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Antinomies of the Classical

On Kleist's Broken Jug

Around 1800, Goethe's only peer in the literary deployment of the stage fool was Heinrich von Kleist. Although his plays never achieved the theatrical success of the third great dramatist of the age, Friedrich Schiller, there is, by now, little doubt that Kleist's singular oeuvre of plays testifies to a literary imagination as subtle as it is profound, as hermetic as it is rewarding. With microscopic precision, his comedy *Der zerbrochne Krug* (*The Broken Jug*, 1811) grapples with and innovates on the themes that have stood at the center of the foregoing chapters.[1] Although the play was first performed in 1808, the very same year that Goethe's *Faust I* finally appeared in print, its form reflects the major developments in eighteenth-century theater with unique formal energy.

1. All the following references are to the version of the play found in Heinrich von Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2010), 1:163–276. I recommend the use of this edition, as the detail I focus on has often been elided by editors. References to the play are given parenthetically by line number.

The point of departure in this final chapter will be an anomalous detail from this play, not simply because it reveals much about Kleist's incisive manipulation of literary form, but because it explores the conditions of dramatic composition and theatrical visibility that played out so controversially in the course of the eighteenth century. The anomaly that provides the cornerstone of this chapter stands at the cusp of the nineteenth century in two respects: it looks back and reflects upon the mechanisms underlying the emergence of eighteenth-century dramatic literature, and it also leaves open the question of whether these mechanisms should be perpetuated or set to rest.

One of the chief accomplishments in dramatic composition around 1800, evident in Kleist's works just as much as in Goethe's, is the acute awareness of the historicity of literary forms—the awareness, that is, of their plurality, their roots in particular periods and places, their connection to concrete social-historical constellations, and their varying assignments of strategic import. In the literary universe that Goethe and Kleist inhabited—better yet, helped create—the multiplicity of historical forms, lacking an obligatory force, imbued the selection and redeployment of any particular form with heightened significance. Under the aegis of historical contingency, the use of a traditional form is not merely the affirmation of an outmoded compositional standard or technical scaffolding, or even of the values that the form may have stood for. Within the modern literary ecosystem, the use of a traditional form is itself a heightened mode of expression, an embedded semantic feature of the text that requires decipherment. Kleist's playful appropriation in *The Broken Jug* of forms that had been passed down since antiquity, with varying degrees of binding force, has not escaped the attention of scholarship.

Over recent decades, critics have shed considerable light on the reworking of tragic form, especially Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*, in a play its author named a comedy.[2] As is well known, Kleist prefaced the manuscript version of his play with a description of an

2. See the pioneering essay by Wolfgang Schadewaldt, "*Der zerbrochen Krug* von Heinrich von Kleist und Sophokles' *König Ödipus*," in *Heinrich von Kleist: Aufsätze und Essays*, ed. Walter Müller-Seidel (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), 317–325.

engraving by Jean-Jacques Le Veau, in the course of which he establishes parallels in Sophocles's tragedy. Moreover, Kleist's play appropriates the analytic structure for which *Oedipus Rex* is so famous—namely, the progressive disclosure—through a process of investigation and inquiry of the protagonist's culpability for an antecedent wrongdoing. The envelopment of perhaps the quintessential tragic form within a comedy stands in striking contrast to *Faust*, in which Goethe renders the comic a crucial structural element of tragedy. But before considering the repercussions of Kleist's reverse approach, we must examine his artful appropriation of a formal standard that stood at the very center of the eighteenth-century effort to create a dramatic literature of rank—a formal standard that belonged as much to one genre as to the other and that figured centrally in the effort to furnish drama with a standard of internal coherence, which left no place for the fool's interjections and interruptions.

The anomaly that provides orientation for the following chapter does not, at first sight, appear to be one at all. It comes in the penultimate scene, scene 12, of *The Broken Jug*, which begins with the inconspicuous stage direction "The previous figures (without Adam.—They move to the front of the stage)" (*Die Vorigen, [ohne Adam.—Sie begeben sich alle in den Vordergrund der Bühne]*).[3] The guiding claim of this chapter is that this parsimonious stage direction is tightly interlaced with the controversies organizing debate over drama and theater in the eighteenth century. In particular, it replays the early Enlightenment wager that a culturally ennobled drama and theater demanded the expulsion of the fool, and it also responds to the late eighteenth-century endeavor to restore his presence. For this reason, the scene instantiates the tendency in comedy, at least since the New Comedy of Hellenistic Greece, to "reflect its own phylogenesis."[4] Comedy, in the course of its long history, has regularly employed standardized scenic structures and

3. See Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, 1:253.

4. Peter von Matt, "Das letzte Lachen: Zur finalen Szene in der Komödie," in *Theorie der Komödie—Poetik der Komödie*, ed. Ralf Simon (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2001), 127.

plot events to realize its participation in a preestablished generic order. In Kleist's case, however, belonging to the comedic genre amounts to more than falling within a time-transcendent category; it means responding to the time-and-place-specific question of whether the fool deserves a place in German literary drama.

