Imagining the Audience in Eighteenth-Century Folk Theatre in Tyrol

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One of the most active and vibrant folk theatre landscapes in Europe may be found in the historical County of Tyrol, which includes today's Bundesland of Tyrol in Austria as well as the two provinces of Südtirol/Bolzano and Trento in Italy. In Tyrol, folk theatre culture has been important and influential from the late Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, in particular during the 1700s. There exists much research on the plays themselves, their themes, and their motifs; some useful editions have also been published.¹ There is, however, no research on folk theatre audiences, perhaps due to a decided lack of sources and the resulting need for a more complex reconstruction of the audiences' composition and expectations than can be undertaken for better documented types of theatre. This essay, therefore, employs sources that include both 'inscribed' and 'described' audience depictions in order to help us gain insight into the audience(s) of Tyrolean folk plays.² To more specifically define these terms: spectators are inscribed within dramatic texts themselves; audiences are described in reports and reviews on theatre performances as well as in books on the demography, economics, and culture of the region. Both kinds of sources will serve as the basis for my reconstruction of eighteenth-century folk theatre audiences in Tyrol.

- 1 August Hartmann and Hyacinth Abele, *Volksschauspiele: In Bayern und Österreich-Ungarn gesammelt von August Hartmann: Mit vielen Melodien, nach dem Volksmund aufgezeichnet von Hyacinth Abele* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1880; repr. 1972; Norbert Hölzl, *Theatergeschichte des östlichen Tirol vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, 2 vols (Wien: Böhlau, 1967); Ekkehard Schönwiese, *Das Volksschauspiel im nördlichen Tirol: Renaissance und Barock* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1975); Ellen Hastaba, 'Das Volksschauspiel im Oberinntal' (doctoral thesis, University of Innsbruck, 1986); Johannes Ulrich von Federspiel, *Hirlanda: Durch falschheit zu feir verdamte unschuld: Edition des Legendenspiels nach der Laaser Handschrift von 1791*, ed. by Toni Bernhart (Wien: Folio, 1999).
- 2 See Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); *Rethinking the Media Audience: The New Agenda*, ed. by Pertti Alasuutari (London: Sage, 1999).

Folk plays, in general, have been highly mystified, and research into the genre has been pressed into the service of various ideologies: the concept of the nation and of an autochthonous poetical genius (Johann Gottfried Herder); the idea of naïve poetry (Friedrich Schiller); the nationalistic, German-centric understanding of a 'pure' German literature that could act as a weapon against enemies and their cultural influences; the post-1950s notion of folk theatre as a means of empowering the peasant and working classes. All these are examples of how folk theatre has been used as a tool for the promotion of different ideological viewpoints.

The folk theatre audience, too, has been idealised from the beginning, a fact that is evident in two pictures from the first half of the nineteenth century. The earliest known depiction of a Tyrolean folk theatre audience appears in *Bauerntheater* (*Peasants' Theatre*, c. 1805) by Jakob Placidus Altmutter (1780–1819), who is famous for his folkloristic drawings and paintings of rural subjects.

FIGURE 7 Jakob Placidus Altmutter, *Bauerntheater* (Peasants' Theatre), pen-and-wash drawing, 179 × 254 mm, c. 1805, Innsbruck, Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, Grafische Sammlungen, TBar/149.

Altmutter's drawing clearly idealises—even romanticises—its subject, which includes both the scene on stage (presumably a Saint George play) and the audience. In a bright and cheerful setting, children, youths, adults, and elderly people—peasant and bourgeois, male and female—congregate to enjoy the play. The drawing provides interesting insights into details that seem typical of a folk theatre audience: the mixed classes, their orientation towards the magnetic action on stage, and the scene's impact on the audience.

FIGURE 8 Adolph von Menzel, *Bauerntheater in Tirol* (Peasants' Theatre in Tyrol), oil on canvas, 375 × 550 mm, 1859, Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle, bpk, Elke Walford.

A similarly romanticised, albeit darker toned depiction of a folk theatre audience is to be found in the painting *Bauerntheater in Tirol* (Peasants' Theatre in Tyrol, 1859) by the prominent German artist Adolph von Menzel (1815–1905). Here, instead, the image concentrates on the audience, explicitly excluding the theatrical scene the public has gathered to watch. This performance is located in a barn, while Altmutter places his out of doors.

