Das Wunsch Hans Sachs: The Marriage of Virtue and Deception

Vachel W. Miller
College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/honors_theses

Part of the German Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/honors_theses/769

Available by permission of the author. Reproduction or retransmission of this material in any form is prohibited without expressed written permission of the author.
DAS WÜNSCHT HANS SACHS:  
The Marriage of Virtue and Deception

A THESIS  
The Honors Program  
College of St. Benedict/St. John’s University

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Distinction "All College Honors"  
and the Degree Bachelor of Arts  
In the Department of German

by  
Vachel W. Miller  
April, 1991
Project Title: Das Wünscht Hans Sachs: The Marriage of Virtue and Deception

Approved by:

Mark L. Flamer, OSB.
Associate Professor of German

Evelina Burgakabie
Associate Professor of German

Wendy Stepan
Assistant Professor of German

Chair, Department of Modern and Classical Languages

Mark L. Flamer, OSB.
Director, Honors Program
Preface

Terms and Structure 2
Morality and Literature 4

The Marriage of Virtue and Deception

Sachs and Marriage 6
Der farendt Schuler im Paradeiß 8
Das heiß Eysen 12
Der farendt Schuler mit dem Teuffelbannen 16

The Forces of Disorder

The Wandering Student 21
The Neighbor Woman 31
The Ordeal of the Hot Iron 33

The Relationship of Carnival and the Reformation to the Fastnachtspiel

The Meaning of Carnival 38
The Meaning of Reform 46

Was Wünscht Hans Sachs?

The Moral of Virtue 52
The Play of Deception 54
A Parable 57
Preface

"Das wünscht euch Hans Sachs!" When I heard that for the first time, I was sitting in the clubroom of a dormitory in downtown Weimar. It was an August evening, 1989, and a puppet master had come to entertain us summer school students. It was magical—whizzers, bells, dancing puppets, and rhymes in a strange language—what a show! It seemed odd, though, that the author voiced the moral conclusion of each play through one of his characters.

For a long time, I thought these Fastnachtspiele had been written as puppet plays. The characters seemed stock types; the comedy seemed simple and slapstick—natural puppet theater. But after some research, I realized they were real scripts from plays written by a shoemaker and performed in 16th-century Nürnberg.¹

What had happened? Instead of being written or performed as a viable theatrical genre, the Fastnachtspiel had become a puppet show, a genre which history had fossilized into an amusing relic of the Middle Ages. And I wanted to know what had happened. I wanted to know what these plays meant for the medieval audience and what Sachs’ texts still mean.

My investigation of Sachs’ Fastnachtspiele has concentrated on three plays: Der farenzt Schuler im Paradeiß, Das heiβ Eysen, and Der farenzt Schuler mit dem Teuffelbannen. These three Fastnachtspiele each conclude with a few words—moral words—from a voice which calls
itself Hans Sachs. Meaningful discussion of these plays must, I believe, listen closely to the moral expressed by that voice. But another voice, a voice with a different moral, calls from within the text. Therefore, as my investigation progresses, I will listen with both of my ears. One may hear seriously; the other, ironically. Somewhere between I hope to distill the meaning of Sachs' conflicting voices. At the end of the plays the moral voiced will be one of virtue, of movement from disorder to a higher level of marital understanding. But virtue will be attained through the work of deception. Ultimately, then, the two need each other, and when heard together, the voices of Sachs celebrate the marriage of virtue and deception.

Terms and Structure

In this thesis, I frequently use the words virtue, unity, order, deception, disorder, and union. The first five words belong to a moral system which judges along a line anchored by, at one pole, virtue, unity, and order; and at the other pole, by deception and disorder. At the first pole are clustered traditionally emphasized ideals such as honesty, compassion, love, and humility. Thus, when I refer to characters as promulgating virtue, I mean they espouse a morality of clear and hard principles of right conduct. Similarly, unity and order connote a state of concordance between conduct and moral principles: people act as they should. Moreover, these words suggest an absence of
deviation: everyone is content to heed the rules. In sum, the world of virtue has clear and true moral signification.

At the other pole are gathered traditionally undesirable actions such as lying, stealing, violence, and adultery. Thus, when I refer to characters as agents of deception, I mean they act in a manner contrary to right conduct, i.e. they violate the rules of virtue. Disorder, furthermore, connotes a state of discord between conduct and moral principles. There is no harmony, no perfect order, in the workings of the world and of those people in it. Instead, there is falsity and suffering. In the world of deception, then, things may neither be clear nor true.

Beneath this system, however, lies union. By union I mean the world in which there is unclear distinction between the moral poles: deception within virtue, virtue within deception. This is the world of carnival, of wholeness, of the Fastnachtspiel. Because it is difficult to see both virtue and deception together, I will often focus on one and seem to ignore the other. Yet in the work of Hans Sachs, they are always together. This is the reality of union, which I will otherwise call the "marriage of virtue and deception." Marriage here has literal reality in terms of the three plays: each play focuses on a married couple. But once it is grounded in the texts, I want to take my paradigm and use it figuratively to understand Sachs and his work. In my primary sense, then, marriage suggests a partnership, the conjoining of elements—whether
characters or values—with their own identities into a greater, generative whole.

My thesis separates into three main sections. The first section, "The Marriage of Virtue and Deception," shows how each play portrays the movement of a marriage toward union. The second section, "The Forces of Disorder," explores the nature of Sachs' deceivers and the meaning of their deceptions. My focus will fall on the Schuler, the Gefatterin, and the ordeal of the hot iron. The third section discusses "The Relationship of Carnival and the Reformation to the Fastnachtspiel." This section extends the paradigm found in the plays and looks at the roots of Sachs' self-referential closures and how those closures affected the genre. The beginning and end of my argument will directly address a question implicit throughout: what is the nature of the union between morality and literature?

Morality and Literature

To some, my interest in morality may seem old-fashioned, a nostalgic desire for a battle between good and bad in a time when a discussion of values has lost much of its traditional critical validity. Such critics might maintain that, though values may have driven literature in the Middle Ages, we moderns know better. Our stories are driven by realities more real—economics, gender, symbolic systems—and these are the only ideas worth discussing. Perhaps they are. I do not at all mean to trivialize
important theoretical frameworks—and they will often aid my argument—yet I believe that morality remains at the heart of literature and is, therefore, worthy of critical scrutiny. It remains valid to examine what characters do, the values they thereby express or embody, and what they learn. For morality, as Clausen explains, plays an unavoidable part of any text about people:

Insofar as what the poet writes has important relations to the experienced world however conceived—the inescapable context of all texts—those relations become an appropriate subject for criticism. In almost all important poetry, those relations are partly moral, and a judgment on the moral significance of the work is necessary to any thorough consideration of it. (20)

For me to ignore a discussion of morals would be to deny that my texts care about them. Especially with plays which self-consciously speak of morals, I think it important to ask what Sachs believed, how his plays manifest those beliefs, and how his beliefs play with each other.

Morality has a deep relationship with literature. In the book On Moral Fiction, John Gardner attests that morality is part of all literature: "True art is by its nature moral" (19). Moral here denotes the "careful, thoroughly honest search for and analysis of values" in contrast to the straightforwardly didactic or moralistic, which already knows what good and evil are before the story
starts and shapes the story accordingly (Gardner 19). If a text already has the answers to its moral questions, that text is uni-dimensional, and it leaves little to discuss. Gardner explains that "the artist who begins with a doctrine to promulgate, instead of a rabble multitude of ideas and emotions, is beaten before he starts" (14). This thesis asks if Sachs rouses a rabble or teaches platitudes: does he already know the moral before the play begins, making his conclusion merely a reminder of an obvious principle? Or do his characters question their creator's conclusions?

The Marriage of Virtue and Deception

Marriage functions like a moral crucible for Sachs. It is the place of contention between women and men, virtue and deception. It is also the place where opposites join in a higher union. This section will discuss Sachs' general understanding of marriage and open a window through which I will view the three texts, as well as their contexts later in the thesis.

Sachs and Marriage

In her essay, "Die Ehemoral in den Fastnachtspielen von Hans Sachs," Barbara Könneker argues that marriage for Sachs teaches compassion and humility, virtues necessary for its survival and, furthermore, virtues necessary for stable relationships throughout society.² Only in marriage do
people relinquish their own wills for the sake of unity: "die Ehe, da von Gott geboten, auch die dem Menschen einzig gemäße Lebensform ist, unter deren Joch sich jeder zu beugen hat, der seinem Willen gehorchen will" (Könneker, "Ehe" 229). In this way, marriage functions as a means of control. It limits unacceptable behavior and brings men and women together in a structure which demands cooperation and compassion.

Primarily, Sachs cares about the preservation of marriage because marriage ensures order. Founded in Eden, marriage offers a paradigm of order which extends from the family to the community. A society with good, stable marriages will itself be stable. Sachs understands marriage as the "Grundordnung des menschlichen Lebens" which provides the foundation of all order created in the world (Könneker 230). Consequently, to violate marriage is to violate the unity of the world. Adultery, then, must be punished— as Sachs' deceivers will discover. Fundamentally, Sachs values marriage as the means of achieving God's order on earth. God's greater Kingdom cannot come until there is harmony in His smaller kingdom, marriage.

