

Episodic Theater and the Digital Text: Editing the Traveling Players' *Fortunatus*

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Abstract

This essay discusses the process of editing a rather simple playtext, the English traveling players' *Fortunatus*, with a quite complex history of circulation and performance and a vast network of sources and influences. Since the traveling theater was contingent (context-based) and extemporaneous, the associated playtexts, collaborative adaptations and translations of English works, present unique challenges for editors and scholars. In fact, their printed form often misrepresents the kind of theater practiced. I raise the question of how the textual remnants of this theater shaped critical attitudes regarding the travelers, and I suggest that capabilities of digital publication can illuminate the episodic and modular characteristics of early modern performance.

Introduction

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, troupes of English players began leaving London to perform their plays for foreign audiences. They took plays from Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Decker, and other Elizabethan and Stuart playwrights and performed them across the Continent, as far east as modern Poland, as far north as Sweden. While early performances were in English, they were quickly translated and adapted in these foreign contexts, made to fit the various social and religious milieus of performance. [Drabek and Katritzky 2016][Bosman 2016][Haekel 2004][Schrickx 1986][Limon 1985]. In the process, the plays were cut down, reworked and adapted in various ways, even sometimes reworked as puppet theater, and the play texts associated with these players, left in a “mutilated” state, were objects of critical derision for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries [Cohn 1865, cvi].

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With recent critical interest in cultural exchange, however, scholars have begun to recognize this theater as an “unexampled success” in the “history of cultural relations.”[Bosman 2006]. Precisely because the players became so adept at navigating various regions, their theater as an institution can reveal practices of performance and cultural translation, features of transnational early modern cultures, and the earliest reception history of Shakespeare and his contemporaries on the Continent. In response to this growing interest, the (few) texts associated with this theater have begun to be newly edited and translated, made available to a wider audience of students and scholars. I am currently producing a digital edition of *Fortunatus*, one of the plays in the 1620 collection *Engelische Comedien und Tragedien*, for *Digital Renaissance Editions*. The wider availability of these texts will not only be useful for students and scholars, especially considering the critical turn to transnationalism, it might also help corroborate a reevaluation of the theater. And yet, as I hope to show, precisely because of the extemporaneous and adaptive performance style of these players, the surviving texts often misrepresent the practice of the theater; indeed, the static form of the printed playtext explains much of the critical derision directed at this theater, some of the misunderstanding of the travelers’ art.

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In this essay, I argue that the digital medium might be more congenial to the adaptive theater practiced by early modern players, and I suggest how we might encode characteristics of the theater into a digital edition. More broadly, I attempt to show that creating a digital edition of the travelers’ *Fortunatus* can help us better understand the success of this theater against its critics by illuminating the episodic and modular characteristics of their performance.

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The Challenges of Editing the Early Modern Travelers

Even more than most early modern dramatic texts, the playtexts associated with the early modern traveling theater present difficulties for the editor. Not only are they quite rare, but they are, arguably, even further from performance than the texts associated with the London stage for two interrelated reasons: their episodic and extemporaneous style. The travelers' performance of any play could differ significantly in different contexts. When the players performed a play in a new location, they would not only rework lines or scenes, but add or cut entire episodes. Scholars have shown, for example, that popular scenes from different plays might be stitched into a new performance; or that a play's content could change significantly depending on a region's official religion [Williams 1990]. Early performance sometimes staged only scenes from plays, strung together for the audience's entertainment, and this suggests that, at least early in their travels, these players viewed the plays not as coherent literary works but rather storehouses of engaging episodes. With the plays and pieces of plays staged dozens of times across the Continent, each, perhaps, differently, it becomes difficult to establish a "Traveling Players' *Fortunatus*".

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We might, then, turn simply to the surviving text, since evidence of each individual performance is likely unrecoverable, letting the edition stand as a record of this cultural object rather than attempting to capture the players' performance of *Fortunatus* more generally. Even here, however, the printed text misrepresents the players. The players' style was not only episodic, but also extemporaneous, heavily reliant on clowning and nonlinguistic elements of the theater. They were famed acrobats and musicians, also frequently afool of authorities because of the bawdiness of their performance style. While, as we will see, the *Fortunatus* associated with these players attempts to capture this extemporaneous style, the static form of the codex proves incapable of accurately representing the players.

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As the remnants of this theater, we are left with a relatively small number of texts, often related in complex and partial ways to multiple English and German dramatic and prose works. These works insinuate the variable, but also, of course, irrecoverable plays that were actually staged by these English players on the Continent, but they are also calcified in print, producing final and static versions. A storehouse of these texts was printed in 1620, *Engelische Comedien und Tragedien*, likely compiled by Friedrich Menius [Freden 1939]. It contained German translations and adaptations of a number of English plays, including *Titus Andronicus*, *Fortunatus*, biblical histories, and seven interludes featuring the popular stage clown of this theater, Pickelhering.