To be sure, such an emphatic reading of a single stage direction can seem rather far-fetched in isolation. The scene break and stage direction can bear such interpretive weight because, considered in context, they stand out as an anomaly in Kleist's play, in which most of the scenes are woven together according to a convention indebted to the French neoclassical tradition, known as *liaison des scenes*. And yet the subtle deviation in this scene from the established convention of coordinating scene breaks with comings and goings should be read as a clue, as a strategically aberrant trace, in Kleist's anachronistic appropriation of a form. Crucially, the scene comes at a pivotal juncture in the plot, immediately after Adam, the village judge, has suddenly disappeared for good. It is anomalous because, unlike all the other exits in the play, this one does not have an accompanying stage direction; ordinarily the author includes, as one would expect, the abridged directive *ab* or "off" to indicate the event of departure. But Adam absconds without a textual marker, and the scene break is occasioned by a different choreographed movement. As we shall see, the scene farcically replays the most controversial episode in eighteenth-century theater and the founding myth of eighteenth-century drama: the banishing of the stage fool.[5]

To grasp the exceptional significance of this stage instruction, we must first take a step back. Here is what is happening in the play on a very general level.[6] It has just become clear that a judge named Adam from the fictional Dutch village Huisium is a shifty

5. See above, chapter 5.

6. For the interpretation of the major themes of the play that has been foundational to the research over recent years, see David E. Wellbery, "*Der zerbrochne Krug*: Das Spiel der Geschlechterdifferenz," in *Kleists Dramen*, ed. Walter Hinderer (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1997), 11–32. Wellbery also takes note of the relationship between Adam and the tradition of the stage fool, referring to Kleist's comic judge as a reincarnation of the Hanswurst.

representative of the law who broke the jug that provides, at least ostensibly, the centerpiece of the comedy. It is also clear that the entire foregoing court case, played out over the previous scenes, has been, from the perspective of plot development, a charade of dissemblance and evasion.[7] Adam broke Frau Marthe's most prized jug the night before while escaping out the window after visiting her daughter Eve, whom he hoped to steal away from her beloved, Ruprecht. All of this has come to light in the previous eleven scenes, which take place over court proceedings that Adam is judging, but that are also being overseen by a visiting district judge, Walter, who is a state representative meant to ensure the soundness of Huisium's court procedures. The end of the court proceedings—and the near end of the play—is not a verdict issued on Adam's guilt, but rather his abrupt flight. The visiting judge and Licht, Adam's scribe and deputy, spend much of the play confused by Adam's repeated prevarications and improprieties. Just before this scene, it has come to light that the judge is also the culprit—the breaker of the prized jug. It would not be far-fetched to suppose that with this revelation and the judge's flight, the comedy should come to a close: the mystery has been resolved, the fraud revealed, and the clandestine attempt to drive a wedge between Eve and Rupreht thwarted. But, importantly, the comedy does not end with the banishment of the villain. Instead, Kleist introduces a scene break and calls the dramatis personae to the front of the stage.

The seemingly unspectacular stage direction that begins scene 12 reflects, with breathtaking density, the historical vicissitudes of dramatic form that have been our focus in this study. Kleist, in

7. My characterization does not account for the profound meditation on law and its offices in the play. On this subject, I recommend Cornelia Vismann, *Medien der Rechtsprechung* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2011), 38–71. See also the insightful essay by Ethel Matala de Mazza, "Hintertüren, Gartenpforten und Tümpel: Über Kleists krumme Wege," in *Ausnahmezustand der Literatur: Neue Lektüren zu Heinrich von Kleist*, ed. Nicolas Pethes (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2011), 185–207. Both texts make much of the relationship between Kleist's play and Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*. De Mazza closes her essay with incisive observations on the contentious status of Gottsched's conception of literary comedy, including the banishment of the stage fool, in Kleist's comedy.