In all three Fastnachtspiele there is a husband and a wife. One of the two tends to be virtuous; the other, deceptive. Because, generally, they neither appreciate nor trust each other, their marriages are painful. Yet, in the end, they will learn virtue and renew their marriages. That
renewed marriage becomes the moral focus of Sachs' closural words. Könneker notes that the "Unentbehrlichkeit der Ehe" is "die Voraussetzung, auf der die Moral seiner Spiele basiert" ("Ehe" 229). Accordingly, each of the plays will show a movement from marital disorder to order, order on a deeper level of insight. But as we listen to the voice of closure, we should remember that order may not have been the only moral of these stories.

Der farenrdt Schuler im Paradis

The simplest of Sachs' virtuous characters is the Pewrin, the wife, in Der farenrdt Schuler im Paradis. She is, in the words of the wandering student, "ein recht einfeltig Viech" (72). He tells her he just came from Paris, but she believes he said paradise and asks if he has seen her dead husband there. Her former husband, unlike the avaricious and unloving man she now has, appreciated the woman's simplicity. And she longs for a return to harmony:

Ach wie manchen seufftzen ich senck,
Wenn ich vergangner zeit gedenck,
Da noch Lebet mein erster Man,
Den ich ye lenger lieb gewan,
Dergleich er mich auch wiederumb,
Wann er war einfeltig vnd frumb.
Mit jm ist all mein frewdt gestorben. (1-7)

Eager to help her lost husband, she will give the student clothes and all her savings to take back to heaven. She
wants her deceased lover to be happy, no matter what it costs her.

Certainly, the intention is virtuous. But the action is stupid. And the woman does not seem to understand the difference. She interprets her world literally—heaven must be just a few miles away—and cannot comprehend more than one level of meaning. Her world is as it seems without any ambiguity. And that is why happiness is her goal. Happiness reflects the absence of conflict and, therefore, the unity of the world. But because her virtue is founded upon naivete, she alone is an inadequate moral model. Her virtue must be wed to deception so that it may engender a deeper moral sensitivity.

Her husband, the farmer, understands the difference between seeming and being. He recognizes the student’s trick, and as soon as his wife steps off stage, he laments:

Ach, Herr Gott, wie hab ich ein Weib,

Die ist an Seel, vernunftt vnd leib

Ein Dildap, Stockfisch, halber Nar. (159-61)

Ironically, though, when she told him what she gave the student, he praised her good thinking: "Ey, du hast der Sach recht gethan" (139). By perpetuating the deception, he can trick his wife into helping him catch the Schuler. If he had criticized her, she may have defended the student. But, offering to bring him more money, the farmer receives her cooperation. Like the student, he uses his intelligence to manipulate the naive woman.
However, the farmer can be fooled as well. Out on the marsh, the student hides the clothes the woman gave him, assumes a new identity, and easily tricks the farmer into running off and leaving his horse. Returning to find his horse stolen, the farmer feels unjustly abused:

Botz leichnam angst, wo ist mein Pferdt?
Ja, bin ich frumb vnd ehrenwerdt,
So hat mirs der böswicht hin ghritten,
Er daucht mich sein dückischer sitten,  (253-56)

The deceiver has been deceived and thinks it unjust. As will be typical of Sachs’ sinners, rather than seeing himself as the victim of his own faults, the farmer feels abused. He has not yet learned to look for the cause of his troubles within himself.

Yet he does learn something: compassion. He realizes that he, too, is fallible. While his anger subsides, a fresh appreciation grows. He feels that a man with a stupid wife should not judge too harshly:

Doch weil sie hat ein trewen muht,
Kan er sie dester baß gedulden,
Wan es kumbt auch gar offt zu schulden,
Das dem Mann auch entschlupfft ein fuß,
Das er ein federn lassen muß,
Etwan leit schaden durch betrug,
Das er auch ist nit weyß genug.  (311-18)

Because of his realization, the marriage will be much more tolerable. The manipulative farmer has been humbled, and he
is now prepared to rejoin his virtuous wife. As Dusek observes: "Finally he is capable of a certain amount of understanding and tolerance, if only because he realizes his own shortcomings" (90). The wife also receives intimations of her imperfection. When she tells her neighbors the story about the student's travels to paradise, she reports that they laughed at her (298-99). Although she may never understand that she was tricked, she may now realize that she did something silly. This recognition that the source of one's problems lies internally, not externally, will be a recurring lesson in Sachs' plays.

Riding his new horse, the wandering student goes to his favorite tavern to relax after work well done. Essentially, he has remarried the couple by tricking them into developing compassion for each other. The farmer has a renewed appreciation for his wife's virtue, and she has faith in his "trewes Herz" (279). It is no impassioned honeymoon, but they can live together peacefully. They both develop "the realization that they are foolish and a quiet attitude of resignation which enables them to cope with their folly" (Dusek 376). Thus, for Sachs, Der fairendt Schuler im Paradeiß teaches a central ethic: "in the interests of keeping peace in marriage, one failing must be allowed to offset the other" (Beary lxxx). Compassion for one's partner becomes the basis for a stable and harmonious marriage.
Sachs has brought some unity back to the marriage. Through the mouth of the farmer, Sachs' authoritative voice closes the play with a wish for continued happiness:

Denn zieh man schad gen schaden ab,
Darmit man friedt im Ehstandt hab
Vnd keyn vneinigkeyt auff wachs;
das wünscht vns allen Hans Sachs. (319-24)

Virtue and deception have been brought together. Yet this is not the state of union--deep moral dichotomy--because Sachs has told his characters and his audience that the days of disorder are over. Husband and wife are to live in virtue--according to Sachs' closing words, unity is the moral. Sachs will voice this moral again in the next two plays. As Beary says, the "reconciliation of differences in marriage and the cultivation of harmony" appear to be Sachs' final values (lxxii). Amid the cheers, is Sachs hoping that everyone heard the message?

Das heiß Eysen

Whereas Der farendt Schuler im Paradeiβ shows a playful deception, Das heiß Eysen shows a painful one. Like the farmer's wife, the woman in this play feels unloved. She contends that her husband, who "von erst viel lieber war," must be engaged in secret love affairs (2). To test his fidelity, then, she demands that he undergo the ordeal of the hot iron.
He appears to pass the test, and for a moment, all is well. It seems as if the play could now end peacefully: the man has been vindicated; the woman is satisfied that her husband is virtuous; and their relationship is back in order. But distrust remains. The woman had refused to accept her husband's oath of innocence, and her distrust has angered him. What is she hiding? The moment of order ends -- he decrees that she, too, must undergo the ordeal. Their marriage, broken by distrust, must be welded together by fire.

If the woman had trusted her husband, there would have been no ordeal. But she tries to blame him for her own weakness. In the opening scene when she confronts her husband, she complains of being plagued by worry:

Mein Mann, wiß, das mich darzu übt
Ein anfechtung, welche ich hab,
Der mir kan niemandt helfen ab,
Mein hertzen lieber Man, wenn du! (40-43)

Ironically, this infection is not his betrayal; rather, it is her hypocrisy. And he can only help by putting her to the test. The woman quakes, pleading fidelity and begging for her husband’s trust:

Ach, mein Mann, thu nicht weyter fragen,
Sonder mir glauben vnd vertrawen
Als einer außden frömbsten Frawen!
Laß mich das heiß Eyssen nicht tragen! (144-47)
The woman wants to return to happier days of trust and shared meaning, but her husband points out the essential problem: "Dein That laut anders, denn dein mundt" (142). They cannot return. Until the cause of the division is uprooted and burned out, distrust will vitiate their marriage.

And if she refuses to undergo the ordeal, he will beat her: "ich leg dir auff dein Nack/ Mein Faust" (210-11). Here Sachs emphasizes that reconciliation cannot come without pain. As a devout Christian, Sachs believes that pain is the foundation of redemption: "The crucifixion is the condition for the reconciliation of the sinner with God" (Beary xcix). For Christ and his followers, the way of rebirth is the way of death. For Sachs and his audience, "the wish for death, *stirb*, sounds at the same time as *werde*" (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 249). Change cannot be thought; rather, it must be experienced, and suffered. The *Fraw*, of all of Sachs' characters in these plays, must suffer the most because her hypocrisy was the greatest. Her husband chastises her:

Ey schem des in dein hertze dich,
Der du wolst sein so keusch vnd frumb,
Vnd triebst mich mit dem Eyssen vmb! (172-74)

Even though she confesses to numerous affairs, the man compels her to carry the iron and burn herself. This torment makes physically manifest her sin against God's sacred institution of marriage, and, accordingly, against
the order of the world. Furthermore, her scar will always remind her that people must look within themselves for the source of their sin (Könneker, "Ehe" 237). This recognition of personal moral responsibility teaches Sachs' characters to be both more contrite and tolerant of others' failings.

The ordeal is over: infidelity has been exposed, anger has been expressed, sin has been punished. But before the curtain closes, Sachs wants to stage another wedding. The Gefatterin proclaims the good news:

Ey ja, glück zu, Gfatter! glück zu!
Ich wil euch gleich das glait heimgeben.
Vnd wollen heint in freuden leben
Vnd auff ein newes Hochzeyt halten
Vnd gar vrlaub geben der alten. (248-252)

Here, most directly, Sachs expresses the moral purpose of the play: the marriage of deception and virtue. Though the scars of the old marriage will remain, the woman and her husband can look at those scars, remember their mistakes, and be content that they have come to renewed love. This process is typical of Sachs' treatment of his characters: "He understood his people, and while he mercilessly flays their faults, underneath it all, we feel not only his compassion, but love" (Dusek 6). Sachs loves even those—and maybe especially those—who sin. He teaches them that marriage is not about perfect unity, but about lasting togetherness founded on the recognition and forgiveness of imperfection.
Der farendt Schuler mit dem Teuffelbannen

This play also shows how a marriage might be redeemed through deception. In the central moment, the wandering student, masquerading as an exorcist, commands the devil to appear before a farmer and his wife. The local priest enters, smeared with black ash and howling like a demon. He dances and then bolts for the door. A condensed dramatization of Sachs’ morality, this scene has powerful meaning: the devil shows the man and woman the reality of sin, a moral insight which will save their marriage.