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Because most of these texts are not "originals" but rather adaptations, usually part of complex and multifaceted story traditions, recapturing the relationships between the original play in London and the travelers' adaptation can be almost impossible. *Fortunatus* demonstrates this complexity well. We have records of three performances of *Fortunatus* by the traveling players, each associated with the troupe of John Green, one of the most prolific early travelers. The first was performed at Kassel in the winter of 1606/7. Shortly thereafter, the players staged the play in Graz in 1608 before Maria Magdalena, documented in her letter to her brother, the Archduke Ferdinand. The last performance, also by Green's troupe – though Green had perhaps died shortly before this performance – took place in Dresden in 1626 [Limon 1985] [Schrickx 1986].

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Of course, most archival records of the travelers' performances do not include a list of plays, and Green's troupe performed across Northern Europe, likely staging *Fortunatus* dozens of times. Even the three performances we know, moreover, place the *Fortunatus* myth in starkly different religious and cultural contexts. Moritz's court at Kassel was among the first that welcomed the English players, and the duke was well-known in England in the period as a champion of Reformed Protestantism and a diligent internationalist. At Graz, on the other hand, the players worked in a counter-Reformation state and performed before a Catholic princess. These venues raise interesting questions about the text: for, as scholars have shown, troupes would regularly adapt the religious messages depending on context [Williams 1990]. How might the *Fortunatus* text have changed in the hands of Green before a Reformed Duke like Moritz and a staunch Catholic like Archduchess Maria Magdalena? Jerzy Limon has suggested, based on Green's choice of patrons, that Green may have been Catholic himself, and thus even the translation involved in an English Catholic player (Green) adapting a playtext written by a fairly radical internationalist Protestant (Thomas Dekker) based on a medieval Catholic proto-novel suggests the religious complexity of this cultural exchange – only amplified in the more overtly religious texts common to this theater [Limon 1985]. Though we have no access to these performances,

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we can safely speculate that a different play was performed in each of these three locations.

Moreover, this play staged a legend that was popular across Europe. Before the end of the seventeenth century, in fact, the *Fortunatus* story had been translated into Dutch, Polish, Danish, Hungarian, Low German, English, French, Swedish, Icelandic, Italian, and perhaps Czech. This kind of popular culture served as ideal material for the traveling theater, but it also offers us a fascinating site for examining cultural translation in the period. How, we might ask, were plays adapted in different linguistic and cultural areas? And did the circulation of the legend – and even the English players – reshape the central story? 9

Even focusing simply on the most immediately relevant English and German editions provokes a great deal of uncertainty. Scholars generally divide the prose versions of *Fortunatus* into two families: The earliest printed version of the legend appeared in Augsburg in 1509, from which a number of printings followed; a second family derives from a Frankfurt edition, simplified, Protestantized, and moralized, from 1549 onwards. This second family group led to the translations throughout Europe, including the English translation (possibly) by Thomas Combe [Blamires 1996]. (More on this shortly.) 10

Fortunatus appeared first on the English stage in 1595-6, recorded by Henslowe as *The First Part of Fortunatus*. Dekker then received payment in 1599 for *The Whole History of Fortunatus*. And finally, a month later, a smaller additional payment for “the altrenge of the boocke of the wholl history of fortewnatius” and “for the eande of fortewnatius for the corte”. This last version, performed at court before Elizabeth, is Dekker’s printed version, *The Pleasant Comedie of Old Fortunatus* [Schlueter 2013]. 11

Since the nineteenth century, the 1620 German *Fortunatus* has been considered a translation of Dekker’s play. For Charles Herford, it is a “barbarous piece,” and a “meager epitome of its original,” [Herford 1886] but its connection to Dekker’s work is clear; Paul Harms agrees, though he demonstrates also that the author of the German piece drew extensively on the language of the German prose work [Harms 1891]. June Schlueter has recently argued that this version may in fact be derived from an intermediary between the Dekker’s two *Fortunati*, and thus it serves as important evidence into the character of the first text before Dekker reworked it for court [Schlueter 2013]. The play shares a number of elements with Dekker’s play (such as the use of echo in the opening scene, and the appearance of spirits to judge and admonish the characters) while also employing stock characteristics of the German stage (especially the stage clown, Pickelherring). 12

The relationship between the English prose translation and Dekker’s text has also been a subject of critical debate. In the nineteenth century, German scholars conclusively established that Dekker’s play relies on the Augsburg and Frankfurt versions of the *Fortunatus* story, but scholars have disagreed over whether these works were mediated through a translation. In his discussion of the many *Fortunati* in English translation, David Blamires assumes the priority of the prose, relying primarily on the fact that *Fortunatus* appears well-known in England from about 1577 [Blamires 1996], while Michael Haldane has more recently suggested that Dekker’s work influenced the prose version [Haldane 2006]. The earliest surviving English prose work we have, 1640, claims that it was translated by T.G.; all extant later editions emend this to T.C. According to the titlepage of the final printing, this work went through fourteen editions with relatively minor changes. Some have suggested that Dekker used a Dutch intermediary translation, but no Dutch translation before the seventeenth century is known. 13

My purpose here with both Dekker’s play and the prose work is not to take sides, but rather suggest quickly the complexity of the *Fortunati*-field. And this overview tracks simply a very few of the English and German editions, neglecting the multiple editions in other languages throughout Europe – and far from all English and German versions. (There is, