

Abstract:

In the early eighteenth century, farce was a much-maligned form of theater, in part because of its over-indulgence in the corporeal. This essay seeks to re-conceptualize the significance of farce by examining its self-conscious spectacularization of the scene of corporeal violence.

Spectacularizing the abjection of the human form, work by authors like Griffin, Carey, Bullock, Johnson, and Hill privileges the body as a site of making and creativity. The farcical trick provides not only an opportunity for physical comedy, but also a performative site that uncannily doubles that of the logic of theatrical performance and spectatorship itself. In this doubled site of play, the abased body of the tricked becomes a sign of the farce being performed, and the trickster, a director orchestrating the trick-as-play. The confusions born of the body and its materiality thus become spectacular sites of creativity, giving value and depth to the kinds of productivity typically perceived as lacking.

Abject, Delude, Create:

The Aesthetic Self-Consciousness of Early Eighteenth-Century Farce

Today as in earlier periods, farce is a much-maligned form of performance. In the early eighteenth century, it was derided as the nonsensically trivial, overly-embodied, and overly-commercial other to more ostensibly legitimate theater, even though it had become an integral and popular feature of the patent stage.¹ Throughout the Restoration, as Peter Holland has shown, “farce” was a particularly damaging appellation to have acquired, though after the increased theatrical competitiveness of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a competitiveness that focused the purpose and place of farce in the entertainment economy, it became more defensible (123). In early use of the term, farce typically referred to the looser collection of entr’acte performances of dancing or stage business literally farced² into a play, or provincial amusements able to evade pre-Restoration anti-theatrical legislation. With the number of French and Italian troupes performing at court after 1660, the form began to emerge as an “uneasy harmony” of the popular and the aristocratic (Holland 115). Farce could be increasingly

¹ For some representative examples of this denigration, see James Miller’s *Harlequin Horace; or, The Art of Modern Poetry* (1741), Edward Howard’s preface to *The Women’s Conquest: A Tragicomedy* (1671), and Samuel Derrick’s *General View of the British Stage* (1759). Dryden’s critique of farce in his Preface to *An Evening’s Love; or, The Mock Astrologer* (1671) is especially interesting in light of his own farcical tendencies. A notably unique apology for farce, Nahum Tate’s “A Defense of Farce,” was affixed as a preface to the second edition of his own farce, *A Duke and No Duke* (1693), adapted from Cockain’s *Trappolin Suppos’d a Prince*. This play by Tate was very popular; according to the *Index to the London Stage*, it was first performed in 1684 at Drury Lane or Dorset Garden, then in 1693 at court, and had around 50 performances in the first half of the century. This play—like other farces in the magical transformation sub-genre, most notably Charles Coffey’s *Devil to Pay*—had a steady performance history throughout the eighteenth century. Tate’s ability to prefix this particular play with a stringent apology of the form suggests a healthy debate about farce that has been overshadowed by its denigration.

² As Leo Hughes has pointed out in “The Early Career of Farce in the Theatrical Vocabulary,” the term “farce” emerged during the late Restoration and early eighteenth century as an English neologism coined from the Old French for “to stuff” (“farce” n.1). According to the *OED*, “farce” was first and foremost a domestic term, signifying a culinary practice still in use today. Before the sixteenth century, the term signified not only gastronomically, but also religiously, referred to explanatory passages or interludes inserted into the liturgy of the Latin Mass (“farce” n.2). As a verb, to farce is, literally, to stuff, and as a noun, farce is, literally, stuffing: veal farce, *champignons farcis*, farce-meat (“farce” n.1). To farce something is to stuff it, or, as Samuel Johnson defines it in his *Dictionary*, to “fill [it] with mingled ingredients” (“farce”). Conversely, then, it also signifies the stuffing itself, the concatenation of disparate parts.

characterized as a theatrical genre—shorter pieces, typically mined from other plays, the primary goals of which are to produce body-shaking laughter by reveling in the exploration of physical wit. Disguise, “grimace,” buffoonery, trickery, and intense theatricality, often enabled through (momentary) social inversion, are key elements of farce; it is this embodied aspect of farce that is most frequently the target of critique. Such plays quickly lost many of their aristocratic associations and won a secure place in the legitimate commercial theater. Indeed, during this period, Leo Hughes has shown, the form began to be consolidated on the English stage as popular entertainment;³ as Dryden notes in his Preface to *An Evening’s Love* (1671), “Farces more commonly take the People than Comedies” (203). After the turn of the century, especially with the consolidation of John Rich’s empire at Lincoln’s Inn Fields, English stages adopted the French tradition of the theatrical bill, and farce became an increasingly necessary supplement to the regular five-act drama. The absence of a popular farcical afterpiece in the bill rendered the evening incomplete, and this was a very sore spot to many commentators seeking to validate the ostensibly elevating and nationalist purpose of the legitimate theater. More self-described farces, often written by actors themselves, were performed and printed, though the designation “farce” was never without its tensions or ambivalences. A lightning rod for debates about the purpose of the stage and who has access to its powerful publicity, farce continued a critical target—in large part because of its centrality in the theatrical economy of the early eighteenth century and its apparent lack of reformative agenda. Even today, many scholars make no scruple to dismiss its value.

³ See Hughes’ work in *A Century of English Farce*, “The Early Career of Farce in the Theatrical Vocabulary,” and “Afterpieces: or, That’s Entertainment,” in *The Stage and the Page: London’s “Whole Show” in the Eighteenth-Century Theatre*. For a fuller exploration of the history of farce on the Restoration stage, see Peter Holland, “Farce.”

This essay approaches farce from a perspective that foregrounds the creative agency of the body on stage. At the center of these plays is often an elaborate trick, focused on the abasement or embarrassment of a particular body; the trick provides not only an opportunity for physical comedy, but also a performative site that uncannily doubles that of the logic of theatrical performance and spectatorship itself. In this doubled site of play, the abased body of the tricked becomes a sign of the farce being performed, and the trickster, a director orchestrating the trick-as-play for the assembled spectators both on the stage and in the audience beyond. Ultimately, I argue, farce figures the play of embodiment as a significant site of creativity. Approaching these plays from a perspective open to the possibility that farce has an aesthetic consciousness highlights the ideologies implicit in our historical and continuing denigration of the form.

Broadly, farce has a penchant for transforming scenes of brutality and affliction into scenes of entertainment.⁴ As Eric Bentley has noted, of course, “violence is not the essence of farce” (243); nonetheless, farce does routinely turn on, or build to, a crucial act of violence comically staged, an act of comic violence that draws our attention to the processes by which the human is refashioned. In the course of its play, farce “entertains us with what is monstrous and

⁴ While there has not been much theorization on eighteenth-century British farce, the interested reader should examine Jessica Milner Davis’ *Farce*, Deborah C. Payne’s “Comedy, Satire, or Farce? Or the Generic Difficulties of Restoration Dramatic Satire,” Stuart E. Baker’s *Georges Feydeau and the Aesthetics of Farce*, and Robert J. Williams’ “Play and the Concept of Farce,” in addition to Leo Hughes’ scholarship. Other useful sources are foundational texts treating theories of laughter and play. Though it does not explicitly investigate farce of the sort I take up here, Matthew Kinservik’s *Disciplining Satire* uses the language of farce, offering an interesting reevaluation of the relationship between early eighteenth-century comedy and satire in light of censorship and licensing law—satiric comedy, during the period, was not seen as instructive, despite its claims to be so, but rather destructive and therefore in need of “moral correction” by critics and censors (26), creating a comic form of satire dependent on a “sympathetic understanding of a satiric target” (209). Unlike satiric comedy, farce is predicated on destruction, but, as I show here, it is a bracketed destruction of the scene of performance—while often deemed necessitous of reform or even excision from the stage as a whole, its destructive work is inly-directed, and it makes no claims to instruction. As Derrick notes in *A General View of the Stage* (1759), the laughter generated by farce is not “founded upon reason, excited to the check given to folly, the reproof of ignorance, or the lash to corruption” (60).

