

Ritual as Frame for the Folk Humour of the Trickster, the Fool, and the Clown

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Chinese folk narrators and actors have long provided a source of pleasure to audiences through the actions of fools, tricksters, and clowns. Besides giving pleasure, the interactions of these characters with members of their own families or society is also a means by which the culture can test and reinforce boundaries of propriety. In this paper it will be shown how the communication of folk narrators and clowns with their audiences depends upon a common understanding of propriety or *li* (禮), and how traditional performers play tricks on the audience's expectations through the use of conflicting signs in contexts which demand heightened propriety. Confirmation of the traditionality of this communication will be sought through a discussion of the fool and trickster in narratives, consideration of the clown in local Taiwanese opera, and a contrast of these texts to written works, Hwang Mei-shu's drama *Ch'i-yu-tzu-li* (豈有此理)¹ and Huang Chun-ming's novella *Lo* (鑼)² Although these literary works draw on folk sources, they are here seen to be making comments upon tradition and, consequently, to be more sympathetic to the fool or trickster role. It is, though, within the traditional belief frame which supports social propriety and lightheartedly rejects behavior associated with the trickster, the fool, and the clown that narrators and clown actors can share a successfully humorous communication with their audiences.

The humour in traditional narrative and drama depends largely upon a protagonist's relation to propriety and ritual. The majority of comic scenes are what anthropologists and folklorists have termed rites of passage. These rites are times of transition in people's lives when they must be on their best guard so that nothing disorderly or disruptive occurs. They include changes in social relationships caused by births, marriages, birthdays, funerals, and other special occasions. Adherence to traditional formalities is expected

to accompany this personal change from one manner of interaction to another. In humorous stories this gravity of context becomes a frame for the breakdown in propriety initiated by a fool or trickster. However, the transgression cannot be completely disruptive of the rite. As Olson in his reconstruction of an Aristotelian theory of comedy³ has pointed out, the imitated actions cannot be too base. If a character were to perform evil actions, he would no longer be laughable and the narrator could not evoke the sympathy he needs to make the interaction humorous. The audience must be able to feel that the trespasses are not very serious or harmful to anyone and that social order can be easily restored.

The Trickster

By definition, the trickster is a role which plays havoc with cultural rules. Since Radin, the trickster in mythological narrative has been recognized for his contradictory and socially satirical character.⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss saw the actions of the trickster as anomalous to cultural categorizations and, therefore, performing mediations between categories of cognition.⁵ In non-mythological folk tradition the human trickster also makes his appearance. In Taiwan, he has been given an origin legend proper to his anti-social actions. Here he has the name of Ch'iu Wang-she (邱妄舍). Transformation or transmigration, what Radin recognized as a basic quality of the trickster, is at the very heart of the story of Ch'iu's birth.⁶ The story claims that in front of his father's house there was a pool of water that could not be drained. A diviner reported to the father that the pool's persistence was probably due to a monster dwelling there, and they set upon a date to exorcise the creature. But just before the ritual was to take place, a monk arrived for a visit. He appealed to the father to spare the life of the creature in the pond. Upon the father's refusal, the monk departed. But after the monster had been brought up out of the pond and its stomach cut open, the family realized that the monk had in fact been a transformation of the monster in the pond. This was revealed when they found the food they had given the monk in the stomach of the monster. It was at this time that the blood of the monk spurted up impregnating Ch'iu's mother with the trickster. Thus Ch'iu is the reincarnation of a monstrous fish and a monk. A transformer who had been both a guest and a threat to the well-being of

the family becomes a son who disrupts domestic and social harmony. Like the narratives which tell of his later exploits, this story of Ch'iu's birth is made to carry conflicting messages: the family's hospitality/destruction of a monk/monster brings about a birth from a death. With the miraculous birth motif, this story might well be a legend about a cultural hero, but instead it gives an explanation and revenge motive for the anti-social behavior of a trickster.

