisted in its ability to provide instruction to a collective audience. But because this model of theatrical reform wore its academic pedigree on its sleeve, it did not take long for the bond connecting the theater to the enviroing social world to appear unstable. It became necessary to take into

3. The remarks by Lessing and Mylius stand on the cusp of but do not fully belong to the emphatic notion of culture that will concern us in chapters 11 and 12. My interest in the foundational role of comparison was initially inspired by Niklas Luhmann, “Kultur als historischer Begriff,” in *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), 4:31–54.

4. In order to illustrate this point at greater length, one might look at how concepts such as imitation of nature (*Nachahmung der Natur*), verisimilitude (*Wahrscheinlichkeit*), or genre (*Gattung*) remained central to the dramaturgical writings of, among others, J. E. Schlegel and G. E. Lessing, even after they had abandoned the Gottschedian belief in a reform program indifferent to cultural and historical differences. For a related discussion, see chapter 11.

5. Christian Fürchtegott Gellert, *Gesammelte Schriften: Kritische, Kommentierte Ausgabe*, ed. Bernd Witte (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1988), 5:149.

more serious consideration, without the same dosage of scholarly pretense, such questions as the following: Who ordinarily goes to the theater? Who is the theater for? What bearing should the spectators' motivations have on its proper configuration? What community-building purpose might the theater possess?

Disavowals of the early Enlightenment dogma that "the stage is made for truth" or that plays should be a "school for ethical behavior" (*Schule der Sitten*) became increasingly salient in the second half of the eighteenth century.⁶ By and large, these objections emerged out of a realistic attitude about the ineluctable fact that people want the theater "to please and to entertain" (*zu gefallen und zu unterhalten*), not just to inculcate virtue.⁷ This chapter shows that a discourse far afield of properly aesthetic or poetic inquiry, namely, *policey* or the *science of policey* (*Polizeiwissenschaft*), provided essential energies and argumentative resources for altering the theater's assigned purpose. Despite its etymological links with the modern term *police*, the body of texts on *policey* was not solely (or even predominately) concerned with preventing criminality or enforcing laws, and for this reason I retain, as is conventional, the archaic spelling throughout the following pages. The primary concern of this discourse was the organization of government and its capillary institutions for supplying the population with order and welfare. And it was this concern with the purpose of government that gave shape to the epoch-making idea that the theater is a forum potentially vital to a society's well-being. The discourse on *policey* lent credibility to the suggestion that the fool could be a decisive instrument for more effectively interweaving theater and its environing social world.

The connection between the fool and social well-being is not as counterintuitive as it may initially seem. After all, the fool had

6. See para. 19 in the unpaginated section of fundamental principles appended to Johann Franz Philipp von Himberger, *Von dem Systeme der Polizeiwissenschaft und dem Erkenntnißgrundsatz der Staatsklugheit und ihrer Zweige* (Freiburg: Johann Andreas Patron, 1779).

7. Himberger, *Von dem Systeme der Polizeiwissenschaft*, para. 19.

become the subject of such controversy in the early Enlightenment because he embodied the capacity of theatrical performance, by means of its visual and acoustic show, to place the audience in a state of pleasurable thralldom. The big shift in perspective was simply that such pleasure was, in the years after 1750, understood as potentially salubrious both for the individual and for society at large. The most famous testament to this reconsideration of the fool, to which I shall turn in the closing pages of this chapter, is Justus Möser's *Harlekin oder Vertheidigung des Groteske-Komischen* (Harlekin or Defense of the Grotesque-Comic, 1761/1777). This text, which was highly indebted to the discourse on *policey*, sparked huge interest among many of the most influential writers of the day. In this chapter, Möser's *Harlekin* will emerge as the condensation of a historically specific way of thinking through the fool's purpose. Although Möser himself asserted that his text was a defense of a very particular embodiment of the fool—the Italian-French Harlequin—I shall argue that he utilizes concepts from *policey* that, in general, were not rooted to a specific theatrical tradition, but instead asserted folly's contribution to creating a productive society.