chimerical” (Dryden 203). Tobin Siebers’ useful model of “the body aesthetic,” which allows us to think of creative practice as always a practice of “making and remaking . . . the human” (3), thus takes on special resonance in farce, for creative practice happens in, on, and through the deformation of the human body. Often, this is a literal violence—bodies are kicked, cudged, and tossed in blankets. Sometimes the violence of farce is less conventionally apparent as such, taking the form of verbal abuse that far overreaches the merely indecorous, scenes of humiliation and the abasement of the human, scenes playing on the fine line separating life and death. And sometimes the violence of farce is directed against language itself, one of the most telling signs of all that is human and civilized and capable of being educated or reformed—characters stutter, speak in contorted dialects, garbled English, nonsense, and terribly bad verse. If farce “den[ies] many of the premises of higher forms of comedy” (108), as Holland notes, this denial⁵ is nonetheless a specific kind of creativity.

Farce is replete with stories of bodies in distress, and the act of beating—often in highly imaginative ways—is one of, if not the, dominant tropes of the form. It is a highly material form of theater on the cusp between drama and entertainment.⁶ In farce, bodies test the limits of the imagination by confronting the imagination with stylized versions of material fact.⁷ The act of beating therefore foregrounds human embodiedness. In Otway’s afterpiece of Molière’s *Cheats*

⁵ In *Heroic Mode and Political Crisis, 1660-1745*, Elaine McGirr draws on the farcical as a tool of reversal, ridicule, negation, and discreditation—which she ultimately reads as within the purview of antiheroic.

⁶ For an excellent analysis of the concept of “entertainment” in the eighteenth century, see John O’Brien’s *Harlequin Britain*, especially the Introduction and Chapter 3, “Wit Corporeal: Theater, Embodiment, and the Spectator.” O’Brien describes the materiality of embodied forms of theater (specifically pantomime, but logically farce as well) as a threat to writing, “undercut[ing] the theater’s desire to define itself as a space of language, and therefore as a literary medium” (xviii).

⁷ It is interesting to note that several players and authors of farce were themselves disfigured, often incorporating their corporeal difference into the warp and weft of their performances. Griffin was a stutterer; Coffey was hunch-backed (and Irish); Spiller and Hippisley were both facially scarred, even to the point of blindness—Spiller by smallpox, and Hippisley by fire. For more information, see their entries in the *Biographical Dictionary*.

of *Scapin* (1677),⁸ the wily servant convinces Gripe to hide from nonexistent enemies in a sack, in which situation Scapin repeatedly beats him with a cudgel (213ff). Christopher Bullock was a particularly well-received author-actor of farce, as *The London Stage* makes evident,⁹ though—according to *The Biographical Dictionary*—he “wrote nothing of great significance” despite the enduring popularity of his works both on patent stages and in the fairground (“Bullock, Christopher” 400). In his *Adventures of Half an Hour* (1716), the “puffing” and perspiring landlord beats Tagg, disguised as a fiddler, out of his tavern (35). In farce, ladies lay about them with their fists, box their servants’ ears, and beat blind fiddlers—icons of popular art—with their own instruments (Jevon, *Devil of a Wife* [1686]; Coffey, et. al., *Devil to Pay* [1731]); they bloody the noses of political adversaries (Centlivre, *Gotham Election* [1715]). Gentlemen threaten to “spit” their foes with swords and “break all the Bones in [their] Skin” (Anonymous, *The Witchcraft of Love* [printed, 1742]); they cane unwilling servants and discharge muskets at naked old men who display their disintegrating bodies to the audience with aplomb. Quacks threaten patients with clysters, bleedings, blisterings, and myriad other grotesque forms of treatment, even unto mistaken burial. In Benjamin Griffin’s popular *Love in a Sack* (1715)—there were seven performances at Lincoln’s Inn Fields in the 1715/1716 season—Sir Arthur Addlepate is “so overjoy’d” at his wily servant’s ruse to inveigle an interview with the lovely

⁸ According to *The London Stage*, *The Cheats of Scapin* enjoyed around thirty performances in London between 1700 and 1731; it had a long career on the stage, enduring well after its debut in the Restoration. In the notes and text following, all information about performance history is taken from *The London Stage* and *The Index to the London Stage*.

⁹ Bullock’s plays were typically well-received, especially *The Cobler of Preston* (1716), *Woman is a Riddle* and *Woman’s Revenge*, all of which played many times throughout the century. *The Per-Juror* (1717) and *The Slip* (1715) had solid first runs—ten or more performances each—as well. *The Adventures of Half an Hour* (1716), however, did not do as well; after its opening performance at Lincoln’s Inn Fields on March 19, it was revived in 1724 at the Haymarket for one performance, and then in 1756 it enjoyed three performances at Bartholomew Fair.

young Aurelia that, he says to the valet, “I must beat you, I cannot forbear it” (31). The spectacle of corporeal humiliation is endemic to the farcical stage.

In farce, these scenes of brutality are often consciously described as entertainments; indeed, it is difficult to imagine any lack of awareness about this characteristic. Griffin’s *The Humours of Purgatory* (1716), which enjoyed a benefit night also at Lincoln’s Inn Fields,¹⁰ turns on a staged masquerade in which a family dresses as “Ghosts and Goblins” to perform a purgatorial, masque-like entertainment before Don Lopez, played by the author, who has convinced himself that he is dead. In Susanna Centlivre’s *A Bickerstaff’s Burying* (1710), running for five nights at Drury Lane, the Emir—on the verge of being thrust into his own coffin alive, as is the custom of the land upon the death of one spouse—struggles frantically “to reach at [his wife’s] Coffin;” when he pulls it open and finds nothing within, he grotesquely “Jumps and Dances about” (19). That Lady Mezro, the Emir’s putative wife, was formerly one Mrs. Take-It of the very Drury Lane where Centlivre’s play was performed suggests that this tongue-in-cheek alignment is far from coincidental. Ravenscroft’s *The Anatomist* (1697) centers on the spectacle of an imagined anatomy theater, which doubles for the performance space of the theater.¹¹ Like Bullock’s, Henry Carey’s work was well-received—notably, *The Contrivances* (1715), with a total of seventy-two performances by 1740, and *The Dragon of Wantley*, with twenty-seven performances in 1737 alone, the year of its opening.¹² Though Carey was most

¹⁰ In the 1740s, Griffin’s play returned to the stage at Goodman’s Fields and the Haymarket.

¹¹ *The Anatomist; or, The Sham Doctor* offers a fascinating view into the relationships between health, illness, farce, and theater; the spectacle of potential vivisection, which forms a large part of the humor of the play, intersects curiously with the work of the farceur- or trickster-as-director, discussed below. Further, it offers a unique opportunity to examine the relationship between literal farce—that is, disparate objects (like the pantomime *The Loves of Mars and Venus*) stuffed or “farced” into a larger whole. In the interests of the lesser-known works in this essay, however, I have chosen not to discuss it. Ravenscroft’s play had a total of ninety-three performances from 1696 until 1745, with a steady performance schedule throughout the century.