fact, poignantly identifies the forces responsible for the significant alterations to the dramatic form in Germany, from its first emergence in the 1730s to the early decades of the nineteenth century. In order to unearth the stage instruction's embedded semantic content, I shall adduce three familiar analytic dimensions. Kleist's text, I claim, positions itself within the contentious and variable relationship between the fixed, written text and the immediate unfolding of live performance, the drama-theater dyad. It is concerned, too, with the way the dramatic text relates to the audience, through its two constitutive axes, the fiction-internal axis and the fiction-external axis. The third and final analytic dimension of concern is that of comic temporality. In other words, Kleist's dramatic text, especially this anomalous scene break, responds to the difference between the controlled temporality of text and the potentially explosive temporality of theatrical presence. Kleist's text provides a particularly powerful means for addressing these issues, for its form draws out an aporetic moment in the attempt to install a literary embodiment of the fool on the stage. Considering the play from these three analytic dimensions will, further, allow us to reframe the form-semantic question that has most preoccupied interpreters, namely, the importance of analytic tragedy to Kleist's comedy.

The stage direction itself will be a guide in this chapter. The following pages begin with the question, Who are "the previous figures"? Then the analysis turns to the question, Who or what is Adam? And finally the discussion of Kleist's comedy responds to the question, What does this movement to the "front of the stage" mean?

The Previous Figures Scene 12 diverges, as suggested above, from the formal parameters that otherwise govern the transition from scene to scene. Kleist's comedy is divided into thirteen scenes, each of which—except for this one—is distinguished from the ones on either side by the entrance or exit of a single figure. The stage in *The Broken Jug* is never empty, and the curtain never falls; each scene surges forcefully into the next. For this reason, nearly every scene, including this one, begins with the stage direction "The previous figures," underscoring the continuity of persons across scene divisions. Perhaps it is for this reason that Goethe remarked, upon first encountering

Kleist's play in draft form, that the formal presentation of the play proceeds with "violent presence" (*mit gewaltsamer Gegenwart*).[8] Within this unbroken, onward-pressing movement, however, the twelfth scene marks a subtle deviation, which opens up this drama into one of the central debates of eighteenth-century poetics.

Even though it was a flop when Goethe first staged it in 1808 in the court theater in Weimar, this comedy, more than any of Kleist's other plays, treats the relationship of the dramatic text to theatrical embodiment as one of its central themes. A significant indication of this is the coordination in every scene (except this one) of the textual demarcation of a scene break, of textual segment, with the entrance of a figure into or an exit out of the field of theatrical visibility. The inclusion of thirteen junctures of arrival and/or departure was particularly attractive, we might conjecture, because the prime integer challenges the partition of the play into symmetrical parts. The absence of acts, in addition, makes large-scale subdivision difficult—or is itself, at least, already an interpretive gesture. While the play does admit of division according to a 6–1–6 structure, with the middle scene as the turning point, where, among other things, the history of the jug is explained, this partitioning can assist only a close reader and interpreter, not a stage director. The play, one might say, possesses an abstract, textual symmetry that transforms to its opposite the moment it is rendered theatrically concrete. The scenic construction is dramatically regular and theatrically irregular—and from both perspectives impregnably sealed.

The organization of the drama into thirteen internally contiguous scenes locates it within a particular historical constellation. The strategy of seamless concatenation, of supplying the stage with uninterrupted visual continuity, was codified in seventeenth-century French classicism as *liaison des scenes*.[9] It gained traction within

8. Letter, 8/28/1807, FA II 6:229.

9. See Jacques Scherer, *La dramaturgie classique en France* (Paris: Nizet, 1950), esp. 201–208. I have also discussed this phenomenon in Joel Lande, "Auftritt und Interaktion: Zu Lessings *Minna von Barnhelm*," in *Auftreten: Wege auf die Bühne*, ed. Juliane Vogel and Christopher Wild (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2014), 233–246. I owe my alertness to this phenomenon in eighteenth-century drama to Juliane Vogel, as well as the other members of the research group on entrances.

the German context in the course of Gottsched's theatrical reforms. Nearly every dramatic text published from approximately 1730 to 1775 in the German language adheres to this structuring principle. This was, to be sure, a belated, and in many respects piecemeal, appropriation of a principle that had been codified earlier in France. Nonetheless, the principle of *liaison des scenes* is, paradoxically, both fulfilled and violated in the scene under scrutiny here. This duplicity is the crux of Kleist's intense reflection on dramatic form. Because the French neoclassical notion, as it gained traction in eighteenth-century Germany, amounts to more than a stylistic preference, it bears on the ontology of the dramatic text and its relationship to theatrical performance.

