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The Salting Down of Gertrude: Transgression and Preservation in Three Early German Carnival Plays

The purpose of this article is twofold. First, it introduces a subgenre of the German carnival play to a wider audience by providing editions and translations of three fifteenth-century Bavarian texts on the theme of preserving unmarried women during lent by packing them in salt. Second, it discusses the historical context focusing on ways in which modern notions of the 'carnivalesque' as a putative agent for positive social transformation are themselves subverted by the conservative nature of much late medieval comedy. Paradoxically, what begins as anti-authoritarian licence ends in the affirmation of a patriarchal status quo that regards the unmarried female body as a commodity preserved for future male delectation.

The purpose of this article is twofold. First, it introduces a little-studied subgenre of the German carnival play (*Fastnachtspiel*) to a wider audience by providing a new edition of three anonymous performance texts from a fifteenth-century Bavarian manuscript together with original translations for English-speaking readers. Second, it offers a discussion of the texts in terms of their historical and cultural context with particular attention to ways in which twenty-first century notions of 'transgression' as a force for positive social change are themselves subverted by the essentially conservative nature of much late medieval comedy. Under the guise of merry carnival hijinks, the plays considered here nevertheless treat unmarried women quite literally as leftover meat, slightly undesirable because of their advanced shelf life but nevertheless still edible when properly preserved from spoilage for future delectation. The essay argues that these texts present a paradox that might well go unseen by contemporary theatre historians enthralled by the undeniable appeal of the concept of the 'carnivalesque' as both festive entertainment and as a putative agent for social transformation. What apparently begins as uninhibited, anti-authoritarian licence and the celebration of sheer carnality ends

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in the affirmation of an established patriarchy that regards the female body as a valuable commodity to be disciplined, preserved, and exchanged as part of the annual post-paschal resumption of the status quo.

Salting Down Virginity: The Texts

The three brief performance texts under present consideration all deal with the conceit of how unmarried young men should deal with unmarried young women during lent, the forty-day period of abstinence and penance preceding Easter during which neither the marriage ceremony nor conjugal relations between married spouses were permitted.[1] All three texts date from the mid-fifteenth century and were composed in northern Bavaria, almost certainly in the imperial free city of Nuremberg, a bustling urban centre famous even in its own day for its boisterous 'c carnival' celebrations and theatrics. In terms of genre, the manuscript itself holding all three texts (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, cgm 714) explicitly designates them as 'c carnival' plays (*vasnacht* or *Vasnacht Spil*) both in its table of contents and in the rubricated titles that precede each piece. In an effort to shame women who had failed to find husbands during the preceding year and to discipline their sexual desire until it could be legitimized by matrimony after lent, the plays depict the process of 'salting down' virgins who had been 'left behind' as a way to preserve them for future consumption by young males. In order to satisfy male desire in the weeks after Easter, a sexually voracious female's 'cock-hunger' and 'night-hunger' must be neutralized by being packed in salt like common stockfish until a priest can rinse the coating off to make her delectable again.

Two of our play texts are apparently acaudal fragments running to twenty-two lines each, while the third, a complete script for five speakers, consists of a mere thirty lines. As is typical of many genres of popular verse, the composition of all three features loose four-stress rhyming couplets, the form of doggerel known as *Knittelvers.* Moreover, all three pieces are examples of the late medieval German *Reihenspiel* ('sequence-play'), a virtually plotless presentational form of 'c carnival' entertainment in which speakers step forth one at a time in order to deliver monologues on a given topic.[2] Our texts adhere to the standard format for such performances: a speaker interrupts the general revelry in an inn by greeting the landlord and announcing the theme of what is to follow, the individual players step forward one after another to deliver their humorous and often bawdy comments, and a spokesman for the group concludes the action by thanking the host, releasing the audience to resume its gustatory pleasures, and leading the cast to the next available venue. Obviously, the loose structure of such works allowed

them to be shortened or lengthened at will depending on the number of speakers available and the amount of time one was willing to invest in diverting the audience from its erstwhile pursuits, which perhaps accounts for the truncated nature of our first two examples. Although some *Reihenspiele* feature a sequence of speakers who engage in dialogue with a central figure, our three texts are of the more common type wherein the actors ignore one another in order to interact directly with the audience instead.

The Salting Down of Gertrude for Carnival (*Der Gerdrawt einsalczen vasnacht*) preserves the opening two speeches of what must have been a somewhat longer *Reihenspiel.* The first speaker addresses the innkeeper whose establishment is the venue for the performance, complaining that he is responsible for failing to find young Gertrude a husband 'who would have rolled around in bed with her'. In order to preserve her virginity intact, the speaker must therefore bed her down in a layer of salt like a filleted fish (food that, paradoxically, could be consumed during the period of lenten abstinence from meat). The second speaker also criticizes the landlord for his failure to marry off the girl and to domesticate her properly, lest she come to resemble a hungry baby bird with unwholesome instinctual cravings. In a mixed agricultural metaphor, he concludes that Gertrude must be salted down until the yoke (of matrimony) can be hung upon her.