Other stories tell of Ch'iu as an adult prankster perpetrating tricks on his family and others in the community. His dupes include a demure young lady whom he offends, his father, and various businessmen who carry on human services in the community. Even his suicide is the topic of one narrative. When we examine the contexts of nearly all his actions, it is evident that the referential context of propriety is first elaborated by the narrator. Then the trickster is given the chance of performing the proper action for the context, but chooses not to do so. In this way the narrator can manipulate the audience's expectations of characters behaving in a proper manner. A good example of this is how people who adhere to a traditional belief become the dupes in an anecdote of Ch'iu's dealings with a maker of paper funeral images of dieties.⁷ Although this story is localized in Taiwan, it is distributed throughout China⁸ and elsewhere the acts may be attributed to Hsü Wen-chang (徐文長). Just before the New Year, the trickster orders a paper god for a funeral. The craftsman is a very responsible man and works day and night in order to have it finished before the New Year, since it is inauspicious to have such a figure around when the New Year arrives. But in the face of all propriety, Ch'iu comes late to pick up the god. He delays so long that the image maker thinks that it is too late for anyone to claim the work and burns it up himself. Just as he finishes doing so, Ch'iu arrives and accuses him of not fulfilling his promise. For this failure to deliver, Ch'iu wants to take the craftsman to court.

In this story the narrator creates suspense not only by having the trickster play on the traditional fear of having such a figure around at New Year's, but also by a quarrel between the maker and his wife who are deeply concerned about what to do in such a situation. They had fallen into a trap. Either they must be faithful to their customer's wishes, even knowing that he is notorious as a trickster, or bring bad luck upon their own family and place of business. Those tricked by Ch'iu usually find themselves in such a paradoxical situation. Although they have to obey the traditional belief

and established convention, it is their adherence to these cultural rules that makes them vulnerable.

The trick is also the narrator's trick on the audience. When the trick begins, the society is at peace with itself. Every businessman listener, like the dupe in the story, has his proper reward for services rendered. When Ch'iu makes of that social order a trap, the dupe and the audience are in the same categorical frame of believing in propriety. They are made to feel the suspense at the nearing of the New Year when the demonic god has not been claimed. If, out of sympathy for the dupe or nervous fear, the audience laughs at the dupe and his wife, Ch'iu's actions have made them laugh at their own highly ordered lives of propriety. They are also vulnerable to the trick by virtue of their being a group of listeners, which although composed of individuals, tend to respond according to social convention when in concert with one another.

While making a dupe of the credulous audience, the narrator invites them to make a critical judgement against the trickster. He does this explicitly through initial and final comments. In the beginning, we learn that the motivation for the trick was boredom: “邱妄舍家居無聊... 又想把鄉鄰們再捉弄一次。” And the teller ends the story with a statement concerning Ch'iu's bad relations in the community, saying that the people had really been shocked by this trick and would not condone Ch'iu taking the craftsman to court. With such remarks the narrator prevents the audience from associating itself with the protagonist, the perpetrator of such despicable deeds. Grouping them with the dupe, he invites them to blame the trickster. These comments, perhaps most significantly, show the audience that the narrator himself is aloof and would not resort to such trickery, thus disassociating himself from his own creation.

The Fool

Stories with fools as protagonists also play on the audience's fear of losing propriety. Again the humour is contingent upon a context of intensified propriety, and the narrator can use some of the same techniques to evoke sympathy and laughter out of a set of conflicting signs. While the trickster seems to knowingly and premeditatedly take advantage of the social insistence on formality and disrupt proper interaction, the fool in his

stupidity is somehow unable to come up to the behavior expected of him. The former chooses not to follow propriety; the latter, no matter how he tries, is unable to do so. The audience finds both actions laughable threats to order.

The following story, from a collection I made in Tainan in 1976,⁹ shows very clearly that the teller expects his listeners to understand social assumptions concerning the role of the fool, and then plays with and makes humour out of those expectations.

The story I'm about to tell is about the stupid son-in-law coming to dinner. In this family, there were several sisters and the third daughter's husband was stupid, very stupid. But most girls are alike in that if the first and second daughter's husbands are very intelligent and hers is unusually stupid, she doesn't want him to act so stupid. Although he is stupid, she wants him to have the appearance of not being so stupid. Then she will not be ashamed. This third daughter said to her husband, "Tomorrow everyone will certainly make fun of you because they've heard you are stupid. They will put out only one chopstick at dinner. You should then say, "A double plank bridge makes crossing easy; a single plank of wood is hard to walk on." If you say this, they will put out two chopsticks for you. And when you eat, you shouldn't eat like you do at home — slurp the food up and scramble for more. You must wait until everyone else has eaten of a dish before you do. This is just to give you a little preparation. I will tie a string to your body and stand right outside the window. When I pull the string and you feel it, quickly pick up your chopsticks and eat. When the string isn't moving, you simply must not eat."