The implications of this formal device for eighteenth-century drama are evident already in Gottsched's 1730 *Critische Dichtkunst*. Gottsched asserts in his treatise that "the entrances within the scenes of a plot must always be connected with one another, in order that the stage is never totally empty until an entire act is over. One person from the previous scene must always remain present, when a new one comes, in order that the entire act hangs together (*Zusammenhang*). The Ancients, as well as Corneille and Racine, have adhered to this principle dutifully."[10] The weaving together of a fabric of scenes, entirely without ruptures, is for Gottsched the textual precondition for the theatrical simulation of a verisimilar fictional world. *Liaison des scenes* is the formal principle Gottsched uses in order to secure metaphysically coherent intraworld relations in drama. It is the mechanism for ensuring the interlinking of the narrative from beginning to middle to end, for ensuring a play hangs together in a way deserving of being called *simplex et unum*. Throughout the eighteenth century, *liaison des scenes* provides the ordering principle that guarantees a play is, in Johann Georg Sulzer's terms, a "whole work" (*ein ganzes Werk*), which is to say, "an indivisible whole" (*ein unzertrennliches Ganzes*).[11] Within the rule-governed regime that took hold in the early

10. Johann Christoph Gottsched, *Versuch einer critischen Dichtkunst vor die Deutschen* (Leipzig: Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf, 1730), 585.

11. Johann Georg Sulzer, "Anordnung," in *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste* (Leipzig: Wiedemanns Erben und Reich, 1771), 1:57–59, here 57.

Enlightenment, a play can make a "vivid impression" on a spectator only through the "order according to which everything follows one after the other."[12] The concatenation of entrances and exits becomes, within this formal paradigm, a mechanism for keeping at bay potential lacunae, for ensuring the internal coherence of persons and events on the stage, and for avoiding the intrusions of the fool. The concept of *liaison des scenes* binds together the drama-theater dyad in the belief that the plausibility of a fictional world on the stage depends on the maintenance, within the text, of a distinct, but parallel form of temporal continuity the spectators experience while watching. The text is not just a work to be read, studied, or understood; it is, in the traditional Aristotelian terminology, the formal cause of theatrical verisimilitude. A key piece of textual evidence for this text-performance sequential arrangement is the fact that, beginning around the time of Gottsched in the 1730s, scenes are called *Auftritte* (entrances) and acts, *Aufzüge* (raisings of the curtain). Textual segmentation, in other words, draws not just its nomenclature, but also the justification for its divisions, from its causal connection to the spectator's perception of a theatrical performance.

Scene 12 in *The Broken Jug* reflects this relationship between text and performance, drama and theater on multiple levels. Even though this scene does not begin with an entrance or an exit, it preserves the continuity of the fictional fabric by leaving all of the characters from the previous scene on stage. If there is an action that occasions the scene break, then it is the anomalous directions that call the ensemble to the front of the stage. For a spectator accustomed to regarding entrances and exits as the ordering device, this anomaly would remain inconspicuous; it is only scrutable on a textual level. The textual anomaly of this scene break is a difference that makes a difference—one that reflects, however subtly, Kleist's critical distance from the eighteenth-century conception of the dramatic text. To unfold the implications of this textual clue, we must consider, first, who Adam is, and second, what the group's approach to the foreground means.

12. Ibid., 65.

Without Adam So who is this Adam? A full answer to this question must include, among other things, the importance of his biblical namesake and his erotic adventuring, as well as his juridical stratagems. I wish to isolate a dimension of the play that has received sporadic mention in the abundant literary scholarship, but the significance of which has remained underappreciated: Adam is a literary incarnation of the most controversial stage figure of the eighteenth century, the funnyman whose persistence has been our focus, and whose banishment coincided with the institution of the formal principle of *liaison des scenes*. Four aspects, sketched below in compressed form, reveal Kleist's awareness of the comic practice of the early modern stage fool.