The Carnival [Play] on the Salting Down of Virginity (*Dye vasnacht vom maigtum Einsalczen*) closely parallels its predecessor in the manuscript, although its language is more unapologetically vulgar (dare one say, 'saltier'?) than that of its counterpart. The first speaker rebukes the innkeeper for failing to marry off all the young virgins 'who suffer under their virginity'. Since they have not been yoked to a husband, he asserts that 'they'll get all moldy down in their cracks'. Consequently, they must be preserved in salt until such time as (in a mixed metaphor whose sexual innuendo is painfully obvious) their open cracks (*kerben*) can be firmly fastened with a clinch-nail (*pruchnagel*). The second speaker upbraids the landlord for maintaining an unmarried servant girl who is suffering from 'cock-hunger' (*zerßigen hunger*) and who has already enjoyed a young man's explorations 'down below her belly'. Because of her impatience to satisfy her sexual desires, he states that she must be salted down in order to relieve her of her 'night-hunger' (*nachthunger*).

The final work of this type, *A Salting Down for Carnival* (*Ain Einsalczen Vasnacht*), also opens with a typical greeting to the innkeeper and his wife. As the season of 'c carnival' comes to a close, still the question remains of what to do with all the desirable maidens who have eschewed matrimony throughout the previous year. The second speaker promises the familiar remedy of salting

the women down in a tub, while the third speaker reassures them that they will be restored by a priest who will duly rinse them off after the period of lenten abstinence.[3] The fourth player urges the maidens to adorn themselves beautifully at Easter and not be shy around their suitors which, the speaker slyly hints, might well include himself. The performance closes with an epilogue in which the 'Crier' promises to resume playing after a lenten hiatus spent strolling through the gardens. Unmarried women will thus be preserved in salt, while gentlemen bachelors will freely enjoy the pleasures of springtime until such time as the maidens might be rinsed, revived, and reavailable.

As might well be expected of plays performed in alehouses on the eve of the season of alimentary and connubial abstinence, all three works simply equate food with sex. The dominant image, of course, is that of preserving unmarried maidens like salted fish, but the texts artfully extend their shared central conceit in several different ways. In *The Salting Down of Gertrude,* for example, the speaker chides the innkeeper for having failed to tame Gertrude's sexual cravings by feeding her 'like the little birds / that gape their beaks wide open and crave many things / that would not be right for the good girl to have' (ll 18–20). In our second play, the speaker promises to salt down unclaimed virgins so they won't 'spoil' or 'get all moldy down in their cracks' (ll 5–6). His recipe means to neutralize unacceptable female desires, their 'cock-hunger' (l 13) and 'night-hunger' (l 22). The second speaker of our third play, *A Salting Down for Carnival,* asserts that there is no need for the landlord to flavour the men's soup with lard since he and his companions will soon have their own supply of tasty maidens salted down for them in a tub (ll 7–12). If the women should feel at all anxious about being subjected to this manner of preservation, the third speaker assures them that it is only a temporary measure until after Easter, at which time 'we'll lend each of you a priest / to bless your flatcakes for you / and rinse the salt off you again, / so that a young fellow will be glad to take you' (ll 15–18). In short, men regard women as toothsome but perishable comestibles. They quiet female hunger, while they whet male appetite in anticipation of the delectable sustenance that awaits the marriageable journeymen after Easter.

Transgression and Preservation in the Early German Carnival Play

The season of carnival or shrovetide (in modern German *Fastnacht* or *Fasching,* in modern French *Mardi gras*) has long been understood as the period of dietary and sexual license leading up to the forty days of lenten penance, prayer, almsgiving, and fasting prescribed by the Christian liturgical calendar.[4] The

generally accepted etymology of the term 'carnival' from the Latin *carnem levare* ('to put away flesh-meat') points not only to the literal practice of abstaining from the consumption of meat but also to the larger sense of mortifying one's own flesh in prepartion for holy week by disciplining all of one's carnal desires. 'C carnival', then, anticipates and in a sense parodies the period of lenten self-denial by temporarily suspending the usual norms governing personal and social behaviour. Tracing its roots back to the Roman festival of Saturnalia, carnival celebrates precisely the bodily functions, needs, and desires that lent requires to be put aside. It follows that the period revels in licence, status inversion, and a general disregard of the rules defining the body and its instinctual pleasures; that is to say, the decorum (including taboos) normally associated with food, drink, sex, and violence.[5] Lent requires abstinence from all corporal pleasures, including the consecration of marriages and all conjugal relations during the so-called *tempus clausum,* while carnival mocks all aspirations to dietary moderation and sexual renunciation. The contrast between the disinhibited indulgence of the tavern and the strict austerity of the church is nowhere made more apparent than in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's famous 1559 painting, 'The Battle between Carnival and Lent'.[6] To some observers, the combat seems to be an unequal one inasmuch as the forces of carnival, led by a corpulent jouster riding upon a huge cask of ale and armed with a pig's head and sausages on a spit, appear certain to overwhelm the outnumbered followers of an emaciated lent, seated upon a flimsy toy cart pulled by a monk and a nun and nourished on meager rations of mussels, pretzels, and waffles. Others see the work as an allegory of the unresolved conflict between Lutherans and Catholics.[7] A more balanced view eschews one-sided triumphalist notions by undertstanding the painting as an absurd and quasi-theatrical spectacle urging the viewer to adopt the path of moderation between the two extremes of indulgence and asceticism.[8]