¹² *The Honest Yorkshireman* ran for forty nights from July 1735 until December of that year, and *Chrononhotonthologos*, which, after its eight performances from February to March of 1734, continued to be restaged periodically and for one or two performances per opening from 1736 until the 19th century. *Hanging and*

well-known for his ballad farces, *Hanging and Marriage; or, The Dead Man's Wedding* (1722) is in many ways a representative piece; his Richard Stubble not only variously “sowers,” “smashes,” “mills,” “lug[s],” and “beats” Solomon Squeak and the “Posse” Gizzard has assembled to corral a violent lover (8-9), but the play turns on the staging of a grotesque entertainment: the public marriage of a putatively dead man to a glowing specimen of provincial English life. The very act of drawing the limits of the body into the foreground, only then to go beyond those limits in the performance of violence, concentrates our awareness of violence as performance. Examination of these plays shows yet more instances of such embodied, performative self-consciousness, and we will look closely at several a bit later.

Many early farces incorporate scenes of popular entertainment or discourses on popular entertainment into the drama itself, suggesting through form and content that they may be read as signs of its broader aesthetic consciousness, material invocations of the kind of aesthetic work farce does. As Robert Williams has noted of farce-play, it is “Janus-like, one aspect turned toward its nature as an existential phenomenon, the other toward its manifestation as a communicative game” (60). Unlike the incorporation of songs and dances typical in early modern drama, in farce, these moments are specifically staged as microcosms or referents of the larger piece. Blind fiddlers and beggars who write poetry; characters, dissatisfied or frustrated with something, who stage elaborate, theatrical scenes in order to teach a (usually violent or

Marriage, however, had only one performance; given Carey's popularity, the early demise of this play is intriguing, indeed. For comparative purposes, Henry Fielding—though prolific—frequently had plays that garnered similar levels of public interest. *The Old Debauchees* had seven performances at Drury Lane from June through July 1732, and *The Letter Writers; or, A New Way to Keep a Wife at Home*, five performances throughout the 18th century. Others, to be sure, were more popular: his *Tragedy of Tragedies* had fifty-four performances, a small number of which were fairground shows, from April to December of 1730, and another 25 in 1731, though it was revived less frequently than some of Fielding's other plays later in the century. *Tumble Down Dick; or, Phaeton in the Suds*, enjoyed an initial run of twenty-one performances at the Haymarket in 1736, but was not revived. There are long-running farces and farces with one performance, just as there are tragedies, comedies, and everything in between. Ultimately, there is no material reason to segregate one “form” from the other; there are only ideological reasons.

humiliating) lesson; wily valets and conjurers who orchestrate others' perception—those both on stage and in the audience we inhabit—for their own ends: these are the actors in the internal layers of the game of farce, and we cannot but see them as meaning-makers whose making is effected through breaking.

One of the key terms in what Williams has called “the meaning game” (61) or the “perceptual play” (63) of farce is thus the meaning of aesthetic value, centrally located in the surfaces of the human body. For Williams, farce “plays with the very game structures through which it is expressed” and, therefore, comes close to self-destruction—never fully affirming, never fully denying, but suspended riskily in between (61). It is unsurprising, in this sense, to note that early playwrights could both write farce and critique it in the same breath; farce seems characterized by this kind of tension. In “Play and the Concept of Farce,” Williams is most interested in the ways that farce shows us our expectations and then undermines them by, in Nahum Tate’s language, “extend[ing] beyond Nature and Probability” (106). And yet, we must take care to include the human form in those structures of expectation, because while farce may be a perceptual game, it is also necessarily about the physical, the material, the embodied. Indeed, it is crucial to link the structures of play with the medium through which those structures acquire meaning, for in farce, meaning is experienced first through the flesh. When we start looking closely at farce—when we take as axiomatic the centrality of the body as a locus for meaning-making, however destructive—then it begins to seem as if everything is a questioning of, or a riposte to, some shadowy image of acceptable art, legitimate theater. It becomes, in some sense, about how and to what end we seek to shape or reshape our world. When we begin looking, it becomes increasingly difficult to make any meaningful sort of distinction between

forms representation, acts, performances, meanings. When we start looking less skeptically at farce, we have taken the first step down the rabbit hole.

“Musick, Singing, Mirth, and good Humour have their Center here”

—Benjamin Griffin, *Love in a Sack*

In Griffin’s short afterpiece, *Love in a Sack*, the “here” that occupies the “Center” of all “Musick, Singing, Mirth, and good Humour” (21) is the house of Captain Debonair, played by the popular scarred and one-eyed comedian Jeremy Spiller (“Spiller, James” 223). In performance, *Love in a Sack* binds Griffin—a renowned stutterer, author, and actor—to Captain Debonair, the “disfigured” and “low” comedian Spiller, and both to the space of performance. First performed in 1715 at Lincoln’s Inn Fields—the “Center” of what many contemporary critics tended to view as bad art—this farce dramatizes yet another tale of December-May love: Sir Arthur Addlepate is a rickety old man in desperate, doomed love with Debonair’s beautiful wife, Aurelia. *Love in a Sack* was one of several popular farces staged at Rich’s Lincoln’s Inn Fields, and it enjoyed two benefit nights from June to August 1715, with one more performance in January of the following year. Rich had assembled a wide array of talented physical comedians to anchor his playhouse, and in addition to Spiller’s corporeal presence, *Love in a Sack* features the physical comedy of Hildebrand Bullock (Christopher Bullock’s youngest brother) as Phillip, a wily, rebellious servant. Griffin himself played the old¹³ lover Addlepate, whose unnatural amours constitute the subject of the jests, tricks, and rampant sites of humiliation.

¹³ In this role, Griffin would have been in his mid-thirties; several popular actors of farce were specifically known for their ability to create the illusion of old age (“Griffin, Benjamin” 365; “Hippisley, John” 333). Spiller was particularly renowned for this ability, as Riccoboni’s description of the 26-year-old actor playing a very old man attests (“Spiller, James” 221).

A popular writer of farce, Griffin was “short and slight of build,” a stutterer who excelled in performing addle-pated old men and skirt parts (“Griffin, Benjamin” 365). Sir Arthur Addlepate, who spends a great deal of time exposing his supposedly tired old body to Aurelia and anyone else who dares to question his hearty haleness, falls easily into Mr. Courtly’s plot to embarrass the waning father and marry his daughter. Under Debonair and Courtly’s direction—there, at the “Center” of all “Music, Singing, Mirth, and good Humour”—Aurelia composes a response to Addlepate’s overwrought *billet doux*, encouraging him to visit her in disguise, for she fears “the dangerous Consequences of a Discovery” (16). Philip, Addlepate’s wily footman, convinces the ridiculous lover to impersonate Old Smut, the stuttering chimney sweeper, who is “So exactly like you, that should he see you himself, he’d take you for his Ghost, or Goblin” (35). Here, mimicry reveals itself as itself uncanny; not only do we see the event being orchestrated, but we also see the strange familiarity of each identity as it is successively put on. During the next few scenes, Addlepate’s body is routinely embarrassed. In the midst of changing into more suitable garments, the naked old Addlepate attempts to hide himself in the soot-sack that had been part of his earlier disguise. When Debonair bursts in on the scene with a musket in hand, he spots the “Sack stand[ing] there” and summarily shoots at it. Addlepate, frightened unto death, falls down in the sack, a “dead man,” only to be pulled out and displayed, naked and abused, yet again. Afraid to further disoblige Debonair, the old man grants his daughter to Courtly and is sent home in borrowed clothes. The performers then, bizarrely, “celebrate in Mirth the happy Day that gives to constant Lovers all they can wish to make ’em happy” (60). In this play, the plot is essentially inconsequential, having been done to death in

innumerable other forms; rather, what matters is the space it offers for the increasingly odd performance.