1. Adam is a figure of mundane corporeality. References to his grotesquely porous and misshapen body pervade this drama. From the repeated references to two orifices of his body—"one in front and one in back" (line 1467)—to his curse of his own phallus—"be damned my midriff" (line 1774)—Adam is symbolically associated with the nether regions of the body in his person and in his humor. The play begins with the scribe Licht's remarking on Adam's gaping wounds and closes with others attempting to thrash him. Adam is the sole figure whose body becomes the subject of discourse and, indeed, of dramatic consequence. Moreover, his office as court judge is contaminated by his base somatic existence. In the cabinet meant for documents and transcripts, he keeps food. This veritable pantry is stuffed with everything from a "Braunschweiger Wurst" (line 216) to "Cheese, Ham, Butter, Sausages, and Bottles" (line 194), as well as the fool's classic moniker, Hanswurst. And it is only fitting that his humor often hews closely to the rude, sexual register.
2. Adam is an intractable rascal. The courtroom proceedings, which make up the major action of the comedy, are repeatedly derailed by Adam's outbursts and digressions. Much to the alarm of the visiting district judge, Walter, Adam does not respect the juridical protocol of question and response, but instead interjects and misdirects at every turn. In this

way, Adam embodies the fool's interruptive relationship to the continuity of plot-driving dialogue. His distinct mode of derailing the court proceedings is profoundly improvisatory. Accounts of past events often spin off a word or phrase in a previous statement, without regard for internal consistency or the avoidance of contradictory reports. In virtue of his desire to elude the appearance of guilt for the broken jug, his utterances all have the character of role-playing, of a spontaneous reaction to his interlocutor and an unforeseen attempt to keep the illusion of innocence alive. The parallel between court proceedings and plot—in German, *Prozess* and *Handlung*—that shapes the entire drama means that Adam's interruptions are both irruptive moments in the courtroom procedure and digressions from the continuous unfolding of the plot. They can even be understood as attempts to forestall the unfurling of a coherent plot and to hinder the revelation of truth.

3. Adam's participation in the patterns of dialogue is characteristic of the fool's comic practice that gained a foothold first in the 1590s. For instance, Adam delivers eight of the comedy's ten asides.[13] One notable instance of an aside comes at the beginning of the seventh scene, when he frames the ensuing events before the scene gets under way.[14] In general, much of the humor in this comedy is produced by Adam's verbal lapses, which inadvertently reveal his guilt but which go unnoticed by the other characters in the fiction. His tergiversations create a division between the internal axis of communication and the external actor-spectator axis of communication. The comedy's humor, in other words, is based upon the audience's knowledge, achieved via the fiction-external axis of communication, of Adam's strategic but clumsy obfuscations, about which the other members of the fiction remain largely ignorant. The visiting district judge, Walter, reprimands him on three occasions

13. Explicitly named in scenes 2, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 13—but equally true in scenes 3, 5, 6, and 9.

14. Kleist, *Sämtliche Werke*, 1:190.

for his duplicity of speech—the key word, which always appears in the same metrical abbreviation, is *zweideut'g* (lines 542, 805, and 20 of Variant), a term that refers here as much to his evasiveness as to his comedic toeing of the line between inside and outside the fiction.

4. Adam's heterodox and highly improvised management of the courtroom is associated with oral speech and set in contradistinction to the written law. He even goes so far as to claim that he is proceeding according to local statutes, "idiosyncratic ones" (*eigentümliche*), which are "not the written ones, but instead ones transmitted through proven tradition" (lines 627–629). He describes his shifty, inconsistent, and self-interested management of the court case as strictly adhering to a juridical "form" (line 630), just one distinct from the rigorous procedure practiced elsewhere in the realm. Adam's unscripted participation as judge of the court case demonstrates the very same temporality of extemporized theatrical presence that the Enlightenment insistence upon the static text had sought to control.

These four points throw Adam's departure just before the beginning of the twelfth scene into sharp relief. His flight replays what we have identified as the founding myth of eighteenth-century theater: the banishment of the fool from the stage.

Before returning to the relationship between the scene break and Adam's disappearance from the stage, it is worth recalling a few details from the broader historical framework. The Enlightenment reforms had altered the importance assigned to the textual configuration of a play by making it into a vehicle for the transformation of the existing stage culture. The notion that textual continuity would produce theatrical verisimilitude, as part 2 showed, went hand in hand with the banishment of the fool, whose incessant interruptions, spontaneous improvisation, and corporeal jest made him the pariah of the reform project. The structure of *liaison des scenes* provided the formal strategy for ensuring that there would never be a pause in the performance in which the fool might burst onto the stage, and that the play would achieve the

requisite internal continuity.[15] A rupture in the principle of *liaison des scenes* amounts, in other words, to a rupture in the Enlightenment attempt to yoke together performance and text.