Mikhail Bakhtin introduced the notions of carnival and the carnivalesque to the fields of literary and cultural studies, characterizing the essence of carnival as a 'boundless world of humourous forms and manifestations opposed to the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture'.[9] Accordingly, the carnivalesque mode of both popular practice and literary (especially dramatic) representation foregrounds the comic, the parodic, the excessive, the unrestrained, the nonsensical, and the grotesque not just as a ludic escape valve for desires otherwise regulated by the social order, but also as a 'manifestation of a profound drive towards liberation and subversion'.[10] The universal inclusiveness of carnival — its egalitarianism, expansiveness, and complete rejection of hierarchy and propriety — transforms into as a positive social force, a counterbalance

to and a critique of civic and ecclesiastical authority. The spirit of transgression we regard not just as spirited hijinks, but also as an act of defiance aimed at delegitimizing the economic, political, and intellectual dominance of the powers that be. In the formulation of Michael Bristol, 'carnival is a general refusal to understand any fixed and final allocation of authority'.[11] Carnival abolishes the sense that the order of things is natural and immutable by celebrating all that is instinctual and spontaneous.

The concept of the carnivalesque as an egalitarian, socially destabilizing, and future-oriented force has been an especially productive one for theatre historians. Michael Bristol, Robert Weimann, Peter Stallybrass, Allon White, Jennifer C. Vaught, Annabel Patterson, Martin Stevens, Peter H. Greenfield, Roberta Mullini, Leif Søndergaard, Guy Borgnet, Jordi Bertran, Thomas Pettitt, and many others far too numerous to mention have traced ways in which popular culture celebrated its own imperatives while also inflecting literary production across Europe in the late medieval and early modern period.[12] But what contemporary readers, understandably enamoured of notions of the value of dissent from established authority, often overlook is that the period of unrestrained speech and behaviour during the limited season of carnival ultimately served not to undermine but rather to reassert the legitimacy of the ecclesiastical and civic status quo. The agents of traditional authority tolerated the brief interval of misrule and indeed promoted it, not in order to weaken their grasp on authority, but rather to maintain it.

In his pioneering studies of ritual performances, the cultural anthropologist Victor Turner famously employed the term 'anti-structure' to refer to ritual as an agent of social change.[13] For Turner and his countless followers, anti-structural elements actively challenge prevailing social paradigms by allowing for the free creative interplay of the members of the larger group. As opposed to being merely an unchanging repetition of the originary acts of creation performed by the gods *in illo tempore,* ritual unleashes the vitality of the undifferentiated community as a whole.[14] These liminal moments of *communitas,* the normal distinctions of status, class, age, locality, ability, and gender temporarily suspend, thus allowing for a momentary 'subjunctive state' during which alternative ways of believing and behaving can emerge. To overestimate the disruptive and hence transformative potential of a liminal state such as carnival as it was experienced in fifteenth-century Nuremberg is nevertheless quite possible. Far from being universally inclusive and egalitarian, the Nuremberg festivities worked to solidify the already robust homosocial bonds among the ambitious journeymen (*Gesellen*) of the city's trade guilds who were responsible both for the annual *Schembartlauf*

(a procession of masked revelers first recorded in 1449) as well as for the carnival plays performed serially on their pre-lenten tavern crawl.[15] Much of the journeymen's satire was directed at prominent public figures, especially in the verses read aloud by costumed revelers on the lavish floats of the *Schembartlauf*. For this very reason, the authorities sometimes pushed back. As early as 1469, the Nuremberg city fathers enacted a series of ordinances aimed at regulating the most outlandish excesses of the season, and carnival was abolished outright in 1526 due to the mockery aimed at Andreas Osiander, a prominent Lutheran preacher, only one year after the Reformation had been introduced into the city.[16] In fact, however, a survey of extant Nuremberg carnival plays composed from the mid-fifteenth to the late sixteenth centuries shows that far from targeting powerful elites, the comedies typically ridiculed those considered 'outsiders' by the bourgeoisie. Anyone not considered to be a respectable member of the urban middle class became the butt of jokes: peasants, Jews, Romani, wandering scholars, rural parsons, beggars, the sick, the blind, the elderly, the unattractive, social misfits of every kind, and, of course, women — especially the stock figures of superannuated maidens, shrewish wives, and the disagreeable crones who were popularly understood to be dangerous witches.[17]

Nowhere was the laughter more caustic than in comedies predicated on the problematic nature of gender relations. In addition to our three plays calling for the salting down of Gertrude and her sisters, Nuremberg also witnessed pre-lenten performance practices in which women who had failed to find husbands (never eligible bachelors who had neglected to find wives) were hitched to a plow or harrow and driven through the streets like livestock by their erstwhile suitors turned tormentors. The figural 'yoke of marriage' was thus replaced by a literal yoke in a ritual of public humilation most likely rooted in ancient fertility traditions.[18] The practice of the 'condemnation of the maidens left behind' (*Rüge der hintergebliebenen Mädchen*) also found more formal dramatic expression in carnival plays attributed to the Nuremberg metalsmith-playwright Hans Rosenplüt (d. after 1460) and the incredibly prolific shoemaker-poet Hans Sachs (1494–1576).[19] In the case of plays such as these, it is scarcely possible to think of the 'carnivalesque' as an egalitarian, socially transformative force. Time and again, these rituals and plays celebrate the efforts of young, marriageable journeymen to regulate female sexual desire and restrict female moral agency. (The fact that journeymen were required to marry before they could ascend to the status of master craftsman and open a shop of their own was doubtless a powerful incentive for them to seek wedded bliss at the earliest opportunity and to deride young women who raised

obstacles to such aspirations.) Far from subverting the traditional patriarchy, these comedies functioned to perpetuate it.