It is significant that the central trick of *Love in a Sack* issues from Jeremy Spiller's court. Spiller's court, here, is at once his character Debonair's country estate, and Lincoln's Inn Fields, the frequently maligned site of John Rich's entrepreneurial entertainments. As the "Center" of "Musick, Singing, Mirth, and good Humour," Spiller's court is represented as the site of benign, good-natured entertainment; indeed, the Bullocks, Spiller, Griffin, and Hippisley, who was trained as a harlequin by Rich, were all engaged at Lincoln's Inn Fields after it opened in 1715. Debonair's country estate, then, also doubles for Lincoln's Inn Fields, where this farce and a great many others had been produced—including Rich's infamous pantomimes. One can only speculate on the degree of self-consciousness intended here; however, we do know, at least anecdotally, that Rich was himself blind in one eye, as was Spiller.¹⁴ That Spiller plays Debonair, a relatively unexpected role for him, suggests not only an overlap between the two "Center[s]" of "Musick, Singing, Mirth, and good Humour," but an overlap that makes visible the problematics of farcical performance.¹⁵

In this self-conscious space of performance, potentially ironic layers of recharacterization and context awareness suture one "Center" to the other, making the game itself part of the spectacle. Spiller, who was not known for his debonair cast, is on one level an unlikely choice

¹⁴ The *Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800* cites an anecdote from *Dramatic Table Talk* concerning Rich's disability: "every body knew that Rich had a great blemish in one of his eyes" ("Rich, John" 350). Spiller had become blind in one eye, likely as a result of contracting smallpox, and as Highfill, *et. al.* note, he "used a squint as part of some characters he played" ("Spiller, James" 223).

¹⁵ While this essay does draw briefly on fairground farces not performed on legitimate stages, it is broadly interested in the politics of aesthetic marginalization; therefore, I have focused on Lincoln's Inn Fields as a consistently farcical site in the heart of the London theatrical economy. Fairground drolls draw on many of the same acts of violent self-consciousness, but deserve their own contextually-specific venue of analysis.

for the Captain. On another level, however, the choice encapsulates the self-conscious, deliberately disjunctive layering paradigmatic of *Love in a Sack*, particularly, and farce more broadly. This disjunction draws our attention to the pleasure we take in being in on the communicative game that plays Debonair off Spiller off Rich: we can see the similarities between Spiller and Rich, the differences between Debonair and Spiller, and the odd resonance between Debonair and Rich, both of whom preside visibly over contested, embodied forms of entertainment. Part of what is central to the performance, then, is the audience's awareness of the play between registers of meaning, a playfulness that coheres in the body of the performer—it is the shared sense of sightlessness between Spiller and Rich that maps the one onto the other. Similarly engaging multiple registers of meaning, Benjamin Griffin is both the author of the piece and the least authoritative of characters represented, Sir Arthur Addlepat: both stutter, drawing attention the way that each inhabits the other. *Love in a Sack* is an icon of farcical praxis—and in Griffin's choice to employ himself as the rickety Sir Arthur Addlepat and Spiller as the Debonair icon of "Mirth and good Humour," it is also an iconoclast of legitimate comedic praxis. Instead of pointing outward, staging the site of moral and cultural reform, it points inward; rather, it points to the surfaces of the bodies that make it happen, to the pleasurable points of contact between stage and audience, to the spectacle of entertainment itself. *Love in a Sack* deliberately reinvents the "Center" of good humor, transmogrifying it into a space of embodied spectacle.

The "Musick, Singing, and Mirth" routinely on display at Rich's Lincoln's Inn Fields is consciously farcical, and this kind of aesthetic invocation permeates both the center and the margins of farce. A number of farces feature popular aesthetic forms at the center of the

performance. Christopher Bullock, for instance—yet another of the threatening sort of actors who also wrote for the stage¹⁶—penned a half-hour afterpiece self-reflexively titled *Adventures of Half an Hour* in which the jealous old Tagg, about to be cuckolded by his wife, and his wily servant, Aminabab, disguise themselves “like Fidlers, and go to [the] Tavern” where Mrs. Tagg and another debonair Captain, her lover, have ensconced themselves in exuberant enjoyment of the evening. Like Griffin, Bullock himself takes up a character in his farce, the wily servant Aminabab. Banking on being “call’d up to ’em” (30), Aminabab and Tagg dress themselves in the garb of street performers and play love ballads for the adulterous dancing company. The figure of the street performer or fiddler is significant in farce, not only because it offers an opportunity for comical violence, but also because it makes reference to an important register of popular performance.

Often blind, disfigured, or lame, as Simon Dickie¹⁷ has shown, the body of the fiddler is indeed abject; however, it is simultaneously a musical, creative body—thus, its treatment is a resonant site for the study of farce. Jevon’s *Devil of a Wife*, like Coffey’s *Devil to Pay*,¹⁸

¹⁶ There are a surprising number of farce-writers who were also farce-actors, *farceurs* in both senses of the word. Anthony Aston was one famous player-poet, as were Christopher Bullock, Colley Cibber, and Benjamin Griffin. Even John Hippisley put pen to paper with the popular *Flora* (1721), a ballad-opera farce of Dogget’s own farce, *The Country Wake* (1696), and the less-successful *Journey to Bristol* (1731). Critics notoriously were embittered by the player-turned-poet, a bitterness visible in excoriations of the player’s decision to ad-lib or add his own words to the poet’s on stage (see, for instance, Steele’s *The Tatler* No. 89). The player taking up the mantle of the poet seems especially problematic when that player is a player of farce who turns to writing farce, as in Bullock’s case. The anonymous “farce” of *The Stage Pretenders* (1720) begins with an exemplary epigram lamenting “those [Deprav’d] Times when senseless Actors write” (titlepage). Featuring Brainless, a “pretended Wit, Actor, and Fatherer of Poetry,” and Capricious, a “Fop, Wit, Poet, and Player” (*dramatis personae*), *The Stage Pretenders* condemns the practice of simultaneously writing and acting. This is a richly suggestive context when considering the trickster’s staging of the trick as play, below.

¹⁷ On the image of the blind fiddler and the violent uses to which his body was put, see Dickie, “Hilarity and Pitilessness in the Mid-Eighteenth Century: English Jestbook Humour.”

¹⁸ Both of these plays are adaptations from earlier sources, notably Sidney’s *Arcadia*, the principal source for Jevon’s *Devil of a Wife; or, A Comical Transformation*—outside of this source, the piece likely was authored collaboratively by Jevon and Shadwell. Coffey’s *Devil to Pay; or, the Wives Metamorphosed* was adapted from Jevon’s and later retooled by Theophilus Cibber. Their popularity suggests the centrality of the magical transformation trope to farce. Coffey’s *Devil to Pay* was his most successful play, and after opening in July of 1731 with only two performances at Drury Lane, it returned in November with 10 performances. It was performed

foregrounds two crucial scenes in which the blind fiddler is repeatedly brutalized by antagonistic characters in the drama—first, by the fanatical, non-conforming parson, and second, by the tyrannical Lady of the house. When Noddy the parson enters, himself profanely “knawing the Leg of a Chicken,” to chastise the revelers for their “lewd, profane, and babylonish Noise,” he is also making a provisional attempt—and one doomed to fail—to delegitimize the scene of farce (8). Through Noddy’s voice, Jevon aligns the fiddler with the revelers via the aegis of his blindness: “Thou blind misleader of the Blind,” he sneers. After “He kicks and beats the blind Fidler,” the revelers in turn “toss Noddy one from another, and beat him.” For turning his brutal attentions on the fiddler, the company turns their attention on him. Later, when the Lady of the house enters, she reinforces this antagonism to the scene of farce, “lay[ing] about her” and “break[ing] the blind Fiddler’s fiddle about his head” (11). Yet, we cannot but acknowledge that Noddy’s and the Lady’s beating of the fiddler is itself farcical. The fiddler seems to be there in part to be beaten—that is, to provide a site at which staged, spectacularized violence, the dominant trope of farce, can be enacted. Significantly, as in the examples noted above, the parson and the Lady are themselves interpellated into the culture of farce they seem bent on evicting, creating a double-bind of referentiality. Farce is aware of its problematic aesthetic status, and on stage, it turns this problematic into scenes of self-flagellation that become, themselves, sites of embodied enjoyment.

The blind fiddler’s abuse at the hands of the parson and the Lady transforms his body into a body double for the farce itself. In *Devil of a Wife*, music and “innocent” mirth are aligned with the protagonists of the piece—Nell, unlike the Lady, “love[s] nothing better” than fiddlers

primarily at Goodman’s Fields and Drury Lane until 1732, when the Haymarket joined in, and 1733, when Lincoln’s Inn Fields/Covent Garden began mounting it. In 1731 alone, it had a total of 31 performances. See note 23, below, for information on the tradition of magical transformation in farce.

(40), and the cobbler Jobson, we remember, is a great singer of ballads. The revelers' entertainments are imagined, in the play, as the rationale for Noddy and Lady Lovemore's antagonism. After Noddy descends with chicken bone in hand, Lady Lovemore violently disagrees with the Butler, who logically argues that "I thought . . . we might be merry once upon a Holiday" (9). Materially aligning the scene of violence with the exorcism of popular, lowbrow entertainments, the Lady proclaims, "All dancing is whorish," then "lugs" the chambermaid as she tries silently to slip away. That Jevon himself was a dancing master—as Griffin and Bullock were writers as well as actors of farce—illuminates the significance of these scenes. Far from standing chastely outside the farce, the Lady and her parson become wholly mired in it. Balladry and fiddling, both notable tropes in farce, thus serve a dual purpose of both entertainment and metatheatricality.

Staging the Walking Dead: Carey's *Hanging and Marriage*

The metonymic relationship, in farce, between popular entertainment and the spectacle of the body hovering impossibly between life and death is realized extravagantly in Henry Carey's *Hanging and Marriage; or, The Dead-Man's Wedding*. In the play, Richard Stubble has been preempted in his desire to marry Betty Gizzard by another suitor, Solomon Squeak. He takes forceful action against Squeak, brutalizing him and those who stand in his way. Aware that he will not get Betty Gizzard to marry him without taking extreme measures, he contrives a plot to fake his own death by suicide. With Gizzard's "Posse" on his tail, he flees to his mother's house and sits down to write his suicide note in doggerel verse. With the help of his "Londonshire"-educated cousin, Jerry, Stubble lays himself out on a table with a rope around his neck, plays dead, and waits for the neighbors to find his note. In it, he vows to come back as a ghost if his

dead body is not, with all due form and ceremony, first married to Betty Gizzard. The country folk are, sensibly, horrified—but Jerry convinces them that it is the only thing to be done. Stubble, with the rope still about his neck¹⁹ and his body held up by two comrades, is married to Betty—upon which Stubble summarily “comes back to life,” to the utter astonishment of all. He is now safely married and the wedding celebrations can begin. In *Hanging and Marriage*, the humor derives from an almost absurdly literal adherence to the proverbial expression “hanging and marriage go by destiny.” That the couple are married when one is presumed dead parodies the characteristic comic conventions, emptying them of their meaning.²⁰ The plot is relatively simple, and the energy derives, as is typical of physical theater, from the performance itself. Stubble was played, again, by Jeremy Spiller, who specialized also in playing very old men—though he himself was not excessively aged. Carey’s stage directions emphasize the improvisational work the actors are to do, and the entire piece is written in excruciatingly contorted, improper English.

The whole of the farce leads up to, and from, the fraudulent death scene and the marriage—apparently suggesting the restoration of order, but in fact only further bracketing or quoting it as a trope—that comes out of it. The play’s overwhelming interest in the sheer spectacle of death is heightened by several references to the farce of Stubble’s suicide as entertainment. After news of Stubble’s suicide has been hawked by Stubble’s Mother, who runs through the village crying and roaring, a crowd gathers at the scene much like a crowd gathered to see some rare exhibition at a fair. One man in the crowd comments that Stubble “did dance main well”

¹⁹ After Betty is pronounced Mrs. Stubble, the stage directions indicate that Spiller “Pull[s] off his Halter,” indicating that he had been wearing the noose all the while (27).

²⁰ In traditional understandings of the genre of comedy, epitomized by Northrop Frye’s work, the concluding convention of marriage signifies the “point when a new society is crystallized” (72). “Irrational” elements governing the chaos of the comedy dissolve in the construction of this new, more self-aware collective (118). While many farces end with a marriage, it is rarely treated in an unequivocal manner.

(18), using the colloquial expression “to dance” for “to hang at the end of a rope.” While the suicide note is being read by Gizzard, another spectator notices the similarity between Stubble’s post-mortem plot and a popular “Show” apparently then in performance: “Ay, just as Bateman fot away the Mon’s Wife i’th’ Show” (22). Most tellingly, however, the news of this spectacle has quickly traveled to another part of the countryside. In a scene set apart from the larger body of the play, two country fellows describe the event as a rare opportunity for entertainment: “Say ye so! Adod we’ll go see’t then; I did never see a dead Man married i’ my born Days afore!— Come along, woot?” (25). Setting this moment of discovery apart emphasizes the effect, and the audience is encouraged to view the dead man’s wedding as a mode of popular, macabre performance, something that, in the language of spectacular and novel entertainment, has never been seen before. They proceed to the fairground, where Stubble’s lolling, scarred, and one-eyed body is married to the blushing Betty. After Stubble revives, and after the confusion has passed, the wedding entertainments begin; Mother Stubble cries that “the Fiddlers are come, the Fiddlers are come!” (30). In a bizarre parody of Stubble’s own “dance,” the village people dance to the fiddlers’ music because, as Mother Stubble poetically notes, “we mun be merry now against the World.”