It further bears pointing out that the constellation of figures in Kleist's play reflects the historical forces that have stood at the center of this study. There is Adam, who is an intractable improviser; his secretary, Licht, who transcribes the events of the trial in the instant of their occurrence; and the visiting district judge, Walter, whose visit to Huisium aims to ensure conformity of court proceedings with the generally applicable written rules. Put more abstractly, Kleist writes into his play a figure of improvisational theatricality, an author of texts, and a regulatory instance. The comedy establishes a triangulated structure among three forces responsible for the genesis of the literary drama: poetological regulation, fixed textuality, and the unforeseeable presence of live theater. Once the conceptual-historical associations underpinning the constellation of figures come into view, the commencement of the twelfth scene emerges as the immediate aftermath of the fool's departure. We are left at the beginning of this scene with Walter (regulatory instance) and Licht (scribe), who step, together with the other dramatis personae, to the front of the stage.

How, though, are we to make sense of the fact that at the moment that Adam has departed, the pattern of coordinating textual segmentation with theatrical entrances and exits becomes irregular? How are we to make sense of this sudden interruption of a crucial formal instrument for the reform imposition of dramatic unity? Simply put: through Adam's disappearance in the middle of the foregoing scene. Here Kleist's literary maneuvers are as subtle as they are instructive. In keeping with the parallel between Adam and the fool, his comings and goings cannot be regulated by those figures who represent textual fixity in the play. That is, once it has come to light that Adam broke the jug during his clumsy attempts to seduce the young maiden Eve, he scurries off the stage, but his departure is not marked as such. His departure breaks the formal convention and textual regulation that all the other figures dutifully obey. Readers learn of his flight only obliquely by way of Ruprecht

15. See chapter 7.

(Eve's beloved), who exclaims as he evidently reaches for Adam: "It is just his cloak" (*Es ist sein Mantel bloß*) (line 1902). Adam's actual exit from the stage is never textually registered in a stage direction. All that the representatives of the ordered text can grasp is an outer garment, a surface shell or covering, detached from the figure himself. Within this analogy, we might say that the text can hold onto only the surface semblance, the textual signifier, while the thing itself, the performed referent, remains forever unpredictable and elusive. Once Adam has fled, theatrical performance and dramatic text are thrown out of sync; the textual segment is not able to keep a firm hold on the entrances or exits. In the absence of Adam, the "previous figures" have lost their principle of theatricality and assume an exclusively textual shape. And for this reason, his departure coincides with the jettisoning of *liaison des scenes* as the instrument of regulating theatrical performance. It becomes clear that this compositional principle, this attempt to form a strict drama-theater dyad, had always been an exclusively textual endeavor, an attempt to place the theater under textual control, without attending properly to the preexisting conditions of theatrical performance. It is perfectly fitting, then, that within the formalized context of drama, this aberration is textually legible but not theatrically visible.

They Move to the Front of the Stage The absence of Adam and the introduction of an anomalous scene division render the final element in the stage direction all the more mysterious. Why does Kleist emphasize the collective movement to the front of the stage upon Adam's disappearance? With the fool gone, Kleist's comedy inaugurates its own principle of textual segmentation, built not around the passage into theatrical presence or absence, but rather around the formation of a collective. At first glance, it seems that, with this scene, Kleist introduces a tableau of social cohesion, much as conventions in the comedic tradition dictate. The comedic finale often portrays the pacification of social conflict through the act of social cohesion par excellence, the betrothal.[16] And with Adam gone, all obstacles to the marriage between Eve and Ruprecht are removed, clearing the way for a paradigmatic happily-ever-after. In

16. Matt, "Das letzte Lachen," 128–140.

accord with a second comedic convention, after Adam has left the stage, Ruprecht goes on to violently and repeatedly beat the cloak he has left behind. Such a scene of corporal punishment strongly resembles slapstick, with Adam (just dispatched) embodying the symbolic role of the scapegoat.[17]

And yet the finale of Kleist's comedy adheres to conventions only insofar as it redoubles and thereby denudes them. There is no scapegoat to beat, only the trace of abandonment, and beating this hollow surrogate with such alacrity is in and of itself laughable. Kleist provides here a simulacrum of the ritualized scapegoat punishment, allowing for an explosion of violence on Adam's judicial livery, but also one that fails to touch his real body. If one of the purposes of generic conventions is to signal, however subtly, participation in an overarching generic pattern, Kleist here reveals the act of scapegoat violence as irreducibly symbolic—which is to say, that it aims less at the execution of violence on a specific individual than at the ritual-like execution of a predetermined and unalterable sequence of actions. It suits Adam's status as an improvisatory fool figure, then, that his unscripted departure reveals the scripted nature of the scapegoat ritual and, one might speculate, thereby exposes the perils of ossified generic conventions.