What is a theatre audience? Who actually experienced eighteenth-century Tyrolean folk plays? Fundamental work on other historical audiences (by, for

instance, Alfred Harbage, Reinhard Urbach, Reiner Schmid, Jeremy Lopez, and Bettina Boecker)³ agrees that knowledge about audiences must be regarded as a 'historical void' ('historische Leerstelle')⁴ that can only be reconstructed through dramatic texts themselves and by considering specific socio-historical context. Audiences were inscribed and represented in the dramatic texts they witnessed in many ways: by direct appeals to the audience in the vernacular and with country-specific colouring;⁵ in prologues often spoken by a character named Prologus;⁶ and through *tableaux* that were meant to evoke the experience of holiness or fear.⁷ These components are not specific to folk theatre audiences, but were common across many national dramatic traditions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Folk plays are a widespread but vaguely defined phenomenon that exist not only all over Europe but worldwide. Christopher Balme and Klaus Lazarowicz have noted that it seems hopeless to define folk theatre and the folk play, since both terms have different meanings in different linguistic and cultural contexts ('folk theatre', 'théâtre populaire', and 'Volksschauspiel', for instance, do not mean the same thing); the terms also tend to address different social classes in different periods (the peasant class in the countryside and the bourgeois in towns during the early modern period; the working classes during the twentieth century).⁸ According to Herta-Elisabeth Renk, the 'folk play' genre

3 Alfred Harbage, *Shakespeare's Audience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941); Reinhard Urbach, *Die Wiener Komödie und ihr Publikum. Stranitzky und die Folgen* (Wien: Jugend & Volk, 1973); Rainer H. Schmid, *Raum, Zeit und Publikum des geistlichen Spiels: Aussage und Absicht eines mittelalterlichen Massenmediums* (München: tuduv Verlagsgesellschaft, 1975); Jeremy Lopez, *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Bettina Boecker, *Shakespeares elisabethanisches Publikum: Formen und Funktionen einer Fiktion der Shakespearekritik und -forschung* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2006).

4 Boecker, p. 4. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

5 Schmid, pp. 184–95.

6 See Stefan Tilg, *Die Hl. Katharina von Alexandria auf der Jesuitenbühne: Drei Innsbrucker Dramen aus den Jahren 1576, 1577 und 1606* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2005), p. 421.

7 See Albrecht Schöne, *Emblematik und Drama im Zeitalter des Barock*, 2nd edn (München: Beck, 1968), p. 13.

8 Klaus Lazarowicz and Christopher Balme, *Texte zur Theorie des Theater* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2012), p. 571. See also Jean-Marie Valentin, 'Theatralische Paradigmen und Konventionen im österreichischen Volkstheater (Anfang des 18.—Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts): Eine provisorische Bilanz', in *Das österreichische Volkstheater im europäischen Zusammenhang 1830–1880: Akten des vom Centre de Recherches Germaniques (R.C.P. 666, Paris, des Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) veranstalteten Kolloquiums, Dezember 1984*, ed. by Jean-Marie Valentin (Berne: Peter Lang, 1988), pp. 5–12 (pp. 6–7).

also lacks any definable literary history.⁹ Jürgen Hein, one of the leading scholars in German folk theatre research, points out that the folk play concept has only been applied to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century dramatic texts from the nineteenth century.¹⁰

Despite the looseness of the genre, it can be said that the concept of a 'folk' play originated in Germany. The idea of folk poetry, which was related to the idea of the nation from the very first, was introduced and promoted by Johann Gottfried Herder in his *Von deutscher Art und Kunst* (*Of German Character and Art*, 1773).¹¹ Gottfried August Bürger was one of the first to promote Herder's ideas in his *Aus Daniel Wunderlichs Buch* (*From Daniel Wunderlich's Book*, 1776) and *Von der Popularität der Poesie* (*On the Popularity of Poetry*, 1784).¹²

Within the context of this essay, I define the 'folk play' as a dramatic text that has four main characteristics. It is:

1. Available exclusively in manuscript form;
2. Written in the vernacular—or, more precisely, in the local German dialect;
3. Performed by amateurs who were members of the same classes as the audience;
4. Performed predominantly during the eighteenth century.

The folk plays referred to here, therefore, were not printed as books during the eighteenth century. Since they circulated only in manuscript form, they represent a unique phenomenon within a culture that had had the printed book as a primary form of media for centuries. In this respect, folk plays

9 Herta-Elisabeth Renk, 'Volksstück', in *Metzler Lexikon Literatur. Begründet von Günther und Irmgard Schweikle*, ed. by Dieter Burdorf, Christoph Fasbender, and Burkhard Moennighoff, 3rd edn (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2007), pp. 815–16 (p. 815).

10 Hugo Aust, Peter Haida, and Jürgen Hein, *Volksstück: Vom Hanswurstspiel zum sozialen Drama der Gegenwart* (München: Beck, 1989).

11 Herder's treatise consists of three parts: part 1, *Auszug aus einem Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker* (*Auszug aus einem Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker*); part 2, *Shakespeare*; and part 3, *Von Ähnlichkeit der mittleren englischen und deutschen Dichtkunst*. Part 3 has been translated into English as Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Shakespeare*, ed. and trans. by Gregory Moore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

12 Gottfried August Bürger, 'Aus Daniel Wunderlichs Buch', in *Bürgers Werke in einem Band*, ed. by Lore Kaim-Kloock and Siegfried Streller, 4th edn (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1973), pp. 313–25; Gottfried August Bürger, 'Von der Popularität der Poesie', in *Bürgers Werke in einem Band*, ed. by Kaim-Kloock and Streller, pp. 335–41.