Their marriage is endangered by adultery. The woman loves, instead of her husband, the local priest—"Der aller liebst für alle Gest!" (8). She does not even try to hide it, boasting of her affair to the audience: "Ich weis, das er mir eilends kem" (9). She feels no obligation to the sacrament of marriage, no commitment to her husband—sins she will be forced to face. According to Könneker, she must be punished because she has "mutwillig einen Streit vom Zaun gebrochen und den Frieden ihrer Ehe gestört" ("Ehe" 225). Although she will not suffer as severely as her counterpart in Das heiß Eysen, she is clearly a vile character. Just before the exorcism, when the farmer says he wants to see the devil, the student smirks, "Ey, so schaw nur dein frawen an!" (189).

The woman’s deceptive nature is magnified by the fallenness of her partner, the priest. Afraid of public ridicule, he sneaks around back roads to reach her unseen.
If the farmer caught him and beat him, he would have to endure the punishment:

Dennoch dörfft ich darumb nit murrn,
Dörfft jn beim Pfleger nicht verklagn.
Ich müßt geleich die schmurren tragn. (55-57)

He realizes his wrongdoing but lacks the strength to stop. He cannot resist the temptations of the flesh and admits his compulsion: "Ich bin zwar mit eim narrn besessn" (60). The man with the most moral authority is making the worst moral mistake. As punishment, his flesh will be exposed and his demon exorcised.

Like Sachs’ other deceivers, the priest commits the sin of hypocrisy by accusing another of his own sin. As a disciple of Christ, he should welcome the poor student at the door. Instead, he curses the Schuler, accusing him of being a con-man: "Du samlest leicht zu einem Schalck./ Heb dich hinauß, du laster Balck!" (77-78). Ironically, the priest will suffer his own judgement. Dressed only in black ash and a doormat, he must do the dance of the devil and then leave the house. As a moralist, Sachs has no patience with hypocrites. Because they arrogantly blame others for their own sins, they must be humbled.  

Through the exorcism, the wife is shown the reality of her sin. She sees the devil which symbolizes her crime against her husband and against God. Though frightening, it is not enough to change her—desire lingerers. The woman confesses this to the student:
Sol ich aber die Warheit jehen,  
Den Teuffel möchte ich wol öfter sehen,  
In vnserm hauß on alle schew (275-77).

Her weakness is natural: Sachs does not expect moral perfection because he believes failure is inherent in humanity (Könneker, "Ehe" 237). Yet he does expect that his lessons be taken to heart. Because the woman has seen her demon, it will not infest this marriage again. Self-understanding becomes the foundation of compassion and moral growth.

Nor will the demon ever possess her husband. The farmer here is a simpleton. Though less naive than the woman in Der farendt Schuler im Paradeiß, like her, he believes what the student tells him. As the woman does when she asks about paradise, the farmer gives the student a role to play when he says, "Hab ich doch wol gehört vor Jarn;/ Jr Schuler kündt den Teuffel bannen" (178-79). Always eager to act, the student promises to conjur up the devil. The farmer--unlike his wife--wants to know what evil really is. But the sight terrifies him:

Mir geht vor ängsten auß der schweiß.  
Ach lieber, wisch bald ab den Kreis,  
Das nur der teuffl nit widerkumb! (261-63)

The Kreis is the circle drawn by the student as a stage for his exorcism. The farmer wants the student to get rid of the stage--rather than seeing the reality of evil, the farmer wants to return to his world of naivete.
Exhausted by the experience, the farmer goes to bed with the student's assurance that the devil will never come back. And it never will, not only because his wife has seen the manifestation of her sin, but also because the exorcism has initiated the farmer. Though he would rather not look at it, he is now deeply aware of the reality of evil. No longer ignorant, he will be able to know sin and turn away.

As the play ends, the student reminds the audience of his success. He has earned a few coins from the woman and priest by extortion and, most importantly, saved another marriage. With a smile, he bids farewell:

Was sol ich vons Bawrn gülden sagn?
Bhelt mein segen den Teuffel dauß,
Das er jm nit mehr kompt zu hauß,
So unterkem er vil vngmachs.

Treger Marck wird gut, spricht Hanns Sachs.

(322-25)

A demon banned forever, adultery will never again corrupt this marriage. The Schuler has revealed the horror of adultery and freed the couple to live in virtue. Both husband and wife, aware of evil, are not likely to risk seeing the devil again. They have learned "den glücklich geretteten Ehefrieden nicht doch noch aufs Speil zu setzen" (Könneker, "Ehe" 227). Marriage has regained its sanctity, its value, its order. The farmer and his wife rejoin each other in bed while the student celebrates.
Some critics do not believe that, in a play like Der farenicht Schuler mit dem Teuffelbannen, virtue has triumphed. Beary comments that deception wins:

Though there is adverse criticism of the priest, the wife and her paramour, both escape punishment, and victory lies with the scholar-trickster—even if it is suggested at the end that his magic charm will keep the devil away and the peasant will be spared affliction in the future. (xciv)

However, I find this reading too literal. The devil is adultery, and it will be kept away because the man and woman have met it. Beary seems to be looking for the explicit moral, the authoritative voice from the playwright, rather than the ethical implications of the action when she says that "plot is rarely sacrificed to the elaboration of a moral precept" (xciii). Perceptively, Clausen points out that the movement of the action reveals the author’s values: "The old word for plot is argument, and it is through plot that the author of a narrative work argues for the correctness of his moral vision" (14). For Sachs, a story which brings moral insight—even if it lacks a straightforward moralization at the end—has taught his characters well.

Yet, essentially, Beary's challenge remains: in the action of the play, do the forces of disorder undermine final unity?
The Forces of Disorder

This section explores the forces acting within the play which challenge the primacy of the closure. These are the forces of disorder: the wandering student, the neighbor woman, and the ordeal of the hot iron. And these are the means Sachs employs to achieve his moral closures. But are these forces not antithetical to the forces of order?

The Wandering Student

Leaving now the married couples, I ask a central question about Sachs’ leading actor: who is the Schuler? I will interpret him as an ironic player, a character who acts as the creative force within his own play. Essentially, the student’s play will be a drama of revelation which is driven by deception. A powerful, but—for the author behind the student—dangerous Spiel.

A character who shapes his own play, the student acts analogously to Sachs as scriptwriter. In both of his plays, the student orchestrates the action. Der farennt Schuler im Paradeiβ begins with his lie about travelling to heaven, a ploy which allows him to control the other characters. When he wants new clothes, for example, he describes to the woman her former husband’s heavenly poverty. When the student leaves the house, the farmer follows him to the marsh. Clearly, the student controls the stage. The other actors are his pawns, unaware that they are being manipulated. By
creating scenes with characters who are unaware they are being played with, the student acts like his own creator, Sachs. In his last speech, the student hints at this relationship: "So wolt ich gwiß von diesen dingen/ Ein gute beut daruon auch bringen" (237-38). But as the ironic player, his means will not always match the meaning.

In *Der freadnt Schuler mit dem Teuffelbannen*, because the woman and the priest expect trickery and refuse to play along, the student uses coercion. He knows of their affair, and their fear of exposure gives him the power to manipulate them as he wishes. When the woman threatens to tell her husband that he is a trickster, the student retorts, "Mein Mutter, schweig! so schweig ich auch" (163). From that moment, she cooperates with the exorcism. Her husband, on the other hand, believes the student is an exorcist. Like the other victims of the student’s ploys, this man simply trusts what he is told. Acting like a director, the student’s strength comes from using others’ lack of awareness to gain control of them.

And that is the strength of the ironist. I call the student an ironic player because he uses irony to construct and orchestrate his plays. Green defines irony this way:

Ironic is a statement, or presentation of an action or situation, in which the real or intended meaning conveyed to the initiated intentionally diverges from, and is incongruous with, the apparent or pretended meaning presented to the uninitiated. (9)
Ironic always deals with different levels of understanding. When he wants to play with someone, the student's favorite kind of irony is dramatic, an irony caused by "the superior knowledge of the listeners, aware of a truth withheld from a character" (Green 250). The paradise play is a clear example: the woman accepts that the student came from heaven, but once she leaves the stage, the student tells the audience how gullible she is. Therefore, the audience comes to see with the student's point of view and becomes aware of itself as audience of his play. The woman, however, because she assumes that the student's role is his real self--because she is uninitiated--believes she is an interactor in a real interaction, rather than realizing she is a character in the student's play. The same is true for the farmer on the marsh and the other farmer during the exorcism. Fundamentally, dramatic irony allows the student to act in and direct his own plays.