Perhaps we can illuminate one source of the paradox by returning to Pieter Bruegel the Elder's depiction of the absurd allegorical joust in his 'The Battle between Carnival and Lent', a commonplace rooted in the agonistic traditions of medieval debate poetry. Like the painting, simple formulations of 'anti-structure vs structure' or 'the carnivalesque vs established authority' are susceptible to a version of the well-known binary fallacy. The complete cursus of the liturgical year does not consist only of the opposition of carnival and lent. In the end, the extremes of feasting and fasting both give way to the dietary regimes of normalcy. After holy week and pentecost, both the church and society at large revert to ordinary time (*tempus per annum*) in both the eccesiastical and the everyday sense of the term. One could argue that the recognition that anti-structural disorder and egalitarian *communitas* cannot be sustained beyond a brief interregnum of topsy-turvy misrule that serves to legitimize the normative hierarchy of ordinary time. In fifteenth-century Nuremberg, then, the imagined preservation of Gertrude and her sisters was an all too apt metaphor for the preservation of the status quo.

Manuscript, Edition, Translation

The three texts in question are all uniquely extant in a single manuscript now in Munich, designated as Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, cgm 714.[20] The substantial codex runs to 490 paper leaves and dates from the third quarter of the fifteenth century. Our performance texts occupy folios 344r–45r and 420v–21v and the second of the two professional hands responsible for producing the volume carefully copied them in simple bastarda script. They rubricated titles, the initial letters of each line, occasional capitals, and later scribal deletions and additions. So too they indicate the provenance of both the manuscript and its contents by the use of northern Bavarian dialectical forms throughout, as well as by the inscription of the name of an early owner, a certain Michel Geyswurgel, a resident of Nuremberg whose death in 1499 provides a *terminus ad quem* for the book.[21] The original table of contents, doubtless compiled in a commercial scriptorium, lists 'all the tales and all the carnival plays' (*alle dy spruch und alle dy vasnachtspil*) in the volume, a collection of vernacular love poems, short secular tales, and comic dramas. The most recent enumeration counts no fewer than ninety-seven items in all, fifty of which (nos 48–97) fall into the category of either complete or fragmentary carnival plays.[22] Taken together, the nature of the codex and its contents

indicates that shortly after the pieces were composed, they were already being considered not just as ephemeral performance works for a single festive occasion but rather as a category of semi-prestigious literature to be purchased, preserved, and presumably read by a new kind of non-theatrical audience, namely, the literate and affluent bourgeoisie of a cosmopolitan imperial free city.[23]

As I have already noted, the only published edition of our performance texts to date is the one prepared more than a century and a half ago by the indefatigible Adelbert von Keller in his *Fastnachtspiele aus dem fünfzehnten Jahrhundert.*[24] Keller's edition standardizes spelling, mistranscribes or omits words, and adds punctuation marks according to his own judgment and the conventions of the day. By way of contrast, the version presented here is a conservative diplomatic edition based on a careful re-examination of the manuscript. Consequently, I have retained the original spelling and punctuation throughout. Italics indicate expanded abbreviations. I rubricate majuscule letters (the first letter of each line and of proper names) and main titles throughout, but give no special treatment in the transcription. I mark manuscript pagination in the margins.

The translation attempts the impossible, namely, both to be as literal as possible and yet to read as fluent, idiomatic English. An anonymous email correspondent once described the translator's predicament as being identical to that of the reformed knight in Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale,* forced to choose between that which is beautiful but false or homely but true. Unlike the knight who escapes his dilemma by choosing not to choose, the translator cannot abdicate from the necessity of deciding, line by line and word by word, how best to approximate both the literal sense and the artistic vitality of the original text. The result in this case is a translation that admittedly fails to capture the lively, robust tetrameter rhythms and colloquial couplets of fifteenth-century doggerel verse, but that choice (I hope) might help guide the reader to a better understanding of what these unusual texts say and how they say it. By comparing my translations to the accompanying edition, readers can judge my efforts for themselves.

Transcriptions of the Texts (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, cgm 714)

[F344r]

Der Gerdrawt einsalczen vasnacht[25]
Her der wirt ich pin darümb her kume*n*[26]
Ich hab gar fremde mer u*er* numen
Von einer dirn dye hayst Gerdrawt

Das die hewr ist gewesen kain prawt
Vnd habt sie also lassen ümb gan
Das yr ir habt/ geben kain man
Der mit ir in dem pett wer ümb gewalczen
Darümb so muß ich sie ein salczen
Hin pis nach der österlichen czeyt
Denn so wil sie nit leng*er* pleyben meyt
Vnd wil ir Unten darczu lassen lugen
Wie sie den visch darein pring mit fugen
Der Ander
Herr der wirt wie seyt yr ein man [F344v]
Das Ir ain solche dirn so wol gethan
So lang her habt lossen erfirn
Vnd Ir nit gedacht ümb ain manß pirn
Damit so thett yr sie gar zemen
Und ließ sich alls dy Iungen fögel emen
Die weyt auff gynen und uil begern
Das der guten dirn nit hat mügen wern
Darümb mus ich sie Salczen ein
Bis ir der öker wirt gehenckt ein –

. . . . . .