functioned as 'low culture' mass media that ran parallel to 'high culture' canonical literature. Folk play manuscripts, as well as other printed materials, were accessible to quite a small circle of people—only those who were able to read—and almost all residents of the rural area of Tyrol were illiterate. In the Habsburg Empire, school attendance was introduced into law in 1774,¹³ but with little effect: most often, only priests, monks, and civil servants were able to read and write, which meant that drama could be experienced only when it was performed on stage. Folk play manuscripts were thus written for rehearsal rather than to preserve the text on paper. 'The main common characteristic of early modern drama is that it is written from the perspective of being performed on stage', as Joachim Küpper states, thus extends to eighteenth-century Tyrolean folk theatre.¹⁴

It seems rather difficult to imagine how actors memorised dramatic texts if they were illiterate—they must have been taught the lines by a director. Indeed, the fact that the dramatic texts circulated exclusively in manuscript form might also lead us to suppose that the actors did not rehearse on their own, but together and with the help of a director able to read. In the absence of sources on folk theatre rehearsals, this circuitous and perhaps inefficient process of collective rehearsing of the text is arguably the most plausible assumption.

Although folk plays are widely considered to be a kind of 'pure' and 'autochthonous' poetry that emerged from a collective creative process, precisely the opposite is shown by the manuscripts.¹⁵ Their authors are often known by name, though they have never found their way onto the canonical list of authors. However, these named writers were not authors in that they were the creators or inventors of a play. Instead, they usually copied and adapted other texts. This becomes apparent with regard to the plays' themes and characters, whose origins include the Bible (Jesus Christ, King David, Absalom) and Christian or Catholic tradition (Perpetua, Hermengildus, Polyeuctus, Sebastian, Alexius, Eustachius), earlier writers (Boccaccio's *Griselda*; the seventeenth-century French Jesuit Renè de Ceriziers's *Hirlanda* and *Genoveva*),

13 Robert A. Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire 1526–1918*, 2nd edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 192–93.

14 Joachim Küpper, *The Cultural Net—Early Modern Drama as Paradigm* (forthcoming, 2017).

15 The most extensive collection of folk plays is in the Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum in Innsbruck. See the catalogue by Ellen Hastaba, 'Theater in Tirol: Spielbelege in der Bibliothek des Tiroler Landesmuseums Ferdinandeum', *Veröffentlichungen des Tiroler Landesmuseums Ferdinandeum*, 75–76 (1995–1996), pp. 233–343.

legend and fairy-tale tradition (the fictional saint Catherine of Alexandria and Hanswurst), and history (Mary Stuart).

1 The Inscribed Audience

An intriguing representation of a folk play audience can be found in *Das Laaser Spiel vom Eigenen Gericht* (*The Laas Play of Judgment Day*) by Johann Herbst.¹⁶ This is a morality play in the tradition of both Everyman and Last Judgment plays that gives instruction on how to die properly and ascend directly into heaven. The original manuscript is no longer extant, though the text, without title, has been preserved as a transcript by Oswald von Zingerle.¹⁷ Even though an exact performance year is unknown, the play very probably dates from the late eighteenth century. Two of its characters provide us with particular insight into the audience: 'Prollogus' and 'Das menschliche Geschlecht' ('The Human Species'). While Prollogus directly addresses the audience, *Das menschliche Geschlecht* is a representative of all viewers and functions as an allegory of the public.

Prollogus appears on stage four times; his first entry starts with the lines:

Hochansöchliche sie erlauben,
in kirze vorzuweisen,
daß man durch wahren glauben
kan alle nöz zerreißen
dem teifl, der nur tracht,
deß menschen sel zu follen
und sie mit ganzer macht
zu stürzen in die höllen[.]¹⁸

16 Johann Herbst, *Das Laaser Spiel vom Eigenen Gericht. Edition der Abschrift von Oswald von Zingerle und Kommentar*, ed. by Toni Bernhart (Wien: Folio, 2010). For a first attempt on the audience in *Das Laaser Spiel*, see Toni Bernhart, 'Das implizite Publikum im *Laaser Spiel vom Eigenen Gericht* (vor 1805)', in 'Das Theater glich einem Irrenhause': *Das Publikum im Theater des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Hermann Korte and Hans-Joachim Jakob (Heidelberg: Univ.-Verl. Winter, 2012), pp. 179–91.

17 The transcript is in the Tiroler Landesarchiv, Innsbruck, shelfmark Nachlass Anton Dörrer, Karton 9, Pos. 16. The title *Das Laaser Spiel vom Eigenen Gericht* was provided by the archivist Anton Dörrer in his 'Das Laaser Spiel vom Eigenen Gericht: Ein Text der Vintschgauer Komödianten', *Der Schleren*, 18 (1937), pp. 164–70.

18 Herbst, p. 10.

Illustrious audience, allow
 Me to show you briefly
 That through true faith
 Any net will be torn apart
 With which the devil wants
 To capture the human soul
 And throw it into hell.