The contrast in the play between Stubble and Jerry, the latter educated in London and a student of a different kind of poetry, is telling. Carey takes great care to differentiate the language that Jerry speaks from that of the remaining cast, a difference that highlights the thematic significance of language, education, and cultural location. The suicide note that Stubble pens is written in poetic form, and though it is far from poetically opaque, the country folk seem to require Jerry’s services as an explicator. Explaining the sense of the suicide note in language

virtually identical to that in the “Varses,” Jerry is at once a superior figure in the joke, on the side of the audience, and an instrument in Stubble’s plan. His cultural location in the play is much like that of the London audience, transforming him into a surrogate, within the play, for the audience beyond. At this point, he seems clearly to play a role that enables the audience to confirm its difference from the provincial folk parodied. During the wedding celebrations, when Jerry is prevailed upon to sing a song, he “runs a Division in Italian” instead of the ballad tunes expected by the country folk. Stubble chastises his choice: “Naw, Cousin, I do not mean an uproar Song; I hates your Outlandshire ’Talian haw haw Stuff; you were us’d to have a power of joaking Songs, Cousin; sing us an English Song, do, that we mun all understand” (30). Here, Stubble’s chastisement of his cousin is virtually equivalent to the kind of critique writers like Addison were leveling against imported operatic fare sung in languages other than English.²¹ The party line in this discourse is that good English poetry was being tossed aside like rubbish in favor of, as Leonard Welsted suggests in “A Prologue Occasion’d by the Revival of a Play of Shakespeare,” “foreign modes and foreign nonsense,” on the one hand, and “low provincial Drolls,” on the other (77). To continue in Welsted’s vein, the cultural power of a small group of elites is being shamelessly democratized: “[C]rowds . . . run” to a series of “capers in the Pit,” forcing critics to, absurdly, judge them (78). Italian opera and French tumblers—“Alien Toys” that nurse a “sickly Taste”—force “antient sense [to] quit the field” in favor of nonsense, often coded as continental effeminacy.²² Thus, Stubble becomes in some measure a stand-in for the

²¹ In *The Spectator* No. 18, for instance, Addison wonders why the English “sit together like an Audience of Foreigners in their own Country [. . .] to hear whole Plays acted before them in a Tongue which they did not understand” (1: 79). For a good treatment of the relationship between Italian opera and English nationalism, see Yadav’s *Before the Empire of English: Literature, Provinciality, and Nationalism in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. All subsequent citations of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* are drawn from Donald Bond’s multivolume Oxford editions.

²² Steele’s *Tatler* No. 99 discusses the problematic at stake when judgment is democratized by popular entertainment: “Every one can Judge of the Danger of the Fellow on the Ladder, and his Activity in coming down

critics touting English drama—he critiques his cousin in the same language of the elite, showing its arbitrary availability to all; however, he is at the same time a representative of the “provincial Drolls,” like *Hanging and Marriage* and the spectacle of the dead-man’s wedding within. That his critique is leveled in provincial dialect only emphasizes these slippages. The “English Song[s]” are aligned with the kind of farcical spectacle that Stubble has himself orchestrated, and Jeremy Spiller’s *Stubble* is clearly the central mover in this play: it is his plot that forms the substance of the farce and his choice of entertainments, that “we mun all understand,” which closes the play—the “Song,” as the subtitle notes, that “will please every Body” (titlepage). Thus, the audience is suddenly put into an uncomfortable position. No longer is Jerry an uncompromised surrogate; instead, we find ourselves seeing events through Stubble’s eyes. *Hanging and Marriage* makes an argument explicitly in favor of the kinds of entertainments Stubble orchestrates, though in the self-referentialities of farce, such arguments are never unambiguous. There is a deep aesthetic ambivalence hovering about Carey’s farce in response to those kinds of entertainments, and it is perhaps the reason this play received only one night’s performance. After all, who wants to pay to see themselves parodied on stage, especially if the expectation were otherwise?

Counterfeit Theater: The Trickster and the Stage Manager

The self-conscious enactment of the farce is bound up with ridiculous disguise and deliberate counterfeiting, a form of dissembling that is visible to all as dissembling. In *The Cheats of Scapin*, the trickster commandeers the services of “a Fellow to—canst thou not counterfeit a roaring Bully of Alsatia?—Stalk —look big—very well. Follow me, I have Ways to safe; but very few are Judges of the Distress of an Hero in a Play . . .” (2: 109). On the effeminacy associated with continental imports, see Alan Sikes, “‘Snip Snip Here, Snip Snip There, and a Couple of Tra La Las:’ The Castrato and the Nature of Sexual Difference” and especially Thomas McGeary, “Gendering Opera: Italian Opera as the Feminine Other in Britain, 1700-42.”

disguise thy Voice and Countenance” (202). Here, we see the mask being planned out and implemented; a bit later, the fellow, Shift, enters, “disguised like a Bully,” and proceeds to threaten and rain hostility down upon old man Gripe (212). Scapin himself “counterfeits a Welshman” (221), a “Lancashire Dialect” (222), an “Irish Tone,” a “hoarse Seaman’s Voice” (223), and “broken French-English” (224). He then, in an imitative coup, “acts a number of ’em together” (224). A fairground droll called *The Bilker Bilk’d* is professedly a play of dissembling; from the title, to the plot, to the central characters’ names—Vizard and Mixum—the droll foregrounds the spectacle of the trick on all levels. When Mixum, the titular bilker bilk’d, takes Vizard’s twenty pound note to the bank, he is arrested for counterfeiting—here, Vizard’s ability to disguise extends to things, and Mixum is unable even to discern real banknotes from coined. Similarly, Centlivre’s *A Bickerstaff’s Burying* turns on Mrs. Take-it of Drury Lane’s theatrical prehistory; she is well-versed in the ways of imitation, and her dissembling prevails while the Emir, who is far out of his league in this respect, cannot maintain his part. *The Humours of Purgatory*, which had three performances at Lincoln’s Inn Fields in April of 1716 and a revival in 1745 and 1748, similarly turns on mimetic ability—both Don Lopez’ feigned death and Don Silvio’s drama of one-upmanship. Stage directions routinely point out the drama’s awareness of its own performative status, its acted-ness; in *The Witchcraft of Love*, Constant “takes out a Handkerchief, and seems to weep” (38).

Charles Johnson’s *Love in a Chest* (1710), which sadly had only one performance at the Queen’s Theatre, May 1, 1710, privileges disguise, of course, but goes one step further, as farce is wont to do. Citing the old-lover/young maid trope yet again and adding a layer of protestant satire on Spanish popery, *Love in a Chest* centers on several mismatched marriages and love

triangles. The moral of the story—if moral there is—nominally suggests that old men have no right to “make Love: ’Tis sending a Challenge when a Man has lost the use of his Limbs” (69). The young Theresa, in love with Sebastian, is constantly interrupted in her romance by the aged Fascinetti, who obliviously seeks her attentions. Meanwhile, Fascinetti’s wife, Casseta, is fed up with her marriage to “a Dead Palsey” (63), and comforts herself in the equally-married Carpegna. Fascinetti’s body, routinely humiliated and embarrassed, is the chief site of the play’s farce—he is abused by Sebastian, Theresa, his own wife, and her lover in an array of ridiculous moments. The “old Polecat” (49) has no ingenuity when it comes to his disguises, choosing to appear in the same identity taken by Theresa’s earlier lover, Sebastian, because “that’s a shape I know she likes—” (58). Theresa, in fact, uses the old man’s lack of ingenuity to turn the tables on him, thrusting him into a chest and diverting her father’s attention away from Sebastian. His repetition of the disguise enables the plot and, in part, legitimates the old man’s farcical humiliation. After being thrust into the chest to avoid Theresa’s father’s ire, Fascinetti is forced to listen to his wife make love to another amidst a storm of verbal humiliation. If he were better at disguising his identity, his stay in the trunk would not have served the purpose it needed to. The play suggests that his aging body—which he farcically displays, saying, “Impotent! Look here, here are Muscles, here are Sinews, here’s a Leg as firm as Brawn [and] a Chine broad and sappy” (49)—is an analogue to his lack of facility with disguise, legitimating his abuse. Yet, we should not forget that Fascinetti, played by the popular comedian Pinkethman, made his career of seeming to take (and give) such abuse, especially paired with the senior Bullock, who played Carpegna. As a pairing, they were greatly admired by Richard Steele, who in his *Tatler* No. 7, found their way of “bearing a beating” so natural and proper that “one cannot help wishing the

whip in one's own hand, so richly does he seem to deserve his chastisement" (1: 68). His apparent lack of facility with his disguise, like his foolishness, are themselves visible acts that highlight theatrical skill—and reveal the interests at play in early critiques of farce.