In order to trace the bare outline of the historical process at issue here, it is first necessary to gain some clarity about *policey*. Interest in the succor that the theater could and should provide was part of a vigorous *policey* discussion that sought to delineate, roughly speaking, the purview of governmental administration. Seeking to maximally enhance the health and wealth of the population, *policey* encouraged the government to rigorously track and control citizens' lives.⁸ The term *policey* had been in circulation for quite

8. Usage of the term *policey*, in fact, reaches back to the end of the fifteenth century. It referred to regulatory mechanisms on city and territorial levels throughout the early modern period. The formalization of *policey* into an academic discipline and its penetration of the political sphere, however, gained momentum in the seventeenth century and then emerged in full flower in the eighteenth century. See Gerhard Oestreich, "Policey und Prudentia civilis in der barocken Gesellschaft von Stadt und Staat," in *Strukturprobleme der frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin: Dunker & Humblot, 1980), 367–379. See the concise and programmatic presentation in

some time and was in no way limited to German-speaking contexts, but in eighteenth-century Germany it became the subject of a systematic and influential lineage of texts. Its concrete ramifications were, in no small part, due to the fact that it proliferated at the universities that served as training grounds for a growing milieu of bureaucratic officials. From today's vantage point, this body of texts seems to consist of part political philosophy, part economic theory, part plan for development of a governmental apparatus, and part moral sermonizing, but a number of recurrent themes, particularly concerning the theater, can be made out.

First, some points of orientation. The basic concern of *policey* was, as one treatise from the early eighteenth century puts it, providing for the "internal and external constitution of the state in order that both remain unified in an agreeable and enduring alliance" (*die innerliche und äusserliche Verfassung eines Staats / damit beyde Stücke / in einer angenehmen und dauerhaften Alliance, vereinbaret bleiben*).⁹ But reflection on and prescription for the constitution of the state was, in this case, not a matter of delineating powers and limits of the sovereign's prerogative, as had been the case in the most influential political treatises from Machiavelli to Bodin and Hobbes. Law and the lawgiver had a subordinate role to play here. Instead, *policey* focused on a different constituent of the state—its population—with the aim of developing techniques to extricate as much economic output as possible and to make society as orderly as possible. By the 1750s the elaborate tomes dealing with the science of *policey* had become breviaries containing protocols for the growth of a governmental bureaucracy, whose duties included the demand that they grant the population a "pleasurable

Michel Foucault, "‘Omnes et singulatim’: Toward a Critique of Political Reason," in *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 2000), 298–325. The theme is developed more extensively in Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2007), esp. 311–361. The standard-bearing study of *policey* is still Hans Meier, *Die ältere deutsche Staats- und Verwaltungslehre: Ein Beitrag zu der politischen Wissenschaft in Deutschland* (Neuwied am Rhein: Luchterhand, 1966).

9. Theodor Ludwig Lau, *Entwurf einer wohl-eingerichteten Policey* (Frankfurt am Main: Friedrich Wilhelm Förster, 1717), 4.

life" (*ein vergnügtes Leben*). This meant developing strategies for the optimal apportionment of bodily "satisfaction" (*Erquickung*) and "amusement" (*Ergetzung*).¹⁰ With the aim of strengthening the population and thereby also the state, *policey* works as the "active hand and eye of the lawgiver,"¹¹ as a set of mechanisms that subvert the law and work toward creating "virtuous and useful burghers."¹²

As a fixture in *policey* discourse, the theater assumed a distinct functional role, determined by its potential as a "means for advancement of the general welfare" (*Beförderungsmittel der allgemeinen Wohlfahrt*).¹³ It is important to notice that welfare contains two sets of interlocking concerns, namely, the aspiration to maximize the wealth (*Reichtum*) of a population as well the felicity (*Glückseligkeit*) of its members.¹⁴ According to this scheme, the theater was worth supporting because it could encourage individual and collective prosperity. While some prominent writers still made occasional reference to the theater as a "school in ethics and virtue" (*Sitten- und Tugendschule*), the overwhelming tendency was to downplay its didactic dimension and amplify its propitious effects for the spectator's body and mind.¹⁵ The theater earned a place as an instrument for "forcing the burgher to be happy," a covert

10. Ibid., 4–5. Oestreich introduces the concept of *Sozialregulierung* to describe the work of the *policey*. See Oestreich, "Policey und Prudentia civilis," 371.

11. Johann Franz Philipp von Himberger, *System der Polizeywissenschaft und dem Erkenntnißgrundsätze der Staatsklugheit und ihrer Zweige* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Johann Andreas Satron, 1779), 89.