Dy vasnacht vom maigtum Einsalczen[27]
Herr der wirt Ich pin darümb kumen her[28]
Habt ir icht maid dye am*m* mayg-thum tragen schwer /[29]
Vnd zu der uaßnacht sind über pliben
Vn*d* sich mit dem öker nit habe*n* laße*n* e*r*schiebe*n*
Dauon in möcht schymeln unden dy kerbe*n*
Die wil ich nit also lassen uer derben
Sünder ich wils mit salcz sprengen wol bewarn
Bis in der pruchnagel mag wyder farn [F345r]
So laß ich denn das salczen wol unter wegen
Ob sie die kerben anders laßen recht fegen –
Der Ander
Herr der wirt nu hört meine wort
Ir habt gar ain hübsche dirn dort
Die get an dem zerßigen hunger
Das het ir wol gewentt ain stolczer Iunger

Der Ir gewartt het unden zu dem leyb
Das die mayt wer worden zu weyb
Ir habt mit ir zu lang gepiten
Sye wirt euch wünschen den riten
Das sie sol beyten bis in den Sumer
Das pringt der untern großen kumer
Darümb ich sie einsalczen mus
Bis der dirn wirt des nachthungers pus — —

. . . . . .

[F420v]

Ain Einsalczen Vasnacht[30]
Got grüß euch wirt un*d* fraw wirty*n*[31]
Die faßnacht wont uns ^⌊noch⌋ ym*n* syn*n*[32]
Die schül wir nu lassen farn
Doch ist ain sach die wir süln bewarn
Das uns die mayt nit schmecken wern
Die da man heten genumen gern —
Der Ander [F421r]
Ir schült uns der suppen nymer schmalczen[33]
So wöll wir dy Iungen mayd ein salczen
Die hewr sein über plyben
Die man oft gen marckt hat tryben
Die müß wir Salczen In ain tunnen
Seyt das in der man ist zu runnen –
Der Dritt
Ir Iunckfrawen Ir schült nit/ erschrecken
Wenn wir zu Ostern wider erkecken
So wöll wir euch ain*n* pfaffen leyhen
Der muß euch dy fladen weyhen
Vnd wescht euch das salcz wider ab
So nympt euch denn gern ain Iunger knab –
Der uierd
Ir schült euch wol gehaben Ir Iungen dirn
Vnd schült euch gen den ostern ziern
Vnd erschrecket nit alls ser
Ich maint auch wir törsten nymer mer
Mit schönen frawen frölich gesein

Das was meym herczem ain grose pein –
Der Auß Schreyer [F421v]
Nu hört ir herrn wol gethan
Zu Ostern heb wir wider an
So wöll wir auff ainander warten
Und Sypacier*e*n in manigen garten
Do schol uns kain frewd werden gespart
Got gesegen euch edler wirt zart –

Translations

The Salting Down of Gertrude for Carnival

FIRST SPEAKER Good innkeeper, the reason I've come here[34]
is because I have heard very strange news
about a young girl by the name of Gertrude[35]
who did not become a bride this year,
and that you let her go her own way
and did not find her a husband
who would have rolled around in bed with her.
That's why I have to salt her down
until after Easter time has passed
or else she won't remain a virgin,
and I'll let her lie down under it
the way they carefully lay down fish.

SECOND SPEAKER Good innkeeper, how does a man like you
let such a lovely young girl
run around loose for so long
while not making her think about some guy's nuts?[36]
That way, you could have tamed her well
and nursed her like the little birds
that gape their beaks wide open and crave many things
that would not be right for the good girl to have.
That's why I have to salt her down
until the yoke can be hung upon her.[37]

. . . . . .

The Carnival [Play] on the Salting Down of Virginity

FIRST SPEAKER Good innkeeper, here's the reason I've come here:
Do you not have maidens who suffer under their virginity,
who have been left behind at carnival time,
who haven't let themselves be shoved beneath the yoke,[38]
so that they'll get all moldy down in their cracks?[39]
I certainly don't want to let them spoil,
so instead I'll preserve them with a sprinkling of salt
until the clinch-nail comes along their way.[40]
But I'll just dispense with salting them down
if they clean out their cracks some other way.

SECOND SPEAKER Good innkeeper, listen to what I say!
You've got a good looking girl there
who's suffering from cock-hunger.[41]
A proud young lad must have taught her that,
who took a peek down below her belly
so that the maiden became a woman.
You've put up with her for far too long;
she's going to wish the plague upon you[42]
if she has to wait until next summer.
That's going to cause her lots of misery.
That's why I have to salt her down,
until the girl is free of her night-hunger.[43]

. . . . . .