After he arrived and sat down, it seemed his wife had guessed correctly. When they saw the stupid son-in-law, they only put out one chopstick. Then he said, "A double plank bridge is easy to cross; a single plank of wood is hard to walk on." The people noticed. "Oh! He's well-read! For one chopstick, he can say 'a single plank.'" So they immediately gave him the second chopstick. They thought "Why, he isn't so stupid after all."

Then everyone started to eat. From the outside, his wife gave a little jerk on the string, and when he saw that everyone else was eating, he ate. When they stopped, so did he. Everyone thought, "He isn't so stupid after all." Not stupid at all! Right? He only picked up the chopsticks and ate when everyone else did. Very humbly, when his wife pulled on the string, he ate. When she didn't pull, he didn't eat.

Just at this moment, coincidentally, someone came looking for the son-in-law's wife and said to her, "Come here a minute." His wife started

to go, but suddenly she realized, "No! I can't go. If I let go of the rope and go inside, my husband won't be able to eat anymore. Then she thought of tying the string to something. She picked up a sheaf of sorghum. With it, she could make the string stay on the ground. She thought that after she took care of the other matter and came back, she could pull the string again. Her husband would just have to stop eating for a while.

Meanwhile, everyone had been noticing that he wasn't stupid and exclaiming how he wasn't stupid, you remember? But, as soon as his wife left, by coincidence some chickens came along, and when they saw the grain, went over to eat it. As the chickens started to peck, he quickly picked up his chopsticks. They pecked again and again at the grain, and again and again, he picked up his chopsticks and ate and ate. What a busy man he was then!

This story is composed of conflicting signs concerning the behavior of the fool. The narrator makes most of his text encourage the listeners to believe that this time the third son-in-law will not appear stupid. Most important is the ritual context of a special dinner, and to intensify the significance of it, the narrator begins by making the wife have her husband understand that this is no ordinary occasion and that her husband should eat in a manner more proper than he usually does. Then there are the repeated quotes of the in-laws who expect the son-in-law to eat like a fool with one chopstick, but themselves are fooled when he shows his intelligence in asking for another chopstick. The reversal in the first half of the story builds up high expectations for the fool which are reinforced with a question to the listeners about whether or not they remember that the fool's in-laws no longer think him stupid. By asking the audience to confirm that the son-in-law is not thought of as stupid, interest in his success is aroused in spite of the recognition that his manner of pulling off the proper eating behavior is quite bizarre. All of these significations are a play upon the listeners' expectations: because he is the third son-in-law, we *expect* him to be stupid, but contrarily, we also are led to *expect* him to be successful this time.

The initial episode with the chopsticks in which there is support for the fool's success is, however, only a set-up. Up until now the plot has progressed on the strength of the wife's motivations. The beginning explains how she will go to great lengths to save herself and her husband from shame. When her noble efforts are diverted through chance, there is a downward

slide of the built up propriety, and the son-in-law ends up looking more stupid than he ever was. Since the wife's method is not revealed to the in-laws in the story, the audience knows more about and can sympathize more than the in-laws with the sacrificing wife and her earnest husband. But, once led to believe that the string controlled movements were a successful method of deceiving mocking in-laws, the listener at the end can only laugh with the in-laws at the fool whose eating manners now resemble the frenetic pecking of chickens. In the plot, chance has preempted motivation.

In the narratives discussed above, the adult trickster and the adult fool do not maintain rules of propriety, but there are also many similar stories with children as protagonists. Of course, one expects children to be lacking in the knowledge of social mandates of behavior. Parents spend much of their time socializing their children, teaching them how to behave and how to say the proper things for various occasions. In some folk narratives the protagonists are children attempting to acquire adult codes of proper behavior. Found in the West in such tales as those of stupid Hans or "Hans in Luck," some have a repetitive structure consisting of a whole series of failures to do or say the proper thing.¹⁰ The protagonist Chen Ta-chuang (陳大慇), Big Simpleton, appears in a Taiwanese variant of this type.¹¹ The boy's mistakes begin when he is looking for a lost piece of white cloth and encounters a funeral procession. He rudely demands a wearer of white mourning cloth to turn it over to him. After he is beaten and returns home, his father tells him that he should have expressed condolences to the bereaved family. With the proper words of condolence now in his mind, he goes out once again. But the procession he meets this time is that of a wedding. And once again he says the wrong thing for the context. His misuse of words follow in such a succession of scenes which are paired off and linked. The words taught him for the wedding are used at a fire, words wishing for a fire to be put out are used in a blacksmith's shop, encouraging words for a blacksmith are used in a fight between men, and finally the action of being a peacemaker between fighting men is used to stop a fight between bulls. This last incident brings death to the foolish child.