12. Ibid., 70.

13. Ibid., 79. See Joseph Vogl, "Staatsbegehren: Zur Epoche der Policey," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 74 (2000): 600–626. On the relationships between the *policey* and theater, see Wolfgang Martens, "Obrigkeitsliche Sicht: Das Bühnenwesen in den Lehrbüchern der Policey und Cameralistik des 18. Jahrhunderts," *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 6 (1981): 19–51.

14. Joachim Georg Darjes, *Erste Gründe der Cameral-Wissenschaften* (Leipzig: Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf, 1768), 363ff.; Lucas Friedrich Langemack, *Abbildung der vollkommenen Policei* (Berlin: Johann Jacob Schütze, 1747), 3.

15. Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi, *Grundriß aller Oeconomischen und Cameral-Wissenschaften* (Frankfurt, 1759), 15.

coercion accomplished by simply watching a play.¹⁶ Let there be no misunderstanding: the campaign for the good of entertainment for the population went hand in hand with the injunction that plays should align with standards of conduct. It remained true that the theater could and should inculcate commendable values and behavioral patterns. The important point, though, is that moral lessons no longer stood at the forefront of the spectatorial experience; they were no longer conceived of as the bridge connecting theater and the social good.

Thus the *policey* discourse effected a twofold displacement from the reform trajectory traced in part 2. The first is concerned with the integration of the theater into a program to strengthen the internal constitution of the state. The second bears on the question of *whom the theater is for*. By framing the potential worth of the theater in terms of its societal use, this brand of governmental knowledge offered an alternative approach to audience. The theater, that is, should not just aspire to reach an elite subset of the population—the early Enlightenment’s “learned, upright, and artistically adept men”¹⁷—but should provide service to a broader swath of the population. The function and scale of the theatrical enterprise, in short, emerged here within an alternative frame.

Because the material from part 2 of this study, in general, advanced a severely intellectualist curriculum, with a near-constant emphasis on reason, it required some conceptual labor to recode spectatorial pleasure as a social good. Unsurprisingly, *policey* authors did not open the floodgates to indulgence in unalloyed folly “at the expense of some one of the virtues.”¹⁸ There remained an abiding sense that “the enjoyments (*Vergnügungen*) by means of which a people seeks to fill its empty hours”¹⁹ disclose the ethical character of that very same people. Gratifications of all sorts, including the theater, earned a place in the literature on *policey* only because of their ability to contribute to the final purpose (the

16. Himberger, *System der Polizeywissenschaft*, 89.

17. Gellert, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 5:149.

18. Langemack, *Abbildung einer vollkommenen Policei*, 48.

19. *Ibid.*

oft-used Aristotelian term of art is *Endzweck*) toward which all government must aim. To put it plainly, *policey* argued that it was good for the state if its population had a laugh now and again, but of the right kind of show.

Even though the expansive body of *policey* texts did not show any interest in issues related to theatrical and dramatic forms, they do say a lot about what a play should do and how it should function. A play conducts its essential work as a preventive mechanism, as part of a general governmental program for combatting an array of ailments, including illness, profligacy, and sloth. The theater, that is, appears as a precautionary measure—or mechanism of *Vorsorge*—much like governmental programs such as the creation of public avenues and secure public spaces, the encouragement of certain dietary habits within the population, and the maintenance of an educational system.²⁰ Such preventive measures were deemed necessary to make up for a certain built-in deficiency that hindered communal flourishing. Humans stand apart from other animal creatures, who “do everything possible according to their kind and composition to preserve themselves.”²¹ The human, by contrast, “poisons and degrades what is his own best [interest], not wanting to content himself with mere necessity, and doing everything for his own ruin and demise through insatiable and always fickle desires and demands.”²² In addition to concern with innate moral corruption and physical vulnerability, writers on *policey* worried that human life does not possess the teleological direction and sense of moderation required to achieve a proper communal existence.

A decisive cluster of perils, for which the theater serves as a potential corrective, pertrained to an unpleasant but indispensable part of life: work. Given its overarching desire to articulate strategies for achieving the population’s maximal productivity, it is only natural that the effects of daily labor on the individual figured centrally in *policey* discussion. *Policey* writers argued that the

20. Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi, *Deutsche Memoires, oder Sammlung verschiedener Anmerkungen*, pt. 2 (Vienna: Jean Paul Krauss, 1751), 65–67; Langemack, *Abbildung der vollkommenen Policei*, 35–36.