So what is the significance of this synchronous collective movement to the front of the stage? Why does it occasion a scene break? On the most basic level, the scene presents here a putatively harmonious unity fostered by the banishing of a figure of illicit sexuality, irreverence to juridical norms, comic improvisation, and procedural intractability. In keeping with the scapegoat structure, the act of violent exclusion has a community-binding force, furnishing the play with a tableau of social cohesion. But Kleist accomplishes more than a harmonious ending to his play with the banishment of the fool.

The choreographic arrangement of this scene is breathtaking in its subtlety. First, by moving to the front of the stage, the collective inhabits a space typically reserved for the fool—in particular for his speech *ad spectatores*—at the very threshold in between the inside and outside of the fiction. The scene enacts, in other

17. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 163ff.

words, the symbolic usurpation of the fool's liminal space, which allows him—and only him—to operate both inside and outside the fictional world. In this moment of collective formation, the group embodiment of dramatic fixity closes off the porous zone within which the fool had his home. A key piece of evidence for this interpretive line is what happens next in the scene. It is not long before Licht, the scribe and, by metonymy, the instantiation of the literary author, calls everyone over to a window where they watch Adam flee. It is not at all far-fetched to suppose that this window is a reference to a widespread motif in painting since the Renaissance. The window typically functions as a pictorial device, which demarcates a separation between the internal, imaginary space of the painting and external reality beyond it.[18] The window, in other words, operates as the symbolic boundary point within the fiction that indicates the self-enclosed status of the fiction itself. Kleist's scene is, therefore, organized around a twofold movement: on the one hand, there is the occlusion and appropriation of the fool's liminal space, and, on the other, there is the spatial identification with a symbol of perfect fictional continence. The closing of the former is the precondition for the full establishment of the latter.

Once everyone gathers in front of the window, the group cries out in in unison, "Look! Look! / he is being whipped by his own wig!" (lines 1958–1959). Together, the group delights in a theatrical prop lashing the scapegoat fool. The function of comedy, Kleist points out in this scene, lies not simply in stories that reinforce social cohesion, but in ones that unite through the shared spectating of the self-inflicted perils of human folly. The ever-skeptical Kleist grapples with the fragile and always fleeting identity of the collective by insisting upon a founding moment of violent exclusion. Immediately thereafter, the district judge, Walter, sends Licht to bring him back. Kleist makes evident, in the ensemble's approach to the front of the stage and ensuing operatic *unisono*, that the act of social inclusion is nothing more than spectatorial enjoyment

18. See Victor Stoichita, *La instauration du tableau: Métapeinture à l'aube des temps modernes* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1993). In addition to Foucault's famous analysis in *The Order of Things,* see Svetlana Alpers, "Interpretation without Representation, or, The Viewing of *Las Meninas,*" *Representations* 1 (1983): 30–42.

at violent exclusion. As Kleist himself wrote in 1809, soon after completing *The Broken Jug*, "Every great and encompassing danger affords, if it is well met, the state, for an instant, a democratic appearance."[19] The concluding scene is just such a fleeting, democratic instance of collective formation.

This moment of collective coalescence, in the aftermath of the fool's expulsion and his symbolic thrashing, introduces a conventional comedic conclusion to a court trial that, in principle, had aimed for a different sort of resolution. The scene break, that is, marks the unexpected conclusion to the proceedings of a cultural institution that functions as a mediating instance between parties in conflict and thereby avoids open physical confrontation.[20] Channeling and thereby limiting conflict, court proceedings, in general, circumscribe the scope of disagreement and, at least in principle, afford a means for its resolution. Structured conflict should, within this institutional context, obviate the need for direct violence. Meanwhile, the court proceedings that make up the plot of Kleist's play fail to provide a structure within which conflict can be played out, without the threat of physical violence repeatedly bubbling to the surface. Evidence of this failure can be found in Frau Marthe's repeated expressions of desire to exact physical revenge on the party responsible—in her mind, Ruprecht—for the broken jug. Her first appearance before the court is punctuated by a speech in which she equates the judge with a henchman and imagines the culprit receiving a sound whipping (lines 493–497). Her protracted description of the broken jug includes the demand that Ruprecht be broken on the wheel (line 767); she interrupts Ruprecht's account of the past evening's events with threats of inflicting harm on him once the court proceedings are over (lines 951–953); and she even threatens to break Eve's bones for refusing to say who broke the jug (line 1199). Perhaps the most striking explosion of potential violence comes from Eve, when her silence about Adam's responsibility for the broken jug eventually breaks down and she instructs her betrothed, Ruprecht, to grab hold of and