Like the Fastnachtspiele of his creator, the student's plays teach two groups: the characters and the audience. They teach the characters through subtle manipulation. Unlike Sachs' other male characters--husbands who always threaten violence--the student does not need physical intimidation. All he needs is a gullible audience, and then like any skillful ironist, he can orchestrate scenes in which the characters learn truths for themselves. And that is good teaching:
For the victim of irony the acquisition of truth by seeking for it himself in piercing through appearances is the surest pedagogic way to ensure that he will make that truth his own. (Green 388)

By teaching with irony, rather than direct moralization, the student helps initiate the audience. He invites them to look beneath the literal presentation of his play and realize the deeper meaning: in knowing themselves, people can develop compassion for others and come to union. Here the student teaches a lesson. But he uses play rather than didacticism; he leads people toward moral maturity, rather than telling them to mature. Thus, through the student, Sachs challenges his own didactic tendency. For the student suggests to the audience to be sceptical of the apparent meaning with which Sachs closes the Spiel--the author's voice may not reveal his heart.

Though he teaches well, the student learns no moral lessons. Because he always seems to be directing the action, he works on a moral level above the other characters, invulnerable to the suffering he causes them. Without challenge, the student remains who he is when the play starts.

Perhaps the Schüler is not human. In the first play, he comes from paradise: an angel. In the second, he is a practitioner of the dark arts: a sorcerer. Both of these masks point to the student's supernatural abilities and paradoxical nature. Falling from heaven and arising from
hell, the student transcends the other characters and, within himself, embodies the marriage of deception and virtue. In his character, dichotomous forces are wed. This gives him the deceptive--and creative--power of the devil, as well as the healing--and unifying--power of an angel. But does this imply moral perfection? No and yes.

Seen through an uninitiated eye, the Schuler is morally despicable. First, he lies. He claims he can travel to heaven in four days and conjure Satan. Second, he steals. In the paradise play, he takes clothes, money, and a horse from a poor farm family. While they end up the town fools, he celebrates at the local tavern. In the exorcism play, moreover, the student extorts food, money, and six months free rent while creating severe angst for the priest and the woman. The priest accurately accuses the student of cruel mischief:

Du störtzt vmb auf dem Land gemein
Vnd kannst nichts, denn die baurn bescheissen
Mit lüg vnd List jns maul auffspreissen
Vnd stilst ein wenig auch darzu. (90-93)

Judged accordingly, the Schuler is no moral hero. His guiding principle seems ego-centric: take advantage of others before they take advantage of you! Kniesant describes the student in this way: "Seine Existenz ist sein Geschäft, seinen Vorteil erreicht er durch Wissen, List und die Unerfahrenheit anderer Menschen" (1512). The student
seems a selfish ethical relativist. But because of his position as the ironic player, there is no one to judge him. He is there to judge others. His morality, though, is not a system of bi-polar categories, and his truth is not the literal meaning; instead, his morality works through irony, and his truth is the revelation of true character.

But those seem dangerous ethics for the authoritative Sachs. Indeed, the ironic player’s duplicity threatens his creator’s closures, and so the voice of the author appears to be in direct moral opposition to the workings of his creation. On the one hand, we have the wily Schuler, whom both the titles and plots of the plays declare the hero, a moral model. But he is simultaneously a champion of trickery, manipulation, and deceit. On the other hand, we have the authorial presence, a voice of piety which ends each play with a clear lesson about living in virtue. Given these two conflicting voices, the message of the Fastnachtspiel seems mixed: the author warns us not to do what his hero does.

Read alone, the concluding value statements ironize the student’s heroism. The endings, the self-conscious labeling of what the play really means, offer themselves as definitive and final judgements. After all, how can the audience argue with the author? He must mean that order and integrity are good; disorder and deception, bad. The conclusions, therefore, demand a revaluation of the student as a villain. If creating mischief is a crime, then the
student should carry the hot iron as punishment! After all, in plays dealing with moral growth, the student has not grown at all--hardly a worthy role model. But why then does he always triumph?

Certainly, the student acts immorally, but he is just playing. As an actor, he is allowed to lie without being judged according to the standards of the off-stage world. The initiated--those who see the student at play--will see that he does not teach corruption. Deeper understanding of human fallibility is the real virtue here.

Perhaps, too, he mocks the closural words of his creator. If the student truly is the hero, then he ironizes the moralizations. The student's playfullness invites his audience to play with the authoritative last words and see through them to the meaning they mask. In the end, Sachs does not want his audience to take his moralization as the moral--that would make life too easy:

The ironist leaves work for the audience to do; they must make his truth their own by reacting against what he appears to mean, so that his purpose in saying something other than what he means is not to deceive with a lie, but to awaken to a truth. (Green 8)

That truth for Sachs is the movement toward union through the marriage of virtue and deception.

Taking the student as an ironist, however, reveals another truth: Sachs is not who he says he is. Sachs loves
trickery as much as he believes in honesty, and although he claims to enter the play only at the end, Sachs has been there all along. Where has he hidden himself? Behind the mask of his Schuler. As much as he is the voice of virtue (the serious, self-conscious Sachs), the author is also the source of deception (the playful Sachs). In the guise of the student, then, Sachs makes fun of his persona as the moral authority of the ending. But that does not negate the moral of unity. Disguised as the student, Sachs uses deception to open the possibility of human communion.

Deception drives Sachs' plays. On a deeper level, deception and its companion forces of disorder drive every story, because stories, by nature, require what D. A. Miller calls the narratable: "the instances of disequilibrium, suspense, and general insufficiency" (ix). In Sachs' plays, the narratable is the gift of the student. He creates the disorder from which the plot arises. Without him, there would be no story to tell. Though a character like the Pewrin is good, goodness alone is boring in the framework of the play. Order is two-dimensional: there is nothing to say about it, and so it cannot generate drama. Order can be an end toward which a story moves, but never a means to get there.

Accordingly, the explicit morals of unity seem simplifications—or even contradictions—of meaning which can only be expressed in the drama itself. Thus, the playful Sachs (the Schuler) always reminds the audience to
look beneath the last words of the serious Sachs.
Certainly, the serious Sachs means what he says--live peacefully together--but, at the same time, the playful Sachs realizes that an admonition is not enough. The words are words, and they do not change lives. Moral transformation comes from living through the events of the play.

As ironic player, the student has the same duty as his creator: expose and exorcise demons within characters. Both Sachs and the student know they must work cleverly. If they directly accused a character of wrongdoing, they might cause denial. So they use dramatic irony to put characters "on stage" in roles which lead to insight.

As a play about moral insight, the exorcism performed by the student in Der fahrendt Schuler mit dem Teuffelbannen becomes an analog for Sachs' work in all three plays. First, there is the creation of the physical stage. The student, like the Gefatterin in Das heisse Eysen, draws a circle to define the space in which the drama will occur. This is the stage of unmasking: here the otherwise hidden moral reality will be made visible. Whereas a typical proscenium stage (in this case, the front of the tavern) lies open to the audience in only one plane, the circular stage is completely open. There is no hiding upstage; the soul is exposed from every angle.

Once the stage has been created, the play may begin. The audience of two, husband and wife, take their places.
Then the lead actor, Fr. Devil, enters. The student has allowed the priest to wear only a dirty doormat. Stripped of his sacerdotal robes—symbols of hypocrisy—he learns a deeply Christian lesson: humility. Besides breaking the priest's arrogance, the student demands that he smear himself with coal dust. Reminiscent of Ash Wednesday, the day which begins Lent, the priest's sinfulness is made manifest.

This revelation is not for him alone, though, for the woman must also see the devil as the representation of her own darkness. In a less meaningful script, the student could have used straightforward words to expose her as an adulteress. But such a tactic might have angered her and enraged her husband, ripping their marriage apart. By using ironic words, however, the student unites them on a higher plane of understanding.

The exorcism scene mirrors the Fastnachtspiel in revealing the problems latent in superficially stable, but deeply troubled, relationships. Once exposed, these problems can be seen, understood, and, Sachs hopes, forgiven. The marriage can thus move toward union, but that movement comes only through the exorcism of the underlying disorder. It seems then that deception is necessary to purge itself for moral growth. Yet deception must not destroy itself completely. In the state of union, some deception must always remain to balance virtue and keep the story thriving.
The Neighbor Woman

Though she does not play the role as strongly as the Schuler does in his plays, the Gefatterin also acts like a director in Das heiß Eysen. Here again Sachs uses a character as an analog of himself. But she, unlike the wandering student, becomes embroiled in the moral problems of the play.

Where the student seems to script the scenes, the neighbor woman seems to set the props. She offers the hot iron as a means to ease the adulteress' suspicion, encouraging her with these words:

Darumb hab fleiß vnd rich auch an,
Da diß heiß Eysen trag dein Man!
Schaw, daß du jn könst vberreden! (27-29)

Like the student, the neighbor woman wants to get at the truth underneath appearances. And by grounding the play in the ordeal, she begins the deception which will lead toward union.

Like the exorcism in Der farendt Schuler mit dem Teuffelbannen, the ordeal in Das heiß Eysen becomes a revelatory event. The Gefatterin places the iron in the center of a circle she draws. This circle, like the exorcist's, becomes a stage within a stage, a locus for the drama of disclosure. Here the leading actor is the husband, a cunning man who cheats on the test to trick his wife into exposing herself. Moreover, the hot iron itself seems to be a player. It is the focal point of attention, and the
threat of the iron burning their hands compels characters to reveal themselves. Importantly, the neighbor woman always brings in the heated iron. Thus, in the first part of the play, she stands morally above the others and, like the Schuler, takes on significations of judge and punisher.