Conflicting evaluations of the boy's behavior are given the listener in such a story. The boy is proper in following his father's instructions and since they are in the form of advice after a failure, there is some expectation

that the boy will succeed the next time he goes out. But, by chance, what he has just learned does not fit the next context he encounters. The structure of this story thus causes the audience to laugh repeatedly. Shifting contexts bring the fool's failure, and only an audience understanding what is proper to each occasion would be able to laugh each time the fool thinks he is being proper. Such a chain of situations new to the child could be endless, but the narrator of this one has seen fit to give the story a tragic ending with the death of the boy. Literally the child is not fit for any situation in this world. The implications of the structure are made explicit with the narrator's moral tag at the end: he says that although it is a popular belief that fools are lucky, this story shows that they are not. Such a judgemental ending reinforces the concept of propriety by communicating the view that nobody gets away with not following what is proper, not even the fool.

The folk narrators of the above stories have used contradictions to manipulate the expectations of their audiences. The tricksters have names already known in traditional lore, and listeners can expect misbehavior. They know that a story about these characters will contain misdeeds against familial or public order. Yet they are also led to expect propriety, and can become dupes. Fools, too, have a predetermined code of behavior. A third son-in-law should act stupid and he does; the child Chen Ta-chuang will indeed say inappropriate things. But the narrators of such stories encourage the audience to believe that this time the fool will not be stupid through verbal enhancement of the need for propriety. Therefore, traditional knowledge of how a story will come out does not make a narrative boring, rather, it provides terms of a contradiction the narrator uses to make his audiences laugh once again at an old joke. As long as the teller's listeners believe in propriety and as a group, at least, expect it to be upheld, they will laugh at failed attempts to uphold it and tricks against it.

The Clown

A comparison of the fool and trickster from folk narrative with the clown in folk drama shows how this cultural role can be amplified to fit a dramatic audience's expectations. Traditional drama in China has very explicit signs of approbation and disrespect, and many visual and auditory signs provide a clear contrast between the noble roles and their opposites.

The dignified walk and demeanor of the *hsiao-sheng* (小生) or the *lao-sheng* (老生), who may also wear a long and prestigious beard, stand in direct opposition to the partially whitened face and loose clothing and walk of the clown. Ritual contexts in which the clown can display his bag of tricks include scenes of interaction in a court where he serves a king or emperor and scenes where he is a companion and foil to a conquering hero.

Not only is the opposition of the clown with other roles more explicit in drama than in narrative; the oppositions a clown actor infuses into his character in a particular play are also vivid signs of contradiction giving the audience ambivalent expectations. First of all, through signs of disrespect the audience is distanced from the clown. Perhaps it is as Brecht assumed: the audience is led to think about the morality of a character's deeds¹² and neither the actor nor his audience can identify with such a fool or trickster. The symbolic white patches across the nose and around the eyes make the audience expect misbehavior, and they are seldom disappointed in this anticipation. However, the clown actor also has means at his disposal to come very close to his audience in other respects, most important of which is his language. It is more colloquial than that of the *lao-sheng* and most other roles. As Liu Szu (劉嗣) has pointed out, the clown must be able to speak many dialects: 又因飾演的劇中人三教九流俱全，所以除京白外還得會說多種方言，能擺出多種行當的架式。¹³ This actor in a travelling troupe is a bridge to people from all walks of life in the particular locality of the performance. In legendary enactments of events which are supposed to have taken place in the far-away mainland of China, he makes allusions to the village in which the troupe is performing on a given day. Another feature which contradicts the clown's distance from his audience, is his topicality which is just as much a hallmark of his character as his partially whitened face. He speaks of motorcycles and products from TV commercials. The audience in its daily life is more familiar with these than with the arrows and swords by which a hero wields his power. In time and place the clown is closer to the audience than other characters. With such conflicting signs the audience is forced to be ambivalent toward the clown, to simultaneously despise him for what the white on his face may signify and have sympathy for him as being "one of us common folk."