Throughout the play, this character announces the scenes and *tableaux*, acting as commentator and interpreter:

der erst glikselig stirbt
 und ihm die himelßkron
 nach seinen dod erwirbt
 vor allerhögsten thron,
 [...]
 der zweite aber ist
 verdamt in höllen grund,
 weil er der teiflen list
 piß in der lösten stund
 hat niehmahlß widersagt
 [...]
 also pefleise sich
 ein ieder, jung und alt,
 daß man ganz riterlich
 theilß sig und kron erhalt,
 wan daß die löste stund
 deß lebenß ruket an
 und unß die höllen hund
 zum fall noch dreiben an.¹⁹

The first dies happily
 And earns heaven's crown
 After his death
 In front of the highest throne
 [...]
 The second, however,
 Is damned to hell

19 Ibid., p. 67.

Because he never
 Renounced the devils' falsehood
 until his final hour
 [...]
 Take care, each and every one of you,
 young and old,
 to earn boldly victory and crown
 when the last hour comes
 and the hellhounds
 hunt us till our fall.

At the very end of the play, Prologus summarises its moral, amplifying its emotional effect and intensifying its pedagogical message. His role is also that of a preacher: he reminds the public of the play's religious intent. Das menschliche Geschlecht will pick up on Prologus's admonition, providing the audience with an example of how they should act in everyday life. In the first act, Das menschliche Geschlecht appears 'with hands up and kneeling on the floor' ('eß kumt daß menschliche geschlecht, wellicheß mit aufgehoben henden auf den poden knielet').²⁰ Four devils and Lucifer himself are pestering Das menschliche Geschlecht; in his misery, he prays to Jesus Christ and to Holy Mary:

gekreizigister Jesuß
 ich falle dir zu fiesn
 ich bite dich, erhöre unß,
 laß deine gnad erspriesn,
 [...]
 o Märiä, die du pist
 ein zuflucht aller sinder,
 peschize auch vor teifflß list
 unß arme Adamß kinder.²¹

Oh, crucified Jesus,
 I am falling at your feet,
 I pray you, listen to us,
 Give us your grace.
 [...]

²⁰ Ibid., p. 16–17.

²¹ Ibid., p. 17.

Oh, Holy Mary, who art
 A refuge for all sinners,
 Guard us children of Adam
 From the devils' fraud.

Mary then enters, just like *Das menschliche Geschlecht*, 'with hands up and kneeling on the floor' ('mit aufgehobenen henden auf den poden knielend'), and prays to her son Jesus:

ach aller liebster sohn,
 mildreich erzeige dich
 dem menschlichen geschlecht
 [...]
 ich pit, erröte sie
 auch von dem ebigen dod,
 [...]
 o Jesu liebster sohn,
 ach so erparme dich,
 weil ich vor deinen thron
 selbst wirf zu fiesen mich,
 dan du auß liebe pist
 selbst von den himel gstign.²²

My dearly beloved son,
 show yourself merciful
 to the human species
 [...]
 I pray you, protect them
 even from eternal death
 [...]
 Oh Jesus, my beloved son,
 Have mercy upon humankind,
 Before your throne
 I throw myself down at your feet,
 For your love of humankind
 You came down from heaven.

Thereafter, Jesus asks his mother to stand up and appeals to God the Father, who answers his son's prayer:

²² Ibid., p. 17–18.

ich wird auf dein pegern
 mein zohrn lasßen falln
 nur daß sie sich pekern
 die gnad verleichen alln.²³

I will forsake upon your plea
 My anger and my pain
 And give humankind my grace
 When they shall repent.

Immediately, Lucifer and the four devils wrathfully leave the scene. Jesus tells *Das menschliche Geschlecht* that his prayer has been answered by God the Father, and *Das menschliche Geschlecht* thanks Jesus for His grace and pledges eternal loyalty to Him.²⁴ This sequence of communications clearly reflects the hierarchical structure of the Catholic church, which by tradition requires individual petitioners to appeal to God not directly but through the intermediaries of Mary and Jesus. The public is here addressed as Catholic believers who are educated in their faith and religion. This educational aspect emphasises the ritual character of the play, which is aimed at the instruction and edification of the theatregoers—not just at their entertainment. At the same time, the sequence also reflects the hierarchical structure of the Habsburg Empire: the public is also addressed as subjects who are trained in appropriate political behaviour.

2 The Described Audience

A more diverse depiction of the audience can be found when we consider reports and reviews of folk plays. There exist a few written descriptions of folk theatre performances from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; because of the slow development of theatre and culture in the rural area of Tyrol, however, we might employ these sources in our analysis of the earlier eighteenth century as well. In what follows, I will concentrate on writings by an anonymous traveller (1790), by Joseph Rohrer (1796), by Johannes Schuler (1822), and by Giacomo Gotifredo Ferrari (c. 1780, published in 1830).