Ironically and comically, though, the Gefatterin dares not take the test herself. When the adulteress pleads with her to carry the iron, she humbly refuses:

O es taug nit; darzu würd ich
am Eysen mein Hend prennen zwar,
Das mir würd abgehn haut vnd har.
Ich war vor jaren auch nicht rein. (204-08)

She fears the test she herself suggested. But she will not be punished for hypocrisy because, unlike the adulteress, the neighbor woman does not try to hide her impurity. She has the courage to confess, therefore allowing the audience to laugh at her and, for a moment, at the ordeal. By admitting her own fallibility, then, she gains a humanity the student never has. He comes from the supernatural world and transcends judgment; she identifies herself with the audience and, like most sinners, fears judgment.

Stripped of moral superiority, the Gefatterin now becomes a voice of compassion. When the husband threatens to beat his wife after she has burned her hands, the neighbor woman intervenes: "O Gfatter, trollt euch vnd schweigt still!/ Jr habt hie ein verloren spiel" (223-24). It seems curious to label this excruciating ordeal a spiel.
But perhaps the neighbor woman intended it that way. Herself an adulteress, she may have suggested the hot iron ironically, to undermine the seriousness of the other woman’s fears. But like the uninitiated audience members, the woman assumes that the Gefatterin genuinely believes in the ordeal, forgetting that it may have been suggested with the opposite intention. Once the ordeal starts, however, all must play along. Subtly, Sachs may be telling his audience the danger of seeing only the surface text. If they misinterpret the game, failing to see beneath, then they will see only through the perspective of the authorial Sachs and be trapped by his love of closure.

After the ordeal is over, the neighbor woman encourages reconciliation. Eager that the couple be reunited, she calms the husband with these words:

Mein Gfatter, lasts best bey euch liegen!

Wölt meinr Gfattern vergeben das!

Wer ist der, der sich nie vergaß?

Kompt! wir wollen dran giessn ein Wein! (238-41)

The neighbor woman here (in a voice the student does not have) accepts sinfulness and disorder, encouraging the couple to live with it, to celebrate its partnership with virtue. Here is the voice of union.

The Ordeal of the Hot Iron

The playful Sachs relishes disorder. He enjoys it most conspicuously in the form of the ordeal. The ordeal of the
hot iron, dramatic center of the play, burns through moral certainties. First, the ordeal itself is a show. A contemporary audience would have understood it as presentational and anachronistic, rather than as a living ritual. In 1554 when Das heiß Eysen was first performed, the ordeal of the hot iron had not been used for over 300 years (Bartlett 34). The Gefatterin admits its age when she says, "Wie man vor jaren gwonheit het" (19). Though historically incongruous, the ordeal retains symbolic meaning as a test of order: while the flesh of the innocent will not burn, those guilty of violating God's order will suffer. Thus, by branding sinners, the ordeal makes manifest the wounds of the soul.

But the ordeal has no inherent meaning. Whoever has the power to set the rules creates the test's meaning. Specifically, if the Church says burning signifies guilt, then only the guilty burn. And if the accused doubts the ordeal's validity, that person must be guilty and deserving of torture. Naturally, the administrators are themselves exempt from taking the test.

The husband in Das heiß Eysen simultaneously denies and grants the ordeal meaning. To everyone except his wife, he denies its validity. He explains his strategy to the audience: "Nun ich wil jr ein schlackheit thon,/ In Ermel stecken diesen Spon" (89-90). By cheating--carrying spoons to protect his hands from the hot iron--he shows his distrust of the test. No simpleton, he knows well that the
iron burns everyone, innocent or not, and his realism overpowers any faith in a test that lies.

His hands stay clean, but what has the husband proven?
He tells his wife that he is innocent:

Mein Weib, nun bist vergwiest fort hin,
Das ich der zicht vnschuldig bin,
Das ich mein Eh hab brochen nie,
Weil ich das glüend Eyssen hie
Getragen hab gantz vnebrent.  (109-113)

Here lies a crucial contradiction: grounded in deception, his claim to virtue loses meaning. Had he questioned the legitimacy of the ordeal, his spoon trick would be justified. But he does not challenge it. Rather, he pretends to accept it, knowing it can be used to his advantage. For once he passes the test he will have unquestionable moral authority over his wife—rather deceptive for a man of virtue. By cheating, he has become a deceiver and, therefore, undermined any claim to piety. His proof of fidelity has proven nothing but his own manipulative cleverness.

His ethics become even more suspect when he demands that his wife undergo the ordeal. Now why would a virtuous man do this? Either he is testing her cleverness: is she smart enough to pull the same trick he did? Or, more likely, he wants revenge because she refused to trust his oath. His desire for vengeance must be satisfied, so he forces her to carry the iron even after she has confessed.
Thus, he transforms the ordeal from a test of guilt into a weapon of punishment. At the same moment, in submitting to the hot iron without trickery, the adulteress nobly exposes herself to judgement. Now the roles have been reversed: the deceptive wife has become repentant; the virtuous husband has become deceptive.

But the authoritative author might read it otherwise. To him, the adulteress must suffer, and it matters little that her husband tricked her. The husband, seemingly virtuous and above the judgement of others, can use any means to expose and punish sin—just like the Schuler. There is nothing wrong with insisting on the iron after his wife’s confession because evil must be punished. Yet punishment is not the true end of the ordeal for Sachs. The greater goal is reconciliation, the movement toward a union grounded in compassion and awareness of one’s own sinfullness.¹²

Though it may lead to justice, the ordeal itself is unjust. No character upholds its ostensible meaning as a test of alignment with the divine order. Sachs, his characters, and his audience all know it is nothing more than a hot piece of iron that burns whomever it touches. But curiously, Sachs returns to it in his farewell moral: "Das kein vnrat weyter drauß wachs/ Durch das heiß Eyssen, wünscht Hans Sachs" (253-54). What does he mean?

Both lines may be understoodironically. The play has undermined the use of the ordeal, and Sachs probably does
not want his audience to go home and chase their spouses with hot pokers. Thus, the use of the hot iron is itself vnrat. The ordeal is not to be dismissed, however. As a moral agent, it unmasked hypocrisy in the movement away from vnrat toward truth.

So Sachs does seem to mean what he says in the conclusion. But that leads to a paradox. As with the exorcism, the means of purging disorder is itself a play of deception. Sachs needs vnrat. There would not have been a purgation—nor a plot—if there had not been deception throughout the text. Whether in Das heiß Eysen or the Schuler plays, deception seems the only way to cut through disguises to reveal the darkness beneath and then enlighten that darkness. The wandering student, the neighbor woman, and the ordeal of the hot iron—the forces of disorder—all point to the irony of the serious author's quest for order.

The Relationship of Carnival and the Reformation to the Fastnachtspiel

This third section will develop further the dichotomy of deception and virtue in regard to the contexts of carnival and the Reformation. I have structured my thesis this way because, rather than using these contexts to read the Fastnachtspiele, I want to use my interpretation of the plays to understand their contexts. This is a vital extension, for the dichotomy found in the three
Fastnachtspiele is the stuff of the genre itself, and, with Sachs, it pushes the genre toward its destruction.

In this section, I will first explore the meaning of the carnival and its plays, asking how an author who claims to distrust carnival can write Fastnachtspiele. Then I will look at Sachs' role in the Reformation, trying to understand how straightforward moral discourse could contribute to the death of a comedic genre.

The Meaning of Carnival

Before the forty long, lean days of Lent, medieval people wanted to have fun. So during the Fastnachtzeit, "the season of abandon," they celebrated without constraint (Strauss 216). They drank, danced, sang, paraded in costumes, made fun of authorities and did everything that was otherwise forbidden. Carnival overturned the traditional order, providing a time for "magnificently reckless discontent" (Kinser 22).¹³ Though it seemed to exaggerate disorderly behaviour, carnival was fundamentally a celebration of living in union. During carnival, the moralistic separation of action into good and bad, proper and impure, ended. Celebrants were free to do everything during carnival; the carnival world included everything:

Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all people. While carnival lasts, there is no life outside it . . . it is a
special condition of the world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part.

(Bakhtin, Rabelais 7)

Carnival made the world whole. For many, this was a thrilling liberation from moralistic judgement.

For others, however, the celebration of carnival subverted the principals of public and private morality necessary for a stable society. Because carnival mocked authority, the Nürnberg city government was wary of it. Already in 1469—almost fifty years before the Reformation—the city council wanted to restrict the carnival and to that end, made this proclamation:

No one, man or woman . . . either by day or by night, shall reverse their clothing or alter it otherwise, and especially that they shall not change or distort their visage with any sort of thing. . . . For indeed in the last Carnival various people used light-headed, luxurious, immodest, impolite words and gestures in plays and rimes. . . . Such behaviour is, in the presence of honorable people and especially of maidens and women, sinful, annoying, and shameful.

(quoted in Kinser 3)

Still, the celebration of carnival continued until the Reformation, surviving supression because it was part of the fabric of life.
The laughter of carnival balanced the prayers of Lent. If carnival had happened any other time of year, perhaps it would have seemed mere decadence. But it always happened in communion with Lent. Before the faithful could earnestly repent, they needed a time to act upon their natural urges. Because all tensions could be released without judgment, carnival became "an occasion of catharsis" (Remshardt 173). This cleansing prepared people for the holy season of Lent. During carnival: "The door opens upon a ritual purging and cleansing with a chaotic abandon to pleasure before the most holy period of the liturgical year" (Williams 28). Thus, carnival served the Church in a time when all of life was religious life. Carnival was a holy season: "Die Fastnacht bildete einen integralen Bestandteil des theologischen Heilsplans" (Moser 191). Rather than a threat to sanctity, the Church understood carnival as a baptism of laughter.