In traditional drama one of the human relationships which implies ritualistic behavior is brotherly devotion or *yi* (義). The famous scene of

the Peach Garden Oath from the *San Kuo Yen-I* provides the prototype for many local opera scenes which attempt to make that devotion secure through ritual. But what happens when one of these brothers is clearly in the clown role? This possibility was explored in a performance of *Chao Kuang-yin Tsou Kuan-hsi* (趙匡胤走關西) by the Wang Family Troupe in the Fall of 1976 on an outdoor stage in the Tung-hua (通化) Street area of Taipei.¹⁴ In this play the clown is presented by the troupe's clown actor as an oil-seller who learns manners from the hero. The hero Chao meets him when he saves Chao's life through the ignoble action of winning a battle with a pirate maiden by losing his pants and causing her to turn away. Chao, the hero's noble friend Chai, and the oil-seller agree to be sworn brothers. They use a peach-tree stick the vendor carries his oil with as the sacred object upon which the oath is made. Later the brothers decide that they must resort to selling the umbrella cart of the hero's companion who is very ill and needs money for medicine. The clown, skilled as he is in bargaining, goes off to sell the cart.

The actor presents the character as both a trickster and a fool in a two directional interaction with his brothers and the audience. At times when the hero accuses the clown of wrongdoing, the clown holds his arms at his sides and looks innocently toward the audience. He expects them to sympathize with him against the accusing hero; but can they, when they clearly see him as a clown who cannot be fully trusted? A bond between sworn brothers should be unswerving, but can a clown be faithful? When he is trying to sell the cart, the clown makes the musicians at the side of the stage and the members of the audience into potential buyers. He engages them in his communication as salesman, but none of them dare to take him up in his offer. Maybe they realize that this purchase would only be make-believe and, in doing so, once again distance themselves from the clown. Thus, although the clown has bragged of his bargaining skill, he ends up getting very little — only five *yuan* — for the cart. What does he do with this money that was to buy medicine for his sworn brother? He goes to a tavern and drinks, spending it all on wine. Later when he is roundly admonished by the hero for behaving unfaithfully toward his sick brother, the clown is reluctant even to admit his guilt and again tries to appear innocent before the audience. He pretends he would lose face by apologizing. But as the audience knows by visual signs, the clown has little face to lose in the first place.

Within the frame of reference of sworn brotherhood, the clown fits uneasily as the following dialogue between the brothers shows:

Chai: You are very callous. We swore to be brothers in life and death, and you took the umbrella cart and sold it. It's fine that you sold the cart — that's not what I'm concerned about. But you — that's when I was getting very sick. Then I got mad at you for spending the money on wine. You just left me, not thinking that half my life was gone. Not knowing whether I would live or die, you just slipped away. And I didn't have a penny with me. If I hadn't begged the innkeeper to charge me later, then I would have died in the inn.

Oil-seller: But because we were concerned about you we went back to the inn to look for you later, but we couldn't find you.

Chai: (sarcastically) Thanks a lot!

Oil-seller: Also, we paid the debt at the inn. It was I who paid back the money.

Chao: What are you saying? What? Are you arguing again? What are you doing? How could brothers act like you do? (Here Chao explains to Chai that the oil-seller was not going back to the inn of his own volition. The hero had happened to meet him on the road, and finding out what had transpired, decided they should look for the sick brother.) I hope you will forgive him for my sake.

Chai: (Turns to the oil-seller) Don't ever do such a thing again.

Oil-seller: Don't embarrass me. I didn't mean it the first time.

Chai: Don't be silly.

Oil-seller: (Laughs nervously) Hee, hee, hee.

Chao: Since he likes wine, why don't you get some to treat him with. (The clown shakes his head.)

Chai: You act just like a child.

Oil-seller: No, I'm never going to drink again.

Chai: I offer it to you. Drink as much as you want, It doesn't matter.

Oil-seller: Really? (And they proceed to drink.)

Although the brothers are very indulgent with the misbehaving clown brother, their attempt to socialize him has failed. Initially there is an implicit suggestion to the audience that there might be a change in the personality of the oil-seller, the goal of the dialogue being to teach him good demeanor and better morals. The oil-seller certainly seems to be a close relative of Sir John Falstaff, Prince Hal's companion in Shakespeare's *Henry IV: Part I*, a play in which all of men's highest concepts of honor are undermined by Falstaff's earthliness. In both plays, whereas the protagonists express the ideal behavior of men in society, the clown often acts out the more human realities. In the larger context of the plays' world of ideals, this role is a combination of the traditional fool and trickster who alternately boasts of his accomplishments and hangs down his head like a misbehaving child when he accomplishes nothing. Yet there is humour in his failure to be absorbed into the proprieties of the culture or society.