A Salting Down for Carnival

FIRST SPEAKER Greetings, innkeeper, and to your wife as well!
Carnival still lingers in our thoughts
But we should let it just go along its way.
But there is still one matter we should attend to,
because the maidens won't taste very good to us,
the ones that men would gladly have taken.

SECOND SPEAKER You shouldn't flavour our soup with lard anymore,
because we're going to salt down the young maidens
that have been left over this past year
and that were so often driven to market.[44]
We must salt them all down in a tub

since a husband has slipped away from them.

THIRD SPEAKER Young maidens, there's no need to fear!
When we come back to life at Easter,
we'll lend each of you a priest
to bless your flatcakes for you[45]
and rinse the salt off you again,[46]
so that a young fellow will be glad to take you.

FOURTH SPEAKER You must make yourselves lovely, young girls,
and adorn yourselves for Easter
and not shrink back so timidly this time!
I even thought that we would never more
dare to be joyful with beautiful women.
That brought great sorrow to my heart.

THE CRIER[47] Listen to this, good gentlemen:
at Easter we'll begin again.
Meanwhile, we'll wait for one another
and go strolling through the gardens;
no pleasure shall be withheld from us there.
God bless you, kind and noble innkeeper!

Notes

1 The only edition of all three texts to date is that by Adelbert von Keller (ed.), *Fastnachtspiele aus dem fünfzehnten Jahrhundert,* Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart 28–30, 46 (Stuttgart: 1853–8; rpt Darmstadt, 1965–6) 2.640 (no. 76); 2.641 (no. 77); 2.722–3 (no. 91).

2 For concise if somewhat dated introductions to the genre, see Eckehard Catholy, *Das Fastnachtspiel des Spätmittelalters: Gestalt und Funktion*, Hermaea, Neue Folge 7 (Tübingen, 1961) and *Fastnachtspiel* (Stuttgart, 1966), and Werner Lenk, *Das Nürnberger Fastnachtspiel des 15. Jahrhunderts: Ein Beitrag zur Theorie und Interpretation des Fastnachtspiels als Dichtung* (Berlin, 1966). For a more extensive documentary history of early German secular drama, see Eckehard Simon, *Die Anfänge des weltlichen deutschen Schauspiels, 1370–1530: Untersuchung und Dokumentation*, Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters 124 (Tübingen, 2003). Important recent essays have been collected in Klaus Ridder (ed.), *Fastnachtspiele: Weltliches in literarischen und kulturellen Kontexten* (Tübingen, 2009).

3 The role of the priest in this ceremonial post-lenten cleansing of virgins is of particular interest. During the period in question, Easter and pentecost were considered to be the proper seasons for administering the sacrament of baptism. Because of its preservative quality, salt was regarded as a sign of purity and was therefore used to consecrate the holy water of the baptismal font and was offered to adult catechumens before their baptism. The desalinization by water of marriageable women who have been preserved for future matrimony is thus equated with the rite that cleanses the soul of the taint of original sin (transmitted to Adam's descendents through sexual concupiscence) and restores it to a state of grace. This sly allusion to the sacraments of baptism and marriage in turn raises more questions than it answers. Is the implication that lecherous priests (a frequent target of carnival satires) are impatient to un-salt desirable young women? Does the passage undercut the solemnity of the priest-led sacrament of matrimony or does it function as a conservative affirmation of the role of the church in performing marriages? For details and further bibliographical references, see the entries for 'Baptism' and 'Salt' in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church,* F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone (eds), 3rd rev. ed. (Oxford, 2005), 151–3 and 1458.

4 For a succinct introduction to the concept and its influential place in literary and cultural studies, see Michèle Lacombe, 'Carnival', Irena Makaryk (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory* (Toronto, 1993), 516–18. For the origins of carnival

in late medieval England and the Continent, see Barbara Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* (New York, 2006), 77–96; for a wide-ranging historical survey with special attention to the development of carnival in German-speaking Europe, see Dietz-Rüdiger Moser, *Fastnacht, Fasching, Karneval: Das Fest der 'Verkehrten' Welt* (Graz, 1986).

5 See, for instance, Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1978), 178–204.

6 The oil-on-oak panel (118 cm x 164.5 cm) is now in Hall 10 of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, where it is catalogued as Inv.-Nr. GG 1016. It has been widely reproduced, for example in the comprehensive *Pieter Bruegel the Elder: Drawings and Prints,* ed. Nadine M. Orenstein (New York and New Haven, 2001), figs 6, 102, and 103, and on the museum's own web site: http://www.khm.at/objektdb/detail/320.

7 See Carl Gustaf Stridbeck, *Bruegelstudien: Untersuchungen zu den ikonologischen Problemen bei Pieter Bruegel d. Ä. sowie dessen Beziehungen zum niederländischen Romanismus* (Stockholm, 1956), 198; Michael Gibson, *Bruegel* (Paris, 1980), 39; and Philippe and Françoise Roberts-Jones, *Pieter Bruegel* (New York, 2002), 119.