Skill at dissembling, in its turn, is another way of speaking of the ability to manipulate the very stuff of appearance and representation.²³ The mountebank, for instance, is one who mounts a bench, a makeshift stage, to hawk his physick, which is a nostrum of performance and show. While the mountebank's art, like his physick, is associated with the delusions of quackery, it is also, in farce, routinely galvanized as a site of creativity.²⁴ Among the practitioners of problematic kinds of art that populate the world of farce, then, are conjurers, blind fiddlers, ballad singers, mountebanks and more—a whole range of tricksters, and those on

²³ While this essay is not primarily interested in exploring fully the trope of magical transformation, it is an important thread to the central concerns of farce and its self-referentiality. It is not surprising that some of the most popular and enduring farces on the early stage are those featuring the trope of magical (or rather, "magical") transformation. The role of the Doctor in farce extends from *commedia* conjurers and Prospero-like characters to Ravenscroft's anatomists and beyond. Within this broad expanse of character, however, the Doctors of farce find their most comfortable role in the range of plays that foreground their ability to affect the embodied experience of the world, like the itinerant Doctors/conjurors in Cockain's *Trappolin Suppos'd a Prince*, Tate's *A Duke and No Duke*, Coffey's *Devil to Pay*, the competing *Cobbler of Preston* plays by Johnson and Bullock, and a whole host of similar pieces from the improvisational world of *commedia*, Molière, and more. Jevon's popular *Devil of a Wife*—like the theatrical tradition of magical transformation plays to which it belongs—explicitly aligns the manipulation of perception with the performance of the farce. In each case, the characters on stage, as well as the audience enjoying the spectacle, are drawn into a space in which one overlays the other. In an overwhelming number, the moment of magical transformation is described deliberately as a kind of performance; in Tate's *Duke and No Duke*, the Trappolin character describes Mago's magical music as the product of "airy Fiddlers" (8). Calling forth a chair from the nether regions of the stage, Mago commands the buffoon to sit, and become audience to "the wonders of my Art" (9). Trappolin is both an actor in and an audience for the conjurer's play. In Jevon's piece, the spirits Nadir and Absihog agree to "*perform*" "[a]ll *this Night*" the commands of the Doctor-cum-Conjurer (16, italics added). Explicitly aligning the evening's entertainment with the characters' delusional belief in their transformation, the Doctor orders his spirits to craft a "Delusion . . . so strong, / That none shall know the Right from Wrong" (16), a fascinating moment that bears examination. Both an itinerant physician and a purveyor of the dark arts, the Doctor is an ambiguous but telling character: it is his skill that provides the audience with the spectacular entertainment it expects. Further, because the Doctor is virtually synonymous with the Quack—as Roy Porter has argued (see note, below), the line between the two was itself one of appearance—his appearance in farce draws attention to the body eternally subject to epistemological and ontological uncertainty.

²⁴ Roy Porter's work on quacks and quackery in the eighteenth century is illuminating. Not only are mountebanks and other itinerant healers routinely associated with theatricality, but the marginalization of the mountebank is itself performative, based less on actual knowledge or efficacy and more on the professionalization of the medical classes, which depended upon an exclusionary characterization of the quack as over-selling. See Porter, *Quacks: Fakery and Charlatans in English Medicine*.

whom an equally wide variety of tricks are played. The harlequins and wily servants, the working class cobblers and woodcutters and country folk who construct elaborate plots to achieve their ends are analogues to the Doctor, who slips easily between quack, mountebank, physician, and conjurer. *The Cheats of Scapin* may have been originated by others, but Scapin is the real artist in each permutation. The farce, in Otway's version, is Scapin's "Composition," and his machinations, a net: "So there's one dispatch'd; I must now find out Gripe: He's here; how Heav'n brings 'em into my Nets one after another!" (213). As Vizard in *The Bilker Bilk'd* also describes, the trick is his art form. After cunningly exchanging Mixum's gold bowl for a fish, Vizard reasons: "I must have my Salmon again, I cannot afford this old Rogue so nice a Bit, 'twill season my Punch rarely. Now for a Master-piece . . ." (16).

As the manager of the piece, the trickster often explicitly directs his players. In Griffin's *Love in a Sack*, Addlepat's servant Philip initiates the ensuing humiliation of the old lover by directing Courtly in his role: "I would have you deliver the Letter to her your self, and together with the Captain, lay a Plot to bring the old Man disguis'd into the House, there surprize him in the Height of his Expectation, and threaten him with Blood, Death and Destruction . . ." (19). Philip seems to take special interest in the more purely farcical elements of this plot, encouraging Courtly and Debonair to "bait [Sir Arthur] a little to perplex him, pretending to take him for old Smut the Chimney-Sweeper" (40). To ensure that his plot is successful, Philip helps Addlepat get into character, advising the old man to "cry Sweep, sweep . . . and stammer as [Old Smut] do's"—and, of course, as the author does (36). *Hanging and Marriage; or The Dead Man's Wedding* is entirely directed by Richard Stubble's contrivances, and he takes his role as manager

very seriously. Describing his to his cousin Jerry and the few townfolk assembled in his Mother's house, Stubble directs their performances:

Cousin, you mun manage tack a little for me; for I mun be dead, you know; but howsom'd ever, I can give ye Devise how to go on for all that. Sflesh! I mun haste, and hang my self out o'th' way, fore Constables comes, or all will be mar'd. Mother, do thee run out amongst Neighbours, and make a cursed bawling, as you did e'en now, and tell Folks as how I be hang'd; d'ye hear? (16)

After directing his actors in their roles, Stubble effects his own suicide while continuing to block: "Here, come, mind what thee beest about; set a Knife, woot So, now do thee cut this Cord, and tie half of it athwart yon same Beam, mean whilst I'll tie this'n about my Neck. [They do so" (17). After arranging himself "a top o' this Table, as thof 'so be I was dead," he commands Jerry to "say, you cut me down," and "keep Folks from coming anear me, whatsom'dever ye do."

And for the *pièce de résistance*, Jerry is to "sily" drop Stubble's suicide note and "so let somebody find 'em as it were accidentally" (17). *Hanging and Marriage*, like *Devil of a Wife*, contains a great deal of stage direction, but the stage direction here is such that the actors are given virtually free rein—and the audience is expected to see the direction as such. Carey not only gives the actors the freedom to direct themselves, unsurprising when we note that, as Bentley has argued, "farce is the quintessence of theatre," for it is acted, not written (251). He also ensures that the audience sees him relinquishing control, making that relinquishing a deliberate act; Stubble's language, printed on the page, can only appear emaciated or incomplete, unless we imagine bodies playing these roles; when we do, it points emphatically to its embodied source. More than a poet's art, farce is the actor's—but, as we have seen, many authors of farce

are also players of farce. The acted-ness of farce, then, is not solely a product of performance; rather, it emerges most clearly at the borders of that dialectic between text and body, convention and violation, expected and unexpected.