The clown in this play gives the audience contradictory signs simultaneously: the man is a clown with human failings, but he is also a sworn brother whose actions strive for nobility like those of a hero. As an actor he plays other tricks on the audience, too. His somewhat improvisatory verbal skills show him to be quick and witty, and in the case of a martial (*wu* 武) clown, his acrobatic skill is quite a physical accomplishment. This artistry on the stage, in accordance with legends from the past about emperors acting this role, make the clown actor greatly respected by his fellow actors.¹⁵ Like the humorous battery of signs of the narrator of comic stories, his skills at tricking the audience are complex manipulations of cultural beliefs and expectations about proper relations among human beings.

Differences between the clown role in drama and the trickster and fool in narrative are due in part to the varying means narrators and actors can use. In drama, the clown's interaction is simultaneously conveyed by language, movement, dress, and facial painting. Therefore, in the course of the play, the actor can work on the sympathies of the audience for his character, as well as present himself as an improper specimen of humanity. In the folk narratives, the amoral quality of the fool or trickster cannot be so easily fused into the main part of the text although it is alluded to in the teller's beginning and concluding comments. Within the main body of the text, however, names such as Ta-chuang serve to remind the audience of a character's personality defects. Finally, whereas in narratives fools can easily be distinguished from tricksters, in drama a clown actor can combine qualities

of both kinds of transgressors of the cultural norm. By interacting in performance with members of their audiences, the narrator and the actor carry on and reinforce a traditional belief frame which supports social propriety and lightheartedly rejects both tricksterish and foolish behavior.

A question remains as to whether the performers' manipulation of audience's expectations into conventional rejection of improper behavior is a quality to which traditionally transmitted arts can lay greater claim. A consideration of two modern literary works may provide some insight into this problem. A play entitled *Ch'i-yu-tzu-li* by Hwang Mei-shu combines and dramatizes two folk narratives from Chekiang.¹⁶ The fool in this play is a third son-in-law whose fault is that since childhood he has asked too many questions. The ritual context of the interaction is the father-in-law's 60th birthday celebration at which the two older daughters and the fool contend for the gift of an ass by thinking up poems. Then, in order to receive other gifts, the three sons-in-law must respond to riddle-like questions from the father-in-law. The third son-in-law, rather than accept the pat answers that the others give, considers each answer highly problematical. He proves that he is not the most foolish member of the family, at least to the satisfaction of the father-in-law who not only awards him the ass, but finds his questioning attitude most appropriate.

In this dramatization, a significant divergence from the traditional is the way in which the audience is led to relate in a new way to old stories. It is the dramatized in-laws who appear to lack the ability to think logically, and by the end of the play absurdity infects a wide range of traditional roles, including the educated official. The first version of the play concludes with an epilogue: the fool addresses the audience telling them that if they ever encounter a real simpleton, to notify him. He will reward them with the ass or a poem. This enticement for a reward further implicates them when this trickster in fool's clothing tells them that he can be found everywhere, that he is everyone's neighbor. In someone else's eyes, everyone is such a fool as he. In the revision of the play the fool bears the mind of a questing scientist, and in the prologue, two stagehands in modern dress debate the traditional assumption that a third son-in-law is by nature stupid. If not anymore a fool than anyone else, is the son-in-law a traditional trickster? No. His earnestness and naivete prevent the audience from condemning him as one perpetrating untoward acts just for the fun of it. It is not so much his tricksterish impudence as the mother-in-law's flatulence

which attacks the sensibilities of the audience in the first instance. With a Greek chorus' relationship to the audience, the stagehands register the offence, reasoning that since stage action only imitates reality, such crudity can be excused. These features of the play take from the audience their conventional responses to traditional narrative and dramatic signs. Questioning traditional proprieties at their core, the play can stimulate the audience's satirical recognition of its pompous adherence to formality, as well as its tendency to blame others for typically human failings.