One early source is Johann Georg Krünitz's enormous 242-volume encyclopaedia (1773–1858). Volume 141 (1825) contains the entry 'Drama', which includes a report by an anonymous traveller who attended a comedy in Amras

²³ Ibid., p. 19.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 20.

near Innsbruck in 1790.²⁵ Such a theatrical performance, the traveller claimed, 'one can hardly find in northern Germany' ('eine theatralische Vorstellung [...], wie man sie im nördlichen Deutschland nicht findet').²⁶ The play was entitled *Der junge Held und Martyrer St. Pangraz* (*The Young Hero and Martyr Saint Pancras*). It took place on Sunday 25 July 1790 from half past one to six in the afternoon. The traveller pointed out that, although it was the tenth performance of the run, a huge mass of people were on the road from Innsbruck to the theatre, which was a simple building in a meadow near a tavern. Seats in the shade cost six Kreuzer, approximately the price of a tavern meal.²⁷

After a detailed summary of the martyr play—and the eighteenth (!) curtain—the anonymous spectator was eagerly awaiting the play's end.²⁸ This came quickly, along with a closing anachronism: Emperor Diocletian was killed by a furious Christian and the martyr Pancras was canonised by the pope. Our witness then draws our attention to the audience:

Mehr als durch die Ausdehnung des Stücks, durch die, Trotz des theuer bezahlten Schattens, drückende Sonnenhitze, und durch die Unverständlichkeit des Tyroler Dialekts, wurde meine Aufmerksamkeit bei der Beobachtung des feierlichen Ernstes der Zuschauer zerstreuet, welche mit unverwandtem Blicke die lächerlichsten Phrasen und Geberden anstaunten. Ein geistlicher Herr, der neben mir saß, erlaubte sich nur ein einziges Mal, bei der Zerstörung des Heidnischen Opfermahls, ein bescheidenes Lächeln. Der Pabst kam, um nicht bloß Genuß zu geben, sondern auch selbst zu genießen, wenn er nichts zu thun hatte, in pontificalibus in das Parterre und wußte ohne Erinnerung sehr genau, wenn die Reihe wieder an ihn kam. Am wenigsten andächtig waren einige junge Tyroler, welche Straußfedern auf ihren runden grünen Hüten trugen. Dieses zeigt nach Landessitte eine Bereitwilligkeit zum Kampfe an.

25 Johann Georg Krünitz, *Ökonomisch-technologische Encyklopädie, oder allgemeines System der Staats-, Stadt-, Haus- und Landwirthschaft, und der Kunstgeschichte in alphabetischer Ordnung: Früher fortgesetzt von Friedrich Jakob und Heinrich Gustav Floerke, und jetzt von Johann Wilhelm David Korth: Hundert und ein und vierzigster Theil, welcher die Artikel Schauspiel bis Scheintod enthält. Nebst 12 Kupfertafel auf 3 Bogen und einem Portrait* (Berlin: Paulische Buchhandlung, 1825), pp. 114–19. Krünitz does not give any sources for this report.

26 Krünitz, p. 114.

27 Ibid., p. 115. The amount has been contextualised by the purchasing-power parity index of the Österreichische Nationalbank, <http://www.oenb.at/Ueber-Uns/Bankhistorisches-Archiv/Archivbestaende/11-4-Wiener-W-hrung-WW-.html>.

28 Krünitz, p. 117.

Da ich dieses nicht wußte, so fragte ich einen ganz bescheiden um die Ursache dieser Auszeichnung, und erhielt hierauf die lakonische und bedeutende Antwort: daß er wünsche, es möchte ihm einer die Feder abnehmen. Sein Wunsch wurde auch, wenn gleich durch einen Andern, erfüllt, und das Publikum hatte eine, nicht bloß dem Scheine nach, blutige Vorstellung gratis anzusehen.²⁹

More than by the duration of the play, by the blazing heat despite the expensive seat in the shade, and by the incomprehensibility of the Tyrolean dialect, my attention was attracted by the solemn gravity of the spectators who were impressed by the silliest gestures and phrases. A cleric who was sitting next to me allowed himself to smile only once, when a pagan place of worship was destroyed. The Pope entered fully dressed, not only in order to entertain the audience when acting upon the stage, but also to enjoy himself. When he had no scene, he was sitting in the parterre, watching the play, and knew exactly when he was on again without being reminded. The least attentive were some young Tyrolean males, who wore ostrich feathers on their green round hats. This showed a readiness to fight, according to regional custom. Since I did not know that, I humbly asked someone for the reason for this decoration and got the laconic, but meaningful answer that the fellow wished somebody would snatch the feather. His wish was fulfilled (even if by somebody else)—the audience got a bloody spectacle for free, which was not only an illusion.

The great demand for these comedies, their high attraction and fascination for audiences, is characteristic of the folk play. In the countryside, theatre was one of very few occasions during which audiences might experience culture and entertainment—apart from sermons, images, music, and dance. It is interesting to note, therefore, that our anonymous reporter seems to have been more interested in the audience than in the play. He attentively observed and described audience members' general attitude as well as the behaviour of particular spectators such as the smiling cleric and the bachelors' quarrel. For him, it seems, the most thrilling dramatic experience was the experience of the audience. Indeed, he uses approximately the same number of pages to describe the audience as to summarise the play. We know nothing of this spectator, though we may assume that there was some social, cultural, and educational difference between him and the audience that he watched attending the