Though carnival and Lent ultimately complimented each other, their modes of discourse differed. Whereas Lent offered what Bakhtin calls the direct word, praising virtue, carnival offered the laughing word, parodying virtue. But this parody was really a blessing in disguise. Bakhtin explains the work of carnival this way:

The direct and serious word was revealed, in all its limitations and insufficiency, only after it had become the laughing image of that word, but was by no means discredited in the process.

(Prehistory 56)
Parody does not negate; it hallows. For those attuned to its deeper message—the initiated—it honors the importance of its object and shows that, though direct language contains the message of virtuous living, the message cannot be contained by that language. Parody and irony create distance "between language and reality" which illuminates, rather than destroys, that reality (Bakhtin, Prehistory 60). Consequently, parody and irony are only dangerous to the discourse which fears for its existence, discourse which is not strong enough to be laughed at. Discourse which can laugh at itself, however, appreciates parody as another voice for the message it contains.

In terms of Sachs' plays, the student speaks with the laughing word. His guile helps him overcome characters who do not see the comedy of their own lives. The student teaches them to laugh at themselves and forgive others. He also discloses Sachs' closure. For example, instead of labeling meaning like the serious author, the student exits to the nearest tavern in the paradise play. By ignoring the final discourse on virtue, the student helps subordinate it to a higher virtue—union—that contains both seriousness and laughter. As Green explains, the author who questions his own ideal "sees it as subordinate to something more embracing and doubts the justification of making an absolute value out of it" (288). The student understands the secret of carnival: silliness must question seriousness, for virtue alone is not ultimately valuable.
But apparently Sachs could not tolerate a world which transcended moral distinctions. Despite its regenerative power, carnival seemed to him to be a destructive temptation. Sachs considered it dangerous because it radically questioned the social order and the virtue of conformity, a threat Sachs had to challenge. In 1540 he wrote an anti-carnival dialogue poem, "A conversation with Carnival About Her Characteristics." It portrays carnival as a beast with a gaping mouth and barrel-shaped belly. Here the poet himself confronts the beast:

I asked: why is your tail so thin
And hard, besplintered, scabby, lank?
And Carnival said: my carrying-on brings
Lots of bad luck after me--
Debts and poverty, vices, sins, and shame...
Eating bad things with good teeth,
Getting up too early, sitting around too late...
Seducing virgins, and married women too,
Playing false, disputing, spreading rumors--
Such bothersome stuff as this follows after me.

(Quoted in Kinser 21)

Later in the poem carnival commits suicide by jumping into a river. For the moralistic Sachs, the lesson is clear: indulgence in sin leads to self-destruction. Although he never demanded the abolition of the Fastnachtzeit, he encouraged its suppression.
But if Sachs honestly opposed the carnivalesque, why would he write *Fastnachtspiele*? Why provide entertainment for the party? Though the serious Sachs worried about lasciviousness, the playful Sachs liked having fun. In his poem, "Summa all meiner gedicht," Sachs admits that during his youth he enjoyed "Spil, trunckenheit und bulerey/ Und ander kurzweil mancherley" (39-40). And as an adult, *Fastnachtspiele* were his favorite literary toy, his comedic consciousness at its most playful. He liked to laugh at human silliness because, during carnival, the playful author understood that laughing at the human condition was the best way to make it better. Könneker interprets Sachs' intention this way:

Die Reaktion, die er beim Leser oder Zuschauer damit hervorruft, ist nichts als Gelächter, und zwar ein Gelächter, das aus der Erkenntnis entsteht, daß es anderen Leuten nicht besser geht als ihm selbst und sich hinter den verschiedenen Masken und Verkleidungen stets der gleiche, fehlbare, mit Mängeln und Schwächen behaftete Mensch verbirgt. ("Ehe" 221)

I tend to agree with Könneker that the play helps the audience members to laugh at themselves. However, the critic must not forget to see some of Sachs' characters as fools for the audience to laugh at. The *Pewrin*, for example, is primarily an object of derision, not identification. In the paradise play, the student
encourages his audience to realize their superiority and laugh at the woman. Here virtue becomes the object of parody. Moreover, the student is presented as infallible and beyond the moral weakness of the other characters. Because his audience is always inferior to him, the student is not a likely object of identification. Sachs uses him to point out the flaws in other characters so the audience can see that moral seriousness can often be a facade to be shattered by laughter.

The Fastnachtspiel was a genre rooted in laughter. After long winter days of work, Sachs' audience of fellow craftsmen and their families came to his plays to be entertained. Accordingly, some view the Fastnachtspiele as having value only as entertainment, as "leichte Unterhaltungsstücke" (Michels 65). Such critics tend to dispute the connection between farcical plays and morality. Brinker argues, "a subordination of farce to didactic purposes stands in contradiction of its purely entertaining nature" (566). The error in this position, I think, is that entertainment--especially parody--can have its own moral task. It mocks the sobriety of moralism and thereby reveals the deeper morality underneath the words. Though entertainment and didacticism seem contradictory, they can illuminate each other and serve to uncover deeper values.

Traditionally, though, carnival plays tended not to be self-consciously didactic. In fact, they were purposefully disgusting, using burps, flagellation, and all the bubblings
of the body as part of the show.\textsuperscript{17} The audience expected such silliness and had little expectation of moral seriousness. Given that frame, it seems clear that Sachs must be speaking ironically when he moralizes at the end of his plays. The genre is essentially ironic, and to interpret it otherwise is to forget that \textit{Fastnachtspiele} were most commonly performed in taverns, not churches. Through the voice of the student, the plays express the liberating message of carnival, the message that it is healthy to mock virtue.\textsuperscript{18}

Looking back now, it seems Sachs had a paradoxical relationship with his favorite genre. Certainly, he had a desire for closure and unity. The serious author demands the dominance of the moralistic word. At the same time, however, Sachs had an affection for deception. The playful author took pleasure in disorder. But how do they work together?

Both paths can lead to purgation. Just as fasting--the serious word of Lent--teaches humility and contrition, the carnivalesque--"the feast of becoming, change, renewal"--purges devils and prepares people for a better life (Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais} 10). The carnivalesque, then, rather than being a dangerous monster, is a great clown which appears "wherever the world seeks renewal in collective release from everyday rounds" (Kinser 30). Both \textit{Fastenzeit} and \textit{Fastnacht} are movements toward transformation, complimentary rather than contradictory baptisms.
The Meaning of Reform

Here I explore how Sachs' religious zeal informed his ethics and his plays. The dichotomy of order and disorder, of seriousness and playfullness, remains at the heart of this discussion. It is a dichotomy which develops new gravity in the context of Luther's Reformation: though the authoritative Sachs saw the Reformation spread, the playful Sachs watched the Fastnachtspiel die.

Living in Nürnberg, Sachs found himself in the center of the Lutheran upheaval. By 1524, only seven years after Martin Luther had posted his 99 Theses in Wittenberg, Nürnberg officially sanctioned Protestantism, and Sachs became an impassioned convert.¹⁹ The shoemaker saw Lutheranism as the way to reaffirm deep Christian values of piety and faith. And if the Reformation required overthrowing the power of the corrupt Catholic Church, then Sachs was ready to fight. He extolled Luther, composed polemics against the clergy, and satarized the Pope.²⁰ Though his work could further polarize Christianity, Sachs seemed to care more for the order of God than for the orderly life of Nürnberg--salvation was more important than the status quo. As in his plays, Sachs saw disorder as a means to attain higher order.

Sachs demanded a return to faith. As a follower of Luther he believed that "the salvation of the individual depends on faith and trust in God" (Beary xxxvii). Accordingly, salvation required the striving for order, for
the unification of the human heart with the will of God. Order, then, was of supreme importance to Sachs. Order and faith must overcome disorder and doubt in the struggle for salvation.

Furthermore, Sachs wanted a vibrant faith. He longed for people to live their faith, rather than recite empty creeds on Sunday. For Sachs, "the message of the gospels was not a call to theological battle, but rather a call and constant reminder to live a proper life" (Sobel 139). Most scholars agree that Sachs wanted people to be good. Remshardt makes this assertion: "That Sachs' intentions are ultimately didactic . . . is unquestionable" (89). Finally, though, Remshardt is mistaken in hearing only the serious voice of the author. The voice of the playful author is allowed to speak from within the movement of the play, but never at the end. The audience must be wary, then, when Sachs claims that all his writings were dedicated to promulgating the divine order. In his "Summa all meiner gedicht" Sachs expresses his intentions:

Zu gottes preis, rhum, lob und glori,

Und daß sein wort werd außgebreit

Bey christlicher gmein ferr und weit. (222-24)

Near the end of his career, Sachs boasts here of having a profound sense of literature's moral responsibility and of his own success in helping his audience grow closer to salvation. The serious author is congratulating himself.
But Sachs may not have realized the ramifications of his work. I will show here that, by grounding his plays in virtue, Sachs abandoned the powerful carnivalesque spirit which engendered the Fastnachtspiel. But first I must explore the way in which the Reformation split the wholeness of the world.