21. Justi, *Deutsche Memoires*, pt. 2, 65.

22. *Ibid.*, pt. 2, 66.

necessity of individual and collective labor brings with it a threat to “the greatest treasure on earth,” namely, health.²³ Therefore, active measures must be undertaken in order to secure the proper level of industriousness. *Policey* turns to the theater because it “knows that the human powers (*Kräfte*) cannot bear constant and ongoing exertion and that they [the powers] diminish when they are constantly directed toward one sort of task.”²⁴ Too much work does not just cause misery, but also reduces the contribution to the collective well-being. It is crucial, then, to “grant the population rest and to try to cheer them up with all sorts of entertainments (*Ergötzungen*) so that it can begin again with renewed powers and complete its work more happily.”²⁵ The theater counts as just such a “reward” (music and dance also earn occasional, though markedly less frequent, mention).²⁶ The rather simple idea advanced in *policey* texts was that only a measured cadence of work and play will ensure maximal output in the former domain. Writers on *policey* thus admonish rulers that they should not “begrudge the people a permissible pleasure” (*dem Volke eine erlaubte Lust misgönnen*).²⁷ Or in a related formulation, “This wearisome life is, in any case, so full of suffering and tribulations that there is no need for governmental efforts to make enjoyment (*das Vergnügen*) and a permissible pleasure a rare thing for political subjects.”²⁸

Ensuring intervals of play as the complement to work has the further benefit of “enlivening the health” of political subjects, by “unburden[ing] the heart from worries (*Sorgen*).”²⁹ The pleasures

23. Ibid., pt. 1, 160.

24. Langemack, *Abbildung einer vollkommenen Policei*, 30. See also Darjes, *Erste Gründe der Cameral-Wissenschaften*, 422–423.

25. Langemack, *Abbildung einer vollkommenen Policei*, 49. See also Lau, *Entwurf einer wohl-eingerichteten Policey*, 56; Darjes, *Erste Gründe der Cameral-Wissenschaften*, 429; and Justus Möser, *Patriotische Phantasien* (Berlin: Verlag der Nicolai'schen Buchhandlung, 1858) 4:34.

26. Darjes, *Erste Gründe der Camera-Wissenschaften*, 429.

27. Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi, *Grundfeste der Macht und Glückseligkeit der Staaten* (Königsberg/Leipzig: Verlag Woltersdorfs Wittwe, 1761), 2:131.

28. Ibid.

29. From Ludwig Lau, *Entwurf einer wohl-eingerichteten Policey* (1717), quoted in Martens, “Obrigkeithliche Sicht,” 23.

of theatrical spectatorship are a concession to the inevitable suffering demanded by labor productivity, and, if properly doled out, such pleasures can actually enhance the overall well-being of the population. The theater thus enjoys a unique potential to enhance the social well-being of its audience and thereby maximize the effectiveness of labor.

Mention of collective pursuits and greater welfare should, however, not obscure the power structure that supports the entire *policey* discourse. Even though models of government often became remarkably elaborate in this body of texts, the social groupings remained commonplace. The standard conceptual constellation can be grasped in terms of the distinction between, on the one hand, the riffraff (*der gemeine Haufen*, *der Pöbel*, *der gemeine Mann*, and, with some qualification, *das Volk*) and, on the other, those imbued with reason, education, and a sound sense of propriety.³⁰ The earliest *policey* texts from the mid-seventeenth century, for instance, are built around the opposition between the sorts of entertainments appropriate to the elite authorities and ones potentially beneficial to the everyman.³¹ In the eighteenth century, meanwhile, *policey* texts have remarkably little to say about courtly entertainments, aside from the occasional exhortation to avoid princely profligacy. At the same time, the established nomenclature and disciplinary attitude toward the less esteemed social classes remain in place. The persistence of an asymmetrical social and political nomenclature brings with it the sense that specific allowances had to be made for those political subjects who preferred bodily enjoyment to the “enjoyments of the spirit” (*Vergnügungen des Geistes*).³² As a spectacle for the uneducated classes, who are especially susceptible to their desires and senses, the theater can pacify common men “so that [they are] at other times more industrious and orderly.”³³ According to this model, the theater became a technology for

30. Heinrich August Fischer, *Von der Polizei und Sittengesetz* (Zittau/Görlitz: Adam Jacob Spielermann, 1767), 46–47.

31. For an instructive early instance, see Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff, *Teutscher Fürstenstaat* (Frankfurt am Main: Thomas Mathias Götzens, 1660), 105–106.