29 Ibid., pp. 117–18.

play. Because of this difference, he was able to point out some details that were worth narrating. It is quite probable that he was a philologist, since he took the opportunity to see (and, presumably, read) the play's manuscript, which was 'from the last century' (that is, the seventeenth century) and 'written in a fairly legible way' ('aus dem vorigen Jahrhunderte'; 'ziemlich leserlich geschrieben'), and held in the burgomaster's archive.³⁰

A different view on Tyrolean drama and the theatre audience can be found in *Uiber die Tiroler (On Tyroleans, 1796)*, a book by the economist and statistician Joseph Rohrer.³¹ Born in Vienna in 1769, Rohrer completed his studies at the university at Innsbruck and became first a civil servant in Vorarlberg and then a professor of politics and statistics at the University of Lemberg (Lviv). He retired in 1827 and returned to Vienna, where he died in 1828. Rohrer wrote many articles and some books on the regional geography, economics, and culture of several Habsburg crown lands.³²

Uiber die Tiroler is an analysis of the physical, mental, and intellectual qualities of the 700,000 Tyrolean people of the time.³³ Several chapters of the book deal with trade and agriculture, as well as with the widespread phenomenon of child labour—more specifically, renting out children as farmhands. Rohrer tells of Tyrolean salesmen travelling throughout Europe, Asia, and the Americas; he praises the technical and inventive ingenuity of the Tyroleans as well as their creativity in painting and sculpture. In contrast, according to Rohrer, the Tyroleans' ability in poetry and chant was absolutely undeveloped due to the chronic deformity of their articulatory apparatus and their general neglect of the German language.³⁴ Rohrer subsequently claims that Tyroleans are funny and comic—wandering and sunburnt specimens who served as a remedy against both melancholy and hypochondria for Bohemian and Hungarian aristocrats: 'The not so rare naïveté of these sons of the Alps elicit a kind smile from prosperous gents, while the ladies feel charitable tenderness for these poor and exotic members of the human race' ('Die nicht seltene Naivetät dieser Alpensöhne erzeugt bey dem wohlhabenden Adel dieser Länder ein gutherziges Lächeln, das gewöhnlich bey den Damen mit einem wohlthätigen Gefühle der Zärtlichkeit gegen diese arme exotische Menschenrace verbunden

30 Ibid., p. 118.

31 Joseph Rohrer, *Uiber die Tiroler: Ein Beytrag zur Oesterreichischen Völkerkunde* (Wien: Dollische Buchhandlung, 1796).

32 Karl Hugelmann, 'Rohrer, Joseph', in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (1889), pp. 64–68, <http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd19527138.html?anchor=adb>.

33 Rohrer, p. 3.

34 Ibid., p. 74.

ist').³⁵ These stereotypes resulted in the gentle disparagement of Rohrer's subjects, which provided him the opportunity to promulgate his anticlerical and enlightened credo: that the Tyrolean mind is usually rather limited because of its explosive mixture of bigotry, superstition, addiction to spectacle and theatre, drunkenness, looseness, and illiteracy.

To control these tendencies, Rohrer suggests, Emperor Joseph II decreed many 'beneficial reform acts and orders regarding politics, justice, and the church' ('wohlthätigen Neuerungen und erlassenen Verordnungen im politischen, Justiz- und Kirchensache [*sic*']') which, the author regrets, had no effect.³⁶ Pilgrimage and comedies, in particular, continued to waste the Tyroleans' time to an unjustifiable and excessive extent. Eighteen additional public holidays a year, Rohrer writes, make the workers in the Vorarlberg cotton factories lose 900,000 gulden in income and the Habsburg Empire 43,000 gulden in duties every year.³⁷ As a result, he argues, theatre and pilgrimage must be suppressed in order that pilgrims and audience members be turned towards activities that have an economic benefit.

Rohrer's position may be little more than the well-written reiteration of a stereotypical view, and yet his contrasting of the Tyroleans' (supposed) limitations of mind and their neglect of poetry and language, on the one hand, and their eagerness for theatre and pilgrimage, on the other hand, is striking. Intellectual and cultural limitations, obviously, do not hinder people from going to the theatre, which is a low-threshold form of early mass media that can and did flower even in an illiterate cultural environment.

About two decades later, in 1822, Johannes Infirmus (the pseudonym of Johannes Schuler) published an article entitled 'Über die Bauernspiele in Tyrol' ('On the Peasants' Plays in Tyrol') in a Viennese review.³⁸ Schuler (1800–1859) was born in Matrei, Tyrol and died at Innsbruck. He studied law in Vienna and was awarded a doctoral degree in Padua; after taking several positions in public administration, he was appointed professor of law at the University of Innsbruck, where he was also elected rector in 1853. In 1848/49, he was a liberal deputy to the Frankfurt Parliament. Over the course of his life, Schuler wrote short novels, articles, and one libretto.³⁹

35 Ibid., p. 76.

36 Ibid., p. 79.

37 Ibid., p. 81.

38 Johannes Schuler [Ps. Johannes Infirmus], 'Über die Bauernspiele in Tyrol', *Wiener Zeitschrift für Kunst, Literatur, Theater und Mode*, 86 (18 July 1822), pp. 693–95.