8 For detailed interpretations of this richly ambiguous work as both an observation of popular urban practices and as a Christian allegory, see Elke M. Schutt-Kehm, *Pieter Bruegels d. Ä. 'Kampf des Karnevals gegen die Fasten' als Quelle volkskundlicher Forschung* (Frankfurt a. M., 1983) and Katrien Lichtert, 'The Artist, the City and the Urban Theatre: Pieter Bruegel the Elder's "Battle Between Shrovetide and Lent" (1559) Reconsidered', Katrien Lichtert, Jan Dumolyn, and Maximiliaan P.J. Martens (eds), *Portraits of the City: Representing Urban Space in Later Medieval and Early Modern Europe,* Studies in European Urban History (1100–1800) 31 (Turnhout, 2014), 83–96, http://dx.doi.org/10.1484/m.seuh-eb.5.101613.

9 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World,* trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge MA, 1968), 4. For a perceptive supplement to and critique of Bakhtin's pioneering work by one of his early admirers, see Aron Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception,* trans. János M. Bak and Paul A. Hollingsworth, Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture 14 (Cambridge, 1988).

10 Umberto Eco, 'The Frames of Comic "Freedom"', Thomas A. Sebeok (ed.), *Carnival!,* Approaches to Semiotics 64 (Berlin, 1984), 3.

11 Michael D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theatre: Plebian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England* (New York, 1985), 212.

12 Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function,* ed. Robert Schwartz (Baltimore, 1978); Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca NY, 1986); Jennifer C. Vaught, *Carnival and Literature in Early Modern*

England (London and New York, 2012); Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (Cambridge, 1999); Martin Stevens, 'Herod as Carnival King in the Medieval Biblical Drama', *Mediaevalia* 18 (1995 for 1993), 43–66; and the essays collected in Konrad Eisenbichler and Wim N.M. Hüsken (eds), *Carnival and the Carnivalesque: The Fool, the Reformer, the Wildman, and Others in Early Modern Theatre,* Ludus 4 (Amsterdam, 1999) and in Ronald Knowles (ed.), *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin* (London, 1998). The list could be vastly extended at will.

13 Notions of ritual liminality ultimately derive from the pioneering 1908 study by Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage,* trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London, 1960). Among the seminal works of Victor Turner, see especially *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago, 1969); 'Variations on a Theme of Liminality', Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff (eds), *Secular Ritual* (Amsterdam, 1977), 36–52; 'Liminal to Liminoid in Play, Flow, and Ritual', *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York, 1982), 20–60; and 'Liminality and the Performative Genres', John J. MacAloon (ed.), *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals Toward a Theory of Cultural Performance* (Philadelphia, 1984), 19–41.

14 For the former understanding of ritual as the ceremonial repetition of narratives that recount divine originary acts, see Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History,* Willard R. Trask (trans), 2nd ed., Bollingen Series 46 (Princeton, 2005) and *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion,* trans. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1959).

15 Our knowledge of this custom is based on the eighty-five extant *Schembartbücher,* richly illustrated volumes that provide details of the processions from 1449 to 1530. For detailed studies of these extravagantly costumed processions, which were originally organized by the Butchers' and Knifemakers' guilds, see Hans-Ulrich Roller, *Der Nürnberger Schembartlauf: Studien zum Fest- und Maskenwesen des späten Mittelalters* (Tübingen, 1965) and Werner Lenk, 'Schembartlauf, Schwerttanz und Fastnachtspiel', *Das Nürnberger Fastnachtspiel des 15. Jahrhunderts: Ein Beitrag zur Theorie und Interpretation des Fastnachtspiels als Dichtung,* Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Deutsche Sprache und Literatur 33 (Berlin, 1966), 15–22.

16 Joseph Baader (ed.), *Nürnberger Polizeiordnungen aus dem XIII bis XV Jahrhundert,* Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart 63 (Stuttgart, 1861; rpt Amsterdam, 1966), 92–4; for excerpts in English translation, see also William Tydeman (ed.), *The Medieval European Stage: 500–1550* (Cambridge, 2001), 638–9. Anxiety about disorderly conduct during public theatricals of many kinds often led civic authorities to take special precautions during performances; see Stephen K. Wright, 'Religious Drama, Civic Ritual, and the Police: The Semiotics of Public Safety

in Late Medieval Germany', *Theatre Annual: A Journal of Performance Studies* 51 (1998), 1–14.

17 English-speaking readers are referred to *Hans Sachs: Nine Carnival Plays,* trans. Randall W. Listerman, Carleton Renaissance Plays in Translation 18 (Ottawa, 1990); *Translations of the Carnival Comedies by Hans Sachs (1494–1576)*, trans. Robert Aylett (Lewiston ME, 1994); and *Hans Sachs and the Performable Voice: An Anthology of Debate, Disputation, Dialogue, Farce, Complaint, Comedy, Tragedy, Carnival Play, and Pasquinade,* trans. Stephen K. Wright (forthcoming).

18 For two sixteenth-century woodcuts depicting the practice, see Dieter Wuttke (ed.), *Fastnachtspiele des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts,* 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, 1978), 29. See also Hans Rudolf Velten, '*Groteske Organe: Zusammenhänge von Obszönität und Gelächter bei spätmittelalterlichen profanen Insignien im Vergleich zur Märenliteratur*', Johan H. Winkelman and Gerhard Wolf (eds), *Erotik, aus dem Dreck gezogen* (Amsterdam, 2004), 259–60, and note 19 below. The custom has recently been revived in rural towns like Hechingen-Stetten (Baden-Württemberg) and Trillfingen (Bavaria); see the articles by Franz Buckenmaier in the *Schwarzwälder Bote* (23 February 2012) and Andrea Spatzal, 'Der Sämann aus Amerika', *Hohenzollerische Zeitung* (5 February 2016). For a bibliography of studies examining the relationship between agricultural rites, folk customs, and the Nuremberg plays, see Wuttke, *Fastnachtspiele,* 331–2.