32. Justi, *Grundfeste der Macht*, 2:273.

33. Möser, *Patriotische Phantasien*, 4:33.

regulating a social antagonism. Theater was identified, that is, as an instrument for forestalling the unrest, disorder, or torpidity to which the laboring class is prone. As a compensatory mechanism rooted in the staccato rhythm of work and play, including its supporting power structure, the following question earned an affirmative response: “Do the senses not have as much of a right to enjoyment as reason?” (*Haben die Sinne nicht so viel Recht zum Vergnügen, als der Verstand?*)³⁴

Against this backdrop, it is worth turning to the most influential discussion of the role of comic theater, and especially the fool, from the mid-eighteenth century. *Harlekin oder Vertheidigung des Groteske-Komischen* (*Harlekin or Defense of the Grotesque-Comic*, 1761/1777) may perhaps not count as a household text today, but it made an immediate splash among a number of eminent writers. Möser’s *Harlekin* earned extensive commentary from, among others, Thomas Abbt (1738–1766), Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Given the dizzying mix of erudition, stridency, and playfulness with which the jurist and *policey* expert from the Westphalian bishopric of Osnabrück, Justus Möser (1720–1794), imbues his text, it is perhaps unsurprising that it solicited an impressive chain of responses. But its import, I argue, consists largely in its repurposing of the commonplace notion that spectatorial pleasure counted as a key mechanism of civic engagement.

There are essentially two interwoven strategies that make Möser’s *Harlekin* so unique. The first consists of the combination of rhetoric and *policey*, bodies of knowledge that ordinarily had little overlap. These traditional bodies of knowledge conspire in pursuit of the second crucial dimension of the text, namely, the transformation of the hierarchical-political valence that typically supported defenses of the theater. That is to say, as the arguments from *policey* are infused with ones drawn from rhetoric, and vice versa, the asymmetrical social nomenclature outlined above gives way to a more inclusive vision of the theatrical audience.

34. Justi, *Grundfeste der Macht*, 2:378.

Spoken in the voice of the Harlequin, Möser's monologue vehemently rejects the staid earnestness of his predecessors and carves out a role for the fool in the creation of a more industrious society. Of particular importance for delineating the alterations to the relationship between theater and life that took place in the latter half of the eighteenth century is Möser's claim that his text can propagate "true taste," while still calling into question one of the pillars of the reform project, namely, the idea that comic theater must educate.³⁵ Möser's *Harlekin* expresses doubt that spectators are actually even drawn to the theater by an "affinity for improvement" (*Neigung zu Besserung*).³⁶ He advances the counterclaim that a spectator goes to the theater with "the desire to cheer oneself up and amuse oneself" (*sich aufzumuntern und zu ergetzen*).³⁷ Indeed, if one wishes to attribute any use to the theatergoer's experience, it will not lie in any moral instruction, but in the respite it provides from the day's labor. "We are merely seeking," Harlekin says of the typical spectator, "to soothe, to calm, to cheer ourselves, and to ready the tired spirit for more serious duties."³⁸ The excitation of the senses instills them new "vitality" (*Lebendigkeit*),³⁹ which in and of itself provides "a necessary and useful motivation" for theatergoing.⁴⁰

These are all familiar tropes. But Möser takes the defense one step further when he asserts that the early Enlightenment reformers had failed to grant the body the "open-hearted laughter" it craves and requires, thereby causing a "suppression of good nature" and charting an all-too-austere avenue for theatrical reform.⁴¹ In Möser's apology for the fool, tenets of *policey* become the means to think through the political utility of folly and to reevaluate the fundamental distinction between the serious and the mirthful.

35. Justus Möser, *Harlekin: Texte und Materialien mit einem Nachwort*, ed. Henning Boetius (Bad Homburg: Max Gehlen, 1968), 9.