Essentially, the Reformation dismantled the balance between carnival and Lent. As Kinser notes, "After the effective victory of Protestantism in Nürnberg, the Carnival-Lent symmetry disappeared" (28). Under Lutheran theology, Lent was lost as a strictly observed period of penance. Without Fastenzeit, the time of solemnity, Fastnachtzeit lost the ground for its being as "Ventil überschäumender Ausgelassenheit" (Könneker, "Teufelbannen" 180). Consequently, the celebration of carnival declined. Kinser's article explains that during its decline, carnival transformed from a living, participatory ritual into an objectified, performed spectacle. In other words, carnival itself became a play, an image of its former fullness. Instead of spontaneous celebrations occurring throughout Nürnberg, parades were held for people to watch. Instead of life being silly and rude and farcical--instead of living the carnivalesque--people watched someone else pretend to live it on stage.

The fading of Lent and carnival were symptomatic of a deeper split engendered by the Reformation: the separation between religious and secular life. Previously the Church
provided the context for all parts of medieval life. Life was whole; consequently, even the excesses of carnival were holy in relationship to the austerity of Lent. But Luther's revolution separated life into the secular and the sacred, and moved the Fastnachtspiel among the secular.

As a consequence of this separation, the content and meaning of the Fastnachtspiel changed. Although the old plays were filled with crude humor, obscenity was never, in itself, the goal. Rather, obscenity parodied propriety. But the new Protestant theology subordinated the laughing word to the direct word:

Kein Protestant, der sich der Mühe entzog,
katholische Denkweisen von ihrem intentionalen Ansatz her zu verstehen, wäre bereit gewesen, die Darstellung von Obszönität als Teil des christlichen Heilsplanes anzusehen. (Moser 183)

Because the Reformation had dismantled the context for carnival, the carnivalesque seemed more disgraceful than redemptive.

Sachs' distaste for the carnivalesque now becomes more understandable. Despite the Fastnachtspiel's traditional grounding in obscenity, he tried to prevent anything seemingly perverse from corrupting his writing. Without question, "Obscenity had no place in Hans Sachs' plays" (Dusak 6). Sachs considered obscenity immoral and inimical to a morally good play. Thomas summarized Sachs' mission: "He discarded the pointless indecency of his predecessors
and aims to treat the subject in such a way as to enforce some wholesome moral" (Thomas 152). Though Thomas, like other critics, is seeing only the authoritative Sachs, there is a vital point here. In carefully weeding obscenity—gross disorder—from his carnival plays, Sachs had forgotten his own lesson: order can not engender itself; it must come through the play of disorder. Thus, Sachs' plays lost their playfulness. With Sachs, "das Fastnachtspiel seinen Ursprünglichen Sinn als Manifestation der 'Narrenfreiheit' verloren hatte" (Könneker, "Ehe" 242). Though I interpret his moral to be that of union, of the marriage of virtue and deception, the fact that his voice closes the play with a moral remains contrary to the spirit of carnival. The carnival play, employed by Sachs to promulgate virtue—rather than liberate its audience from virtue—was deprived of its deeper meaning as an agent of playful disorder.

Uprooted from their traditional opposition to Lent, the carnival plays consequently began, with Sachs, to become secularized. Earlier the genre "had no concept of itself as art" (Remshardt 86). But as carnival became more and more representational, the genre became conscious of itself as literature. As a consequence, "Künstlerische Gesetze und Absichten beherrschen die Spiele, die sich mehr und mehr aus dem Zusammenhang der Fastenzeit lösen" (Catholy 8). Though Sachs developed the plays to be more artful—with rounded characters and dramatic unity—they simultaneously lost their original foolishness. They became spectacles,
representations of themselves, reminders of a time when carnival liberated the world from hierarchy and propriety.

Fundamentally, though, this was a historical transformation beyond Sachs' control. Even though he assisted its spread, the Reformation would have done its cleaning without him: "Die Reinigung des Fastnachtspiels von der Obszönität . . . kann nicht allein als Resultat der ethischen Einstellung des Dichters angesehen werden" (Moser 183). Yet Sachs contributed to the metamorphosis. He tried too hard to control the forces of the narratable. In the end of the plays, order claims precedence over disorder. Though characters like the wandering student challenge that order, the serious author does not allow obscenity and demands satisfying moral closure. The carnival tradition, in contrast, resisted closure. The Fastnachtspiele of the prior century had open endings which allowed the conflicts and questions to remain unsolved (Könneker, "Ehe" 242). Thus, Sachs' closural voice became antithetical to the fundamentally irreverent Fastnacht spirit, and the serious author, having removed the profound disorder of the carnival tradition from his work, drained the lifeblood from his genre.

Sachs' moralizations abandoned the deep source of the Fastnachtspiel. By changing the fabric of his plays from the chaotic to the orderly, "von der Provokation zur Affirmation," he changed their fundamental nature (Könneker, "Ehe" 242). Deprived of the carnival spirit which gave it
life, the Fastnachtspiel quickly decayed. A few authors followed Sachs, but none achieved his popularity. By 1600, drained of its vital fluids, the genre was dead. Carnival plays might later be written in commemoration of the old tradition, but as a thriving genre, as part of the living theater of carnival, the Fastnachtspiel passed into literary history. After Sachs, all that was left was a puppet show.

Was Wünscht Hans Sachs?

In my farewell to the Fastnachtspiele of Hans Sachs, I would like to look again at the relationship between ethics and literature, the play and its moral. Order and disorder, deception and virtue: which one dominates? After the curtain falls, what does Sachs leave us?

The Moral of Virtue

Unity, of course. The lives of Sachs’ characters have returned from instability and discord to stability and harmony. And that is what is important. His moral is clear to all: marriage, as a model of human community, must be maintained with an ever-deepening understanding of the other. Sachs has taught his characters to appreciate both the seriousness and silliness of their lives. They have seen their own weaknesses, and thereby, have come to better endure the weakness of others. All three plays share a
movement from disorder to order, hiddenness to awareness. The hot iron and the Schuler help cleanse relationships of deception and restore virtue. Though their marriages remain problematic, husbands and wives have returned to lives of order.

Of course Sachs cared about ethics. His writings consistently reveal a concern for human goodness: "His blood had a decidedly moral flow" (Thomas 150). He cared enough to provide his carnival plays—which might be mistakenly interpreted as mere entertainment—with clear morals for the audience to remember. Clearly, the voice that calls itself Sachs at the end of the play believes that literature can make people better.²⁴ Hence, one need not doubt that voice's sincerity in the conclusion to "Summa aller meiner gedichte" when it closes with these words:

Und meine gedicht laß zu-letz
Dem guthertzig gemeinen mann,
Mit gotts hülff sich sich besser darvon.
Gott sey lob, der mir sendt herab
So miltiglich die schönen gab
Als einem ungelehrten mann,
Der weder latein noch griechisch kan,
Das mein gedicht grün, blü und wachs
Und vil frücht bring, das wünscht Hans Sachs.

(246-54)
Sachs has given his characters and audience the fruit of virtue. It is a valuable gift, but after biting into it deeply, the audience's eyes should open. For the fruit of virtue comes from the play of deception.

The Play of Deception

If order is the end, disorder is the means. Unified marriages are forged by trickery and manipulation, forces of deception embodied in the Schuler and Gefatterin. They act as ironic players, orchestrating morality plays of their own. And once freed to play, disorder is not destroyed by unified conclusions: "the narratable inherently lacks finality. It may be suspended by a moral or ideological expediency, but it can never be properly brought to term" (Miller xi). The narratable is not even silenced; in fact, the deceivers become the mouths Sachs uses to voice his moral messages. The Pawr in the first, the Gefatterin in the second, the Schuler in the third: in each play, a character known to be a dissembler tells us what to believe. By using actors as oracles, Sachs subverts the authority of his own words.

He invites us, then, to interpret his Spiele playfully, ironically, and look below the surface. The wandering student subverts superficial morality because he knows that lying can bring honesty; deception, revelation. By leading his actors to renew their lives, the ironic player becomes a moral hero, for "moral action is action which affirms life"
(Gardner 23). Through the Schuler's carnival plays and playing, Sachs' Fastnachtspiele go beyond moralistic poles of good and evil toward a deeper union.

Yet my question remains: which voice dominates in the end? Is it that of order, or of disorder? But before I answer, I must ask myself a more fundamental question: why do I want an answer? Why must one ultimately have superiority over the other?

Rather than one or the other, the better answer is, both. This is not a typical interpretation. With regard to the carnival plays, Sachs is often trivialized by critics. They quickly categorize him facilely as either a didact or an entertainer. Könneker summarizes Sachs' work in this vein: "Denn in erster Linie zielte seine Sprache auf Belehrung, seltener auf Unterhaltung" (Sachs 21). At various stages of my thought, stages summarized above, I have seen Sachs as both moralist and comedian. But this thinking fails because it necessarily ignores or subordinates the other side. A better description comes from Thomas when he says of Sachs: "His spirit was compounded of honest evangelical piety that knew no misgiving, and a genial, roguish humour that knew no bitterness" (150). These are not distinct sides of a divided consciousness but, as Thomas suggests, interwoven elements which exist together. For Sachs expresses a morality beneath the poles of virtue and deception, of union, a morality serious enough for Sachs to laugh at.
Now I will use figurative language to express an image which, I hope, will further convey my understanding of Sachs' work. At the end of the play, both virtue and deception stand on stage together. One does not serve the other--both leading actors, they share the applause. For deception and virtue are partners in Sachs' Fastnachtspiele. They are married. Thus, the search for meaning must always see them together. To give one precedent is to violate the marriage, and that is just what these plays work against. Sachs has given marriage as the paradigm in which dichotomous forces may balance themselves and live together, perhaps not happily ever after, but, at least, ever after.