Hwang Chun-ming is another modern writer who has presented traditional society in his writings and has a modern message concerning the social outcast. In his novel *Lo*, the main character¹⁷ is a town crier in a society which has turned to loud speakers for the dissemination of its community notices. In several ways, the relationship of Kam Kim-ah with the vagrants he attempts to join and with various businessmen in his community resembles the interactions of Ch'iu Wang-she with the businessmen and people in his community. Like Ch'iu, Kam gets things from these people by trickery. But when Kam doesn't pay his bills for food and services, he becomes an object of public ridicule. His motivations for his anti-social actions are different from those of the traditional trickster. Not being able to play the gong for a living anymore, doing inappropriate things is his only means for survival. Claiming that he challenged the ghost of the papaya patch and striking a coffin three times with a broom to initiate a death are on the surface humorous attempts to display a courage he doesn't really have. But, more important, they are means of getting something to eat. When Kam becomes a fool even to the vagrants who themselves live off of funeral banquets, he becomes marginal to that social group. Then when finally asked once again to beat the gong for a government tax announcement, he adds to the notice an oath of his own. This exaggeration of what will happen to those who don't pay up and how he will lay down his life if they find he is lying causes the crowds to laugh at him. His over-compensating struggle against public ridicule merely increases his alienation.

However, a reader cannot join in the public ridicule of Kam Kim-ah as the audience of a traditional narrative might. In traditional works the fool and trickster roles are static; in this novel, the main character is changing, degenerating. The author permits readers to get inside the mind of the perpetrator of tricks and the fool. Flashback memories of Kam's past as a town crier leave no doubt that by carrying important notices and finding

lost children, he helped bring order to the community and earned a sense of self-esteem. In the past he did not add ridiculous oaths at the end of his announcements. The notices he once gave restored order; since he has become marginal to society, his words create disorder. But knowing his need for food and his feelings, a reader can feel more sympathy for him than for a traditional trickster who merely acts out of boredom. When Kam transgresses with bravura against superstitious beliefs about death, he feels guilty:

I've already lived half a lifetime, and although I might not be considered a particularly "good" man, I've never been a particularly "bad" one either — and certainly not one to cause someone's death. I can only hope and pray that the whole experiment falls through.¹⁸

The combination of Kam's thoughts and actions as he gradually becomes more alienated make him a tragi-comic figure, both humorous and pathetic. Assuming that readers, like the people in Kam's community, may have the tendency to condemn such an individual, the author asks them not to do so — rather, to see Kam as a sacrifice to social change and progress.

From this brief comparison of humorous characters in modern works of literature with similar characters in traditional narrative and drama, it is evident that different effects upon the readers and audiences are probable. The traditional clowns and fools are funny in reference to traditional modes of behavior and ritual. When the propriety is broken and nothing too disastrous occurs as a result, then the audience can be comforted and no longer fearful. In this way, the fool's actions can be scorned and enjoyed simultaneously. But in non-traditional works which comment upon tradition, the scorn for the fool and trickster diminishes. The character's possibilities for heroism increase and cultural formalities, as well as the tendency to ridicule transgressors of social norms, can be laid open to question.

In conclusion, there are at least two possibilities for an audience's responses to the roles of trickster, fool, and clown. Either the actions may be applauded for their attack against propriety or the character perpetrating the act against what is socially recognized as proper behavior gives the audience a chance to publicly, as a group, decide in favor of propriety and continue to see him as a fool or a trickster. In the first case, the character can be considered a comic hero. It is suggested by Torrance in his study of

Western comic figures that Odysseus, Reynard, Don Quixote, and Falstaff are comic heroes.¹⁹ This alternative favors a Freudian analysis of humour as a pleasure derived from release from reason, critical judgement, and suppression.²⁰ According to this interpretation, the individual members of the audience subconsciously support the disruptive transgressions of the fools, tricksters, and clowns.

Tradition, however, depends upon transmission from one individual performer to another. That literary works which are comments upon tradition can reverse the traditional reaction of ridicule and elicit more sympathy for fools and tricksters than has heretofore been given suggests that the second alternative is more fitting the traditional matrix. Folk values are transmitted and reinforced within a given belief frame. A fool remains a fool; with each repetition the stories redefine him as such. A trickster remains anti-social; the repetition of his stories are illustrations of this quality. In this process of reinforcement of the old definitions, social adherence to ritual observances enable narrators and clowns to be tricksters of their audiences. But it is when the fool or trickster comes from an individual's pen, and not from oral transmission, that sympathy is aroused for a character who causes us to question the order of our lives. As individuals, human beings may sympathize with a comic role they more readily condemn in social interaction with one another through time.