19 For English translations of and commentary on Hans Rosenplüt's 'Pulling the Harrow' (*Das Eggenziehen*) and Hans Sachs's 'The Housemaids in the Harness' (*Die hausmaid im pflug*), see Wright (trans.), *Hans Sachs and the Performable Voice.*

20 For a detailed codicological and paleographical description of the manuscript, see Karin Schneider, *Die deutschen Handschriften der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek München: Cgm 691–867*, 2nd ed. (Wiesbaden, 1984), 79–89. Schneider's catalogue supercedes the earlier description by Adelbert von Keller, *Fastnachtspiele aus dem fünfzehnten Jahrhundert*, 3.1373–82. A digital reproduction of the entire manuscript is available online at http://bildsuche.digitale-sammlungen.de/index.html?c=viewer&bandnummer=bsb00024106&pimage=00001&v=100&nav=&1=de.

21 All that is known about Michel Geyswurgel is that he was an affluent townsman who owned a house near the Nuremburg marketplace and that he was sued by neighbours who operated a public bath; see Eckehard Simon, 'Manuscript Production in Medieval Theatre: The German Carnival Plays', Derek Pearsall (ed.), *New Directions in Later Medieval Manuscript Studies: Essays from the 1998 Harvard Conference* (York, 2000), 164.

22 For editions, see Keller, *Fastnachtspiele,* passim; Schneider, *Handschriften*, gives specific citations for each individual entry.

23 For the only evidence of early ownership and readership apart from the nature of the codex itself, see note 21.
24 See note 1.
25 The table of contents (F3r) gives the title as *Der Gertrawten ein salczen.*
26 The rubricated capital H extends across the first two lines.
27 The table of contents (F3r) gives the title as *Vom Maigtum Ein salczen.*
28 The rubricated capital H extends across the first two lines; 'her' is written above the line due to lack of space caused by the large initial.
29 The final words after the hyphen are written on the line below due to lack of space caused by the large initial.
30 The table of contents at the beginning of the manuscript (F3v) gives the title as *Ayn Einsalczen.*
31 The rubricated capital G extends across the first two lines.
32 A later hand, apparently that of the original rubricator, has inserted the word *noch* in red ink with an upward caret below the line. Such corrections by the rubricator are common throughout the manuscript.
33 The ascender of the letter l in *schmalczen* has been entended by a later hand into the upper margin of the page and decorated with a fanciful if somewhat crude floral motif.
34 Like most carnival plays, the piece was clearly meant to be performed serially at a number of inns or other indoor locations; see also ll 12 and compare ll 1 and 11 of *The Carnival [Play] on the Salting Down of Virginity* and ll 1 and 30 of *A Salting Down for Carnival.*
35 MS. *Gerdrawt.* The anglicized spelling is mine.
36 Matthias Lexer's *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch* (1.col.2035) glosses *mansbire* (literally, 'man's pear') as 'testiculum'.
37 The notion of matrimony as the state of being yoked together is biblical in origin; see, for instance, the common interpretations of 2 Cor 6.14. At the same time, however, there may be a sly allusion to the shrovetide custom of yoking unmarried women together and shaming them by driving them through the streets like livestock; see notes 18 and 19 above.
38 See note 37 above.
39 Lexer's *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch* (1.col.1550) glosses *kërbe* as 'Einschnitt, Kerbe' (gash, cut, notch, incision, groove); translations mine. The vulgar reference to the female genitalia is obvious; see also ll 9–10.
40 A *pruchnagel* is literally a nail or staple used to close up a crack or fissure (see note 39 above), but was also a widely used slang term for 'penis'; see for instance, Jacob Grimm, Wilhelm Grimm, et al. (eds), *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, (1854–1969), 2.col.413.

41 Lexer's *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch* (3.col.1082) notes that *zërsic* in an adjectival form pertaining to the noun *zërs,* 'the male member, penis' [translation mine].
42 The *rite* is literally a kind of fever; see Lexer's *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch* (2.col.463). The use of *rit(t)e* as a curse is a common one; see Charles Hart Handschin, 'Das Sprichwort bei Hans Sachs', *Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin: Philology and Literature Series* 3 (1903–1907), 106.
43 Lexer's *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch* (2.col.25) glosses *naht-hunger* (literally, 'night-hunger') as 'female desire for sexual intercourse' [translation mine].
44 See note 37 above.
45 *Fladen* are flat round oat cakes, but the term is also used colloquially to refer to cowpats; see Lexer's *Mittelhochdeutsches Handwörterbuch,* 3.col.384.
46 See note 3 above.
47 The *Ausschreier* functioned somewhat like a carnival barker, calling attention to a performance by addressing the audience directly. Perhaps the epilogue is meant for the same speaker who delivers ll 1–6.