Ultimately, this marriage is also a movement toward harmony, toward order. But Sachs does not impose this order from above. Rather, he goes back to the beginning. On the stage where deception and virtue join together lies the generative ground of ethics, the source of all stories. In The Ethics of Reading, J. Hillis Miller calls this place "moral law." He explains that "the moral law gives rise by an intrinsic necessity to storytelling, even if that storytelling in one way or another puts in question or subverts the moral law" (2). The metaphysical wholeness of life--embodied in the carnival--engenders stories driven by deception. But, as Sachs and his student know, deception can ultimately lead to deeper insight.
A Parable

Not as a final closure, but as a generative suggestion, I offer here a parable based on my image.

On that stage where order and disorder dance together, where virtue and deception are wed, a Fastnachtspiel is born. It is a free creation, a story which must live out its own questions and suffer its own narrative to stay alive. Though they now lose their child to its play, its parents are not sad. For they know that the answers to its questions will finally lead it back to its birthplace.
ENDNOTES

1. Hans Sachs was born on Nov. 5, 1494, in Nürnberg. He attended a Latin school from the ages of seven to fifteen. And then, as a 17-year-old apprentice shoemaker, he travelled throughout Germany. Settling down in Nürnberg in 1516, he set up his shoe shop and lived with his wife and, eventually, seven children. There he was renown as a good citizen and popular writer (Genee 297). After years of fixing shoes and singing his Meisterlieder, he died on January 19, 1576, at the age of 81.

2. Much of Sachs' thought on marriage is derived from Luther who defended the importance of marriage as an "Ordnungsfaktor" in social life (Könneker, "Ehe" 230).

3. Könneker refers to Sachs as "ein loyaler Diener der Obrigkeit und fest überzeugt von der Gottgewollheit der sozialen Ordnung, in der er lebte" ("Ehe" 10). She believes Sachs encouraged social conformity and the support of the status quo. Although beyond the scope of my thesis to evaluate this assertion, it supports my initial claim that Sachs desired order.

4. There is powerful irony here. The story is traditional, told by Der Stricker and others, and much of the medieval audience would have been familiar with it. Consequently, they could have guessed that the woman was an adulteress and hypocritical in her accusation. Her suffering, then, seems more deserved and, given the genre, even comic. Though the moral tones are heavy, Genee sees this play as primarily a comedy. He describes it as "ein wahres Meisterstück, daß er es hier verstanden hat, binnen wenigen Minuten eine dramatische Spannung voll echter Komik hervorzubringen" (340).

5. As an author, however, Sachs needs hypocrites. They bring disorder into the world, becoming catalysts for the drama and partners of virtue in the movement toward union. The use of the hypocrite, then, exemplifies Sachs' moral dichotomy.

6. Knox explains that in dramatic irony, "the author takes the same point of view as the audience, he creating what it enjoys" (92).

7. Whether or not the student is conscious of his function in the plays is difficult to assess. He does not seem to think of himself as a moral agent; he simply plays.

8. Several sources report that Sachs often acted in his plays which indicates his enjoyment of the theatrical ruse.
9. This is the ethical method of irony. Green explains it this way: "Ironic teaches its truth not directly (therefore possibly encountering disbelief or indifference); but by suggesting something other that what is meant, to which the person addressed reacts, as intended, by making the necessary correction, flattered by the belief that the truth has been reached by his own efforts, in contradiction to what the ironist has said" (389).

10. "From the ninth to the twelfth centuries, in every part of Latin Christendom... the ordeal was in regular use. By 1300 it was everywhere vestigial" (Bartlett 34).

11. Bartlett explains that, "The rituals for the ordeal of hot iron frequently contain the invocation, 'If you are innocent of this charge... you may confidently receive this iron in your hand and the Lord, the just judge, will free you, just as he snatched the three children from the burning fire'. The Old Testament reference, to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego passing unharmed through the burning, fiery furnace, linked trial by fire and the vindication of belief" (21-22).

12. Könneker sees this clearly: "Wo ein bestehender Konflikt tatsächlich zum Austrag kommt, geschieht es meist derart, daß Mann und Frau das Vergangene auf sich beruhen lassen und den vorübergehend wiederhergestellten Ehefrieden bei einem kräftigen Versöhnungsmahl feiern" ("Ehe" 226).

13. Ragotzky agrees that the rules of carnival reverse what is normally expected: "Die Möglichkeit, die Normen der offiziellen Welt auf den Kopf zu stellen, ist auch das Gesetz der Fastnacht" (97).

14. Yet, given the turbulent politics of carnival during the Reformation, censorship was a grave concern: all actors and scripts needed approval by the council, the Rugsamt, before being performed. For example, on January 25, 1557, the council reported this: "Uf Hanns Sachsens bitten und anhalten, ime zu vergönne, das er seine gemacht spiel halten möge, soll man dieselben spiel von ime nemen und besichtigen, ob sie dem gemeinen volk nit ergerlich seyen und widerpringen" (Hirschmann 49). The censors must have liked it because this play received official approval to be performed. On January 27, the council decided, "Hannsen Sachsen soll man seine speil zu halten zulassen" (Hirschmann 49). Given his relatively tame texts, it seems unlikely that Sachs suffered censorship. However, he may have written with the censors in mind. But this is a problematic area beyond my research.

15. An earlier author of Fastnachtspiele in Nürnberg, Hans Folz, believed otherwise. Folz contended that the carnivalesque is the most honest expression of human nature
and that, "moralizing complaints mask rather than reveal the reality of everyday behavior" (Kinser 18).

16. Ragotzky notes, "Der Bauer in der Narrenrolle ist die beliebteste Figur im Fastnachtspiel. . .Die Begriffe 

vagnachtspiel und paurenspiel werden. . .synonum verwendet" (77). The farmer was a favorite object of mockery for the burgeoning urban population of Nürnberg.

17. Extremes were vital to the traditional plays because they had to be shocking to create what Moser calls metanoia: the realization of one's sinfulness and the profound need for cleansing and spiritual renewal, "die Sinnesänderung des Menschen" (192). Moser believes metanoia was the most important function of the carnival plays, "der Schlüsselbegriff für das Verständnis von Fastnachtsbrauch und Fastnachtspiel" (192). Its importance lies in its relationship with Fastenzeit: people must feel their sinfulness and want to change before they can fully participate in Lent. But metanoia cannot be created by direct, solemn discourse. Rather, Moser feels that the display of actions opposing christian piety, the obscene and animalesque—"Kreatürlichkeit"—gave the audience an object of renunciation (187). Like Bakhtin, therefore, Moser thinks that carnival supports, rather than undermines, the spiritual health of its celebrants. However, Moser has erred in seeing the carnivalesque as the puppet of the didactic, rather than as a challenge to the validity of direct discourse.

18. Echoing Bakhtin, Williams sees the Fastnachtspiele as the heart of the carnival: "In the presence of the highest and the lowliest townspeople taboos were broken, freeing the people to laugh at the very order whose authority their celebration simultaneously denied and reaffirmed" (28).

19. By 1522 Sachs possessed 40 Lutheran books, and he read so much that he did not write another poem until 1523 (Könneker, Sachs 6).

20. His first work was "Die Wittenbirsche Nachtigall," an allegory which extolled Luther as a prophetic bird leading a flock of sheep from the desert. He also wrote seven prose dialogues which were, generally, anti-clerical. Beary summarizes Sachs' critique of the clergy: "In following the man-made laws of the Curia they had forgotten the faith in Christ that leads to salvation and likewise the love of one's neighbor" (xvi). Sachs attacks went further. In March of 1527, persuaded by the Lutheran preacher Osiander, Sachs wrote a series of four-line captions for a book of anti-papal woodcuts. The book, Auslegung der wunderlichen weissagung von dem Papsttum, is "propoganda of the most virulent kind" (Beary xviii). Here is one of the captions from the book which typifies Sachs' attitude about Rome:
Dem Babst all frumkeit ist verschmecht,
Wer ihm Geld gibt der ist gerecht,
Sei gleich meineidigund treulos,
Ihm gibt er Brief und freiheit groß.

(quoted in Genee 168)

Although the city was predominantly Lutheran, the city council did not want trouble. The council banned the book, summoned Sachs, and warned him to return to his shop: "Nun sey solichs seynes ampts nit . . . darumb eins raths ernster bevelch, das er seins handtweks und schuechmachens warte" (quoted in Sobel 138). Notably, this seems to be Sachs' only well-known public censure.

21. Thomas is typical when he says that Sachs "stood valiantly for the decencies of life, and for temperance in all things" (50).

22. As a living, presentational tradition, Fastnachtspiele were created by middle-class citizens. Sachs was the last working writer. The only authors after him, Peter Probst and Jacob Ayrer, were no longer handworkers (Könneker, "Ehe" 244).


24. According to Könneker, Sachs saw the mission of art as the education and bettering of humanity (Sachs, 25).
Works Cited


Nürnberg, 1976. 219-244.
---. Hans Sachs. Realienbücher für Germanisten.