Notes

1. Hwang Mei-shu (黄美序), *Ch'i-yu-tzu-li* (豈有此理), *Chung-wai Literary Monthly* X:5 (oct., 1981), 118-146. This is a revision of a play written in 1972 and first performed in English at Florida State University in 1973. It was translated and performed in Taipei as *Sha Nü-hsu* (傻女婿). See *Yu-shih Wen-yi* 240 (Dec., 1973).
2. Huang Chun-ming (黄春明), *Lo* (籬), (Taipei: Yuan-ching Publishing Co., 1974). The translation of the passage quoted in this paper is by Howard Goldblatt, *The Drowning of an Old Cat and Other Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 61-145.
3. Elder Olson, *The Theory of Comedy* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 46-65. Olson holds that "the ridiculous always involves a double contrariety: a contrariety to the good, and a contrariety to the serious." See p. 13.
4. Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972).

5. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper and Row, 1969). See especially "The 'Good Manners' Sonata," pp. 81-133.
6. Li Hsien-chang (李獻璋), ed., *Taiwan Min-chien Wen-hsüch Chi* (台灣民間文學集) (Taipei: Mu-t'ung Publishing Co., 1978), pp. 440-442.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 458-464.
8. This story belongs to Type 1538A. See Nai-tung Ting, *A Type Index of Chinese Folktales*, FFC 223 (Helsinki, 1978), p. 193.
9. The narrator of this version of Ting Type 1691* was Liu Chang-chun (劉長筠), a Shantungese.
10. This is Ting Type 1698A, p. 224. For a comparison see Grimm Brothers' folktales #32 and #83.
11. Wu Ying-t'ao (吳瀛濤), *Taiwan Min-su* (台灣民俗) (Taipei: Chung-wen Publishing Co., 1978), pp. 423-426.
12. Bertolt Brecht, *Kleines Organon für das Theater* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1953), #42 and #43.
13. Liu Szu (劉嗣), *Kuo-chü Chiao-se ho Jen-wu* (國劇角色和人物) (Taipei: Li-ming Publishing Co., 1972), p. 359.
14. Chen Tsung-ming (陳聰明), a director and clown actor for the troupe says that besides the *wen* and *wu* (文武) divisions for clowns, he performs simpletons (白癡) and those who speak too frankly (文直). For a fuller discussion of this troupe's performances see Patricia Haseltine, *Folk Enactment in Taiwanese Local Opera* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1978).
15. Signs of respect backstage have traditionally included waiting for the clown actor to begin putting on make-up before other actors apply theirs and giving the clown the privilege to sit anywhere he likes backstage, while performers of other roles observe restrictions of place. Two emperors, T'ang Ming-huang (唐明皇) (712-56 of the T'ang Dynasty) who was founder of the Pear Garden school of actors (梨園) and Chuang-tsung (莊宗) (923-6 of the Later T'ang) are said to have performed the clown role. In a discussion of why the role has been traditionally respected, Liu Szu attempts to separate fact from legend. He says it is known for certain only that the clown has been respected among actors. However, legends claim that either Ming-huang or Chuang-tsung liked drama so much that he often had his ministers act out plays in the court. Since they feared to lose propriety (失禮) in front of the emperor, they deferred to one another the risqué clown role. When he found out why they were so reluctant, the emperor himself played the clown. Typically the legend ends with the statement, "後來丑角的身分就是由於帝王串演而尊大的。" But Liu prefers to conclude that versatility of performance skill may well be the real reason the clown actor is so respected by other actors. Liu Szu, pp. 357 and 359.
16. Hwang Mei-shu writes that "the two episodes of the play . . . were originally two independent stories or jokes from Chekiang."
17. In a letter addressed to Kam Kim-ah, Hwang Chun-ming lets the reading public

know that the main character for *Lo* was suggested to him by a man who had formerly played the gong in his hometown, but now was to be seen with the vagrants across from the coffin shop. Hwang says he was impressed by the fact that the former gong-player had shown great respect for Hwang's uncle at the funeral, but had decided not to honor the uncle's unfilial son when he passed away in America and was given a funeral in the village. pp. 1-6.

18. Goldblatt, p. 94.
19. Robert M. Torrance, *The Comic Hero* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978).
20. Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, trans. James Strachey (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960).