36. *Ibid.*, 16.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*, 17.

40. *Ibid.*, 16.

41. *Ibid.*, 19.

Möser thus offers a wholesale revision of what comic theater is for. According to this new line of thought, laughter, as a form of corporeal excitation, restores “the badly rusted spirit back into a communally useful motion.”⁴² Members of society are driven to the theater out of the desire to have their spirits lifted, to find themselves uplifted and renewed. The pleasurable experience of laughter, issuing in the experience of rejuvenation, is the very source of the theater’s social utility. The difference between the utility founded on *policey* principles and the early Enlightenment program can be understood as the switch from service to reason and service to mental and corporeal health, itself based on the more general goal of enhancing the productivity of the population. The overpowering excitement of laughter provides an avenue to “shake the lamed and stiffened nerves of a body” back to life, a life of labor and productivity.⁴³

Chapter 10 will return to the social value of laughter. For the moment, it is important to notice the rhetorical strategies Möser employs to justify the theater. Throughout the early modern period, the standard formula, repeated with almost mechanical frequency, dictated that the capacity to “delight and improve” makes poetry a noble pursuit. The word typically translated in English as “delight” is Latin *delectare*; “improve,” *prodesse*.⁴⁴ “Delight” is almost invariably rendered in German as *ergetzen* or, in modern orthography, *ergötzen*.⁴⁵ We require this basic piece of etymological background because Möser repeatedly refers only to delight or *ergetzen* (on its own) as justification for the theater. That is, he places all the weight on one side of the venerated Horatian formula, brushing aside the need to instruct. And placing all the emphasis on *ergötzen/delectare* means that the sensory pleasures of theatergoing, the rapture of laughter, is not reserved for only a subset of the

42. Ibid., 18.

43. Ibid., 19.

44. The mandate stems from Horace and is originally an “either/or” and not a “both.” In the poetic manuals of the early modern period, however, the two elements in Horace’s phrase were regarded as inseparable.

45. See the afterword in Möser, *Harlekin*, 86.

population—those unable to take pleasure in *Geist*—but is understood as beneficial to all.

Möser's defense of the Harlequin with its focus on delight did more than tip the scales in favor of one side of a traditional binary. It reinterpreted the independent legitimacy of each term. For in the first half of the eighteenth century, delight had not just been coupled with its more austere partner, instruction; it had been subordinated to it. Consider the elaboration of the traditional Horatian formula in the definition of a *play* or *Schau-Spiel* in Zedler's *Universal-Lexicon*. Consonant with the mainstream of humanistic learning, Zedler defines a play as "a theatrical presentation . . . through living persons that aims at the instruction and delight of the spectators (*Erbauung und Ergötzung der Zuschauer*)."⁴⁶ The other paragraphs of the entry make clear that this definition is meant to fend off religious condemnations of the theater. He accomplishes this goal by allowing for pleasure in the experience of theatrical spectatorship only as a means to make instruction palatable. Enjoyment is permissible just to ensure the spectator will be "led to a school from which he can get the best lessons and make for himself the finest rules."⁴⁷ At the same time, delight is inscribed with a perilous limit beyond which its effects become intractable. When unhinged from the principle of instruction, Zedler claims, plays encourage moral dereliction. And so he makes clear that "this enjoyment (*Vergnügen*) may not be owed to a so-called Harlekin."⁴⁸

Möser's *Harlekin*, by contrast, denies the imperative that instruction stand at the center of the theatrical enterprise, and instead insists on the independent value of the "noble intention to delight (*ergetzen*)."⁴⁹

And what good is delight? Here again, a set of classical tropes are put to work, this time concerning the nature of laughter. Since the classical discussions of laughter by the Roman orator Cicero

46. Johann Heinrich Zedler, *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste*; cited from the online version (<http://www.zedler-lexikon.de>).

47. *Ibid.*, 1040.

48. *Ibid.*, 1041.

49. Schlegel, *Werke*, 3:271.

(106–43 BCE) and rhetorician Quintilian (35–100 CE), physical restoration had been identified as the ameliorative outcome of laughter.⁵⁰ Quintilian, for instance, defines the effects of laughter in terms of the verbs *refacere* and *renovare*.⁵¹ This humanistic trope is one of Möser's subtle strategies for installing himself within accepted tradition, while still pointing out an alternative (that is, not educational) service of comic theater. His accomplishment is the expansion of the renovative capacity traditionally reserved for laughter and its application to the complete experience of comic theater.