19. Heinrich von Kleist, "Über die Rettung Österreichs" in *Sämtliche Werke*, 2:337.

20. See the subtle observations in Niklas Luhmann, *Legitimation durch Verfahren* (Frankfurt am Main: Surhkamp Verlag, 1983), esp. 100–106.

bash the judge without restraint (lines 1894–1896). Despite these repeated verbal calls for brutality, the thrashing of Adam's cloak, upon his escape from the stage, is its sole physical manifestation. Adam's inability to maintain his role as judge—to establish, that is, a division between his self-presentation as an officer of the court and the rest of his person—means that the court proceedings do little to suppress the potential for physical violence. And, of course, since that failure ultimately reveals his own culpability, he becomes the intended object of abuse. In place, then, of a juridical resolution and the suppression of violence, the transition from the eleventh to the twelfth scene of Kleist's comedy introduces a moment of what one might call generic self-identification—a moment, that is, when the play asserts its participation in the conventions of the comedic genre. Compared with tragedy, comedy has an unusually high tolerance for both verbal descriptions of and optical displays of physical violence.

And yet this is a play that draws much of its comedic energy from its close proximity to tragedy. As scholars have often noted, the court proceedings in Kleist's play reprise the analytic structure of Sophocles's canonical tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*. One of the chief differences between the two plays pertains to the question of self-knowledge. Whereas Oedipus progressively uncovers his responsibility for a patricidal crime that had necessarily escaped his knowledge up to that point, Adam works throughout the comedy to obscure his wrongdoings. His various attempts at articulating his whereabouts on the previous evening and explaining the multiple wounds covering his body and his mysteriously absent wig ultimately disclose his responsibility. Whereas the tragic process confronts Oedipus with the limits of his self-knowledge due to circumstances beyond his experience, the comedic process exposes Adam's self-knowledge, despite his best attempts to obscure his unscrupulous machinations. Ultimately, his inability to provide a consistent testimonial account *expresses* his culpability, even as he repeatedly *avows* his innocence.[21] In the perilous

21. On the distinction between expression and avowal, with reference to Wittgenstein and the unconscious, see David Finkelstein, *Expression and the Inner* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

discrepancy between his expressions and avowals, Adam lives up to the anthropological claim that he introduces at the outset of the play: "Everyone carries the woeful stumbling block in himself" (*Denn jeder trägt / den leidig'n Stein zum Anstoß in sich selbst*) (lines 5–6). Adam's fall is not a transgressive act of the will, nor an encounter with an inhospitable fate, but rather an internalized *lapsus* that leads him to stumble over his own two feet. It is his own failure to produce consistent untruths, to serve as a reliably false witness, that ultimately costs him. Like the many fools before him, his utterances are fundamentally situational responses. But as Kleist makes a protagonist out of the fool, installing him as the central figure of his literary comedy, improvisatory comic prevarications run up against the consistency of self-presentation demanded from a full-blooded character. Returning to the idiom I introduced in my discussion of the early Enlightenment reforms, one might even speculate that Adam trips over the inconsistencies of character that come to expression in a drama composed under the aegis of syntagmatic unity.

At its conclusion, then, *The Broken Jug* insists upon its own status as a literary drama, including its media-historical foundation in textuality. After all, even though the group takes pleasure in the fool's humiliation, Walter, the regulatory instance in the play, ultimately sends Licht after him. The play comes to a close with the poetological imperative for the fool's reinclusion in the aftermath of his expulsion, and it is the embodiment of fixed textuality who is assigned the responsibility of bringing the fool back to the stage. Kleist's attempt to restore the fool takes place not on the stage but on paper. And yet *The Broken Jug* withholds a final verdict on the viability of a theatrical fool under the aegis of the literary text, with its emphasis on character. The question of whether or not the fool ever returns, and under what conditions he does so, remains unsettled. This finale, which replays the founding myth of eighteenth-century German comedy, holds in abeyance the question of whether the project of instituting literary drama, launched in the early decades of the eighteenth century, can overcome its founding act of violent exclusion.