In Benjamin Griffin's *The Humours of Purgatory* (1716), we are reminded that we can play tricks on ourselves, as well as on others. Indeed, when we go to the playhouse we are soliciting that curious state of double-consciousness, which, if we take it seriously, can be dangerous—dramatizing, as it does, the very real extent to which we are vulnerable to our delusions. Don Silvio's role is perhaps most representative of the kind of directorial power commanded by the trickster figure. Don Lopez, an aged, miserly hypochondriac on the verge, as he thinks, of his "Grand Climacterical" (2), has vowed to disinherit his daughter, Constantia, and leave his estate to the Church. Lopez' family is at wit's end; Don Silvio, Constantia's lover, contrives a plot to reform the old man by using his "very dreadful Species" (14) of delusion against him. Ultimately, Lopez convinces himself that he is dead, and so Silvio has him put into a coffin, paraded through town, and finally carried back to his darkened home where the scene has been set for the game at hand. Under Silvio's direction, all the family and servants have dressed as "Ghosts" (34) to convince Lopez that he is in purgatory, where he will spend the rest of his afterlife in mirth, drink, and good entertainment. Various characters come in and dance for him; he drinks wine from grapes grown on the banks of the River Acheron. After this performance, Lopez is left, alone, in the darkened room, and when a servant enters to check on his health, he is shocked to find that, instead of dead, he has been merely indulging his "Roving . . . Fancy in a Dream" for the past two hours (46). Lopez describes *The Humours of Purgatory* as

a “Vision” in which he learned that Constantia is indeed dutiful, loving, and deserving of Silvio’s hand in marriage; as is expected, the piece ends happily.

As the director of Don Lopez’ “Vision,” Silvio invites Constantia and Julia to “humour him, and endeavour to work upon him by fair Means” (21). When reason—the “fair Means” by which Lopez’ wife and daughter are to “work upon him”—fails, Silvio turns to the hypochondriac’s own “Frenzy,” hoping that he will “wear of” it:

let us pretend to bury him, and see if that won’t alter his Resolution; persuade him that he’s in Purgatory, and that he must eat and drink there Let us convey him into some dark Room: My self and the whole Family will persuade him that we are Ghosts, and he must do as we do, eat, drink, and be merry. (21)

Silvio, Julia, and Constantia engage a coffin for the old man’s undead body; he is deposited there and carried with all pomp and circumstance through the streets, only to be returned to his own home, the “Stage made dark” for the farce (32). Lopez’ family and friends extravagantly—and fraudulently—mourn his passing and leave him to his entertainment. After the mourners leave, the music strikes up: “Don Lopez rises, and looks about him. Enter the Dancers, Lopez observing ’em all the while. The Dance ended, enter Diego and Jaccomo like Ghosts, with a Table, Chairs, Wine; Lopez observes ’em, they go off” (34). Here, the music works to signal Lopez’ transition from reality to the underworld of his “Roving . . . Fancy;” disguised as ghosts, the servants Diego and Jaccomo change out the stage furniture, all the while Lopez, “never . . . so amaz’d in [his] Life,” sits in his coffin and watches the stage transform.

Theatricality, at this point, is closely associated with the “other World” of Lopez’ imagination (35). Continuing the sensibility of transition, Silvio, Julia, and Constantia—plus

“one to sing”—enter, “all dress’d like Ghosts,” and describe the liminal space that Lopez finds himself in as one of eternal mirth, entertainment, and good cheer. This liminal space, in fact, is much like the space of farce itself, around which death, disease, and disfigurement loom. When the old hypochondriac falls asleep after gorging himself on several glasses of “Heavenly Free-cost,” Diego and Jaccomo carry off the stage furniture and the principal actors become the audience for Lopez’ therapy:

let us watch his Slumbers at a small Distance, and expect the Consequences. If he has but Reason enough left to make Reflection on his own Absurdities, it may prove an absolute Cure for his Melancholy, and reconcile him once again to Life and his Family. (44)

As the manager of the farce, Silvio is “a Person consummate in the Art of Physick” (15), and his farce, Lopez’ “absolute Cure.” Yet, this “absolute Cure” is also a product of Lopez’ remaining “Reason.” Reflecting on his two hours’ dream, Lopez’ rationalizes his frenzy as a “Vision.” Impossibly, the farce is both dreamt of and real, frenzy and fact, chimerical and concrete. While the piece seems to end tidily, that very tidiness only emphasizes that there is more at stake in play than in narrative end.

Conclusion: Farce and the “Art of Poetry”

And we defy the sharpest Sight,
E’er to distinguish which is Right (26)

—The Doctor, speaking of his performance in *The Devil of a Wife*

The core of farce is profoundly mobile. Fraudulence, counterfeiting, dissembling, and acting: this is the stuff of farce, and its bodies, those at play in it. These plays are replete with

characters whose bodies fully inhabit the space of farce, with actors whose bodies and roles give dimension to that space. The chest, the trunk, the sack, coffin, cellar, and well: these are all spaces where the bodies that inhabit them are disarticulated, beaten, and humiliated, then exposed as bodies without which, living would not be possible. These spaces, and the flesh that inhabits them, speak power to the fallibilities, pains, and even moments of sheer magic that come with being embodied. The anatomy theatre and the wine cellar, the magical island of Cosgar and the empty “Desart” in which Trappolin wanders—these spaces, too, duplicate the stage itself. On the farcical stage, whether that stage be within or without the confines of the theater proper, the act of being embodied becomes a way of manipulating the common denominators of being in the world.

The confusions born of the body and its materiality become, in farce, spectacular sites of creativity. Locating itself at the lower ends of the aesthetic hierarchy—or perhaps embracing a marginalization imposed from without—farce proliferates the site of creativity, giving value and depth to the kinds of creativity that might otherwise lack it, to those that are typically perceived as lacking it. The blind fiddlers and the fraudulently mad disseminators of opera parts, the tricksters both within and without the pale of poverty, the artists of the mechanical and the mechanics of artistry: when the body becomes the site of creativity, then everybody has, at least potentially, access to it. As the Third Servant in Aaron Hill’s popular farce *The Walking Statue; or, The Devil in the Wine Cellar* (1710)²⁵ asks of Thomas, the Second Servant, “how can a Fellow without Learning . . . be Master of that feeling, touching Way, that the Poets talk of?”

²⁵ Hill’s *The Walking Statue* was a hit on the eighteenth-century stage. After its January 1710 opening at Drury Lane, it ran pretty consistently through February and inconsistently through May. From 1710 until 1737, it had 77 performances, according to *The London Stage*.

(20). Thomas, the footman-turned-songster and poet, turns the Third Servant's point on its head—for, according to him, it would indeed have a head:

Pugh! Fool! the Art of Poetry is the Gift of Nature, and 'twou'd be no new Thing to tell the World, that there's many a Footman can touch, and move, and feel, and stir up the Passions with the best Poet in Christendom. But listen to the Song Boys (20)

If creativity is about feeling, farce says, then everybody—both Some Body and No Body of popular fame—has the potential to “touch, and move, and feel, and stir up the Passions.” In farce, this is often the exaggerated touching that quickly becomes beating, the exaggerated feeling that quickly becomes hypochondriac or inebriate delusions. The creativity of farce is located in the body, in the exploration of its limits and the ways we can escape those limits. By thematizing and spectacularizing its brand of creativity, farce on the early eighteenth-century stage suggests, with the Second Servant, that “poetry” is a realm in which everyone holds citizenship precisely because we all have bodies capable of remaking the inhabited world.

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