The assertion of the fool's renovative effects is, in essence, the assertion of the fundamental worth of a good laugh. In fact, Möser's contemporaries regarded his advocacy for the fool as the attempt to locate comic theater in a legitimate sphere of meaning equal to life's more austere undertakings. The man of letters and mathematician Thomas Abbt corresponded with Möser around the same time that he published a review in the Berlin weekly *Briefe, die neueste Litteratur betreffend* (*Letters Concerning the Recent Literature*, 1759–1765). In his letters to Möser and his published review, Abbt indicates that he sees the fool's monologue as a potential way out of dead-end moralizing, while still aiming to “purify taste.”⁵² Abbt does not want to count among the “sect of funeral singers” who want nothing more than that “everything around us, even including the Harlekin, should become serious.”⁵³ Against the chorus of solemn reformers, he insists “the improvement of morals” does not provide the “primary intention” for playwriting or for theatergoing and so enjoins the fool to “be kind enough to consort with us more closely so that we might thereby better pass the time.”⁵⁴

50. On the Roman oratorical context, with attention to both Cicero and Quintilian, see Mary Beard, *Laughter in Ancient Rome: On Joking, Tickling, and Cracking Up* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 99–127.

51. Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, trans. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 3:64–65.

52. Möser, *Harlekin*, 72.

53. *Ibid.*, 63.

54. *Ibid.*

The reintroduction of the fool, therefore, entails two distinctive features. It will, first, counter the tendency to rob the theater of all its cheer, ensuring, second, that the spectator will enjoy the show. These two steps are rooted in a revaluation of the role of the senses, no longer attached to the asymmetrical social structure characteristic of the *policey* discourse. Consider this decisive passage:

Indeed, may not enjoyment equally count as an intention? Is there not a moral enjoyment? And if nature provides us with gratifications that we may relish, then does art alone have impure hands, so that we must be ashamed to accept enjoyment from it and instead always demand utility? Harlekin rejoices when he beholds the blessed effects of the enjoyment he doles out to his listeners.

In der That darf denn das Vergnügen nicht ebenfalls als eine Absicht gelten? Gibt es denn nicht ein moralisches Vergnügen, und wenn die Natur uns Freuden darreicht, die wir geniessen dürfen, hat denn die Kunst allein unheilige Hände, daß wir uns schämen müssen, vor ihr Vergnügen anzunehmen, und von ihr immer nur Nutzen fordern dürfen? Harlekin jauchzet, wenn er die seligen Wirkungen des Vergnügens betrachtet, dass er seinen Zuhörern austheilet.⁵⁵

Morality and utility still have a role to play in this scheme, but they are now downstream from the pleasurable absorption the theater should afford. A flourishing theater, it is becoming clear in the 1760s, depends essentially on the communicative rapport between stage and audience—a rapport most readily and effectively secured through the stage fool's presence. Only once the fool's "blessed effects" are fully felt will the theater be able to discharge its genuine vocation: providing the audience with *Gemüthsbelustigung*, a spirited elevation of the temper, that encourages a flourishing society.⁵⁶ By attempting to replace the pleasurable exchanges between fool and audience with austere tales of moral virtue, the reform program had caused its

55. Ibid., 68.

56. Anonymous, "Harlekin, oder Vertheidigung des Groteskekomischen," *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste* 7, no. 2 (1762): 334–351, here 339.

own demise. Assigning theatrical pleasure its due place should, ultimately, allow for society to function more cohesively.

Möser's *Harlekin* participates in—one might even argue that it instigates—a realignment of the relationship between comic theater and life. Its signature gesture is the advocacy of a more inclusive approach to the sorts of meaning that deserve a place in social and political life. Making the rational faculties the sole custodians of all good taste had ignored the good that comes from the sensory experience of delight. If only the older strategies of merrymaking associated with the fool could now find a place on the stage, then the theater could serve its “salubrious” purpose—it could “ready the spirit for more serious duties.”⁵⁷ There may be no play without work, but work needs play too.

57. Möser, *Harlekin*, 69 and 16.