39 H. Kuprian and H. Reitterer, 'Schuler, Johann(es)', in *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon*, vol. XI (Vienna, 1998), pp. 318–19.

In Schuler's eyes, folk plays and peasant comedies were not exotic phenomena, but were unique popular events, worthy of promotion and popularisation. Schuler states that this kind of theatre was common throughout Austria, Bavaria, and Schwaben, but was nowhere more important and prominent than in Tyrol.⁴⁰ His appreciation of the art form is rather a new voice that marks a starting point for the eventual scholarly discovery of folk plays.

Schuler points out that performances were quite extended in time, normally lasting

daß ein solches Schauspiel ein Uhr Nachmittags bis sieben Uhr Abend dauert, während welcher Zeit die Zuhörer nicht in bedecktem Raume, und auf gepolsterten Stühlen oder in bequemen Logen sitzen, sondern auf harten Bänken fortdauernd der stärksten Sonnenhitze ausgesetzt bleiben. Und doch haben diese Bauern den Dichtern nie Gelegenheit gegeben, sich über das Beschneiden ihrer Werke zu beklagen, oder den Schauspielern, den Mangel an Aufmerksamkeit zu bedauern.⁴¹

From 1 pm to 7 pm, during which time the audience is not sitting under a roof, nor on upholstered chairs, nor in comfortable seats, but rather on hard benches and exposed to the most blazing sunlight. The peasants, nonetheless, never gave the poets reason to complain that their works had been cut, nor did they give the actors reason to complain of a lack of attention.

Schuler continues with a striking description of the beginning of the performance:

Das Glöckchen ertönt, der Vorhang rollt auf und der ganze tosende Schwarm ist wie versteinert, kaum daß Einer dem Andern zu athmen vergönnt. Die berühmtesten Schauspieler würden sich glücklich schätzen, ein so aufmerksames und empfängliches Publicum vor sich zu haben. Je mehr die ganze Bühneneinrichtung jede mögliche Illusion zerstören zu wollen scheint, mit desto größerer Liebe und Phantasie gibt sich der gemeine Mann den süßen Täuschungen der Kunst hin. Nur den polirten Leutchen der feinen Welt war es vorbehalten, zu lachen und zu plaudern, wenn König Lear rast oder Wilhelm Tell zielt. Sehr oft sah ich bey diesen kunstlosen Schilderungen des Martyrthums Thränen über

⁴⁰ Schuler, p. 693.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 694.

die braunen männlichen Wangen fließen, und wenn je das Theater eine Schule der Erbauung war oder werden könnte, so ist es in diesen einfältigschlichten Darstellungen.⁴²

The bell is ringing, the curtain is raised, and all the roaring swarm seems to turn into stone. Hardly anyone suffers their neighbour to breathe. The most famous actors would be proud of such an attentive and impressionable audience. If the stage design and decor tend to destroy any possible illusion, it is with even more passion and love that the common man abandons himself to the sweetest illusions of the art. Only snobbish people will laugh or chat, when King Lear is raging or Wilhelm Tell is taking aim. I very often saw tears flow from tanned male cheeks during these artless representations of martyrdom. If theatre ever was or is going to become a school of edification and instruction, these naïve and simple performances are examples of it.

In this passage, Schuler discerns two social classes in the audience—an upper and a lower one—who differ in their behaviour and reactions. While our anonymous reporter seems to notice different social groups but not to favour any of them, Schuler clearly appears sympathetic to the peasants who watch the play attentively. As a consequence of this, he romanticises both play and peasants.

The playwrights, Schuler writes, were often the village schoolteacher or a shoemaker (a possible allusion to the most famous versifying German shoemaker, Hans Sachs, even though Schuler does not mention this name). Unfortunately, it seems that folk dramatists did not receive any money or recognition for their works as their names were usually concealed.⁴³

Another insightful source is by Giacomo Gotifredo Ferrari (1763–1842), an Italian composer and voice teacher who born in Rovereto near Trento and died in London. Ferrari composed four operas (all of which premiered in London), two ballets, two piano concertos, and about fifty sonatas.⁴⁴ Beginning around 1780, he was a scholar with the Benedictines at the Marienberg Abbey in Tyrol;

42 Ibid., p. 695.

43 Ibid., p. 695.

44 Nicolas Slonimsky, Laura Kuhn, and Dennis McIntire, 'Ferrari, Giacomo Gotifredo', in *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, vol. 2, ed. by Nicolas Slonimsky and Laura Kuhn (New York: Schirmer Books, 2001), p. 1094.

at a village nearby, he attended a play that he described in his 1830 autobiography *Aneddoti piacevoli e interessanti* (*Pleasant and Interesting Anecdotes*).⁴⁵

In the chapter 'Festa teatrale religiosa al padre abate ed ai monaci di Marienberg' ('A Religious Theatrical Celebration Dedicated to the Abbot and Monks of Marienberg'),⁴⁶ Ferrari recalls the performance of a Noah's Ark play ('L'Arca di Noè in un atto solo') that took place in the early 1780s and was written by the barber of Marienberg Abbey, who initiated the performance together with a judge, a captain, and an innkeeper from the surrounding area. Ferrari does not mention the writer's name. This corresponds to Schuler's note on the fact that authors of folk plays often remained anonymous, a surprising similarity since Ferrari was a professional composer and thus, presumably, aware of how important it was for authors to be recognised.

The Noah's Ark play took place in a barn provided by the innkeeper. Ferrari describes the stage and decor in detail, explaining where the ark, sea, heaven, paradise, and hell were situated on stage. Although he was not particularly attentive to the audience, he mentioned some useful details: the courtyard in front of the barn served as the seating area; it was surrounded by tables covered in curtains and decorated with green branches, deer's antlers, and bear-skins (which, Ferrari tells us, were commonly used decor in Tyrolean taverns). On the right side, in the centre of this area, a chair was reserved for the abbot; on the left were another six chairs for the monks. A row of chairs for the village's wealthier residents were arranged behind, as was the area for 'the common people, who were allowed by the directors to attend the performance' ('la gente comune, alla quale i direttori avean favorito l'ingresso');⁴⁷ they entered one hour before. When the abbot and the monks entered, the audience stood up and applauded loudly, and before the performance began, the six actors paid homage to them. Ferrari clearly discerned different categories of audience members within the theatre space—clerics, wealthier residents, and common people—as, we might recall, can be seen in Altmutter's drawing, which depicts the different classes in distinct dress.

In his description, Ferrari observed that no actor or actress on stage appealed directly to the audience: the performers neither watched the audience nor addressed any words to it. In other words, there was no Prologus-like character

45 Giacomo Gotifredo Ferrari, *Aneddoti piacevoli e interessanti occorsi nella vita di Giacomo Gotifredo Ferrari da Roveredo: Operetta scritta da lui medesimo, e dedicata col dovuto permesso a sua Maestà Giorgio IV, Re della Gran Bretagna* (London: Presso l'autore, 27 Clifton-Street, Filzroy Square, 1830).

46 Ferrari, pp. 101–06.

47 Ibid., p. 100.

in this play. Interestingly, when the performers stopped acting, they abruptly discarded their roles, left the stage, and became part of the audience: like the other spectators they started ‘eating, drinking, and talking to each other as if they stood in their dwellings’ (‘mangiavano, bevevano, parlavan fra di loro come se fossero stati nei loro tuguri’).⁴⁸

In eighteenth-century folk theatre, therefore, actors could become spectators—and vice versa. Our anonymous observer in Krünitz and Ferrari both point out that actors watched the play like all the other audience members when they did not have to act on stage. The musicians in Altmutter’s drawing might also be mentioned in this context. While playing their instruments, they were facing the stage. Even actors and musicians, it would seem, were eager to become spectators whenever possible. The scene from *Laaser Spiel* also illustrates the unity of audience and actors: Prologus addresses the public and comments upon the play; the character Das menschliche Geschlecht represents and personifies the public—these characters both involve and mirror the public.

Tyrolean folk play actors, authors, and most audience members tended to be part of the same social, economic, and intellectual class: they were peasants or smallholders. Authors differed slightly from actors and audience members because they were able to write, to read, and, therefore, to access a more wide-reaching cultural net. This leads us to reconsider the theatrical triangle of authors, actors, and audience since in folk theatre these tend to be identical.

In contrast to the shared social status of authors, actors, and the majority of the audience, there were also, as we have seen, a small number of clerics and local aristocrats in the audience. In our sources, these attendees were distinguished from the common people, both spatially and with regard to their behaviour. They were in a position to spend money for a seat in the shade (Krünitz), were offered proper seats (the abbot and monks, Ferrari), and might react in a particularly emotional way when religious scenes were performed (the smiling cleric, Krünitz). Aristocrats in particular were considered an inattentive and unmannered audience by both Krünitz and Schuler, the latter of whom tends to intensify morally his reproach of them by idealising and romanticising the peasants in attendance as the more receptive and grateful audience in contrast with noble spectators who were unable to appropriately appreciate the play.

We must, of course, also consider the perspective from which our reports were written. Our sources were all composed by members of the regional or local elite—their authors were civil servants, academics, politicians, and

48 Ibid., p. 101.

artists. Their social positions imply a distance from everyday rural life that enabled them to diagnose folk drama as either exotic (Rohrer) or romantic (Schuler), depending on the observer's ideology.

Finally, we must also return to the fact that folk dramatic texts circulated exclusively in the form of handwritten manuscripts. As noted above, this is highly peculiar since letterpress printing had been invented centuries earlier. Because of its medium of distribution, folk theatre functioned as a cultural phenomenon parallel to European high culture, in which printed books had long been the most preferred medium for the circulation of texts. The folk play thus also draws attention to the fact that handwritten and printed books were circulated synchronically for centuries. Since folk play texts existed only in manuscript form, access to them was rather limited. However, this did not hinder low-threshold access to theatre for an illiterate public. Theatre performances were in fact easily accessible to them, while written texts would not at all have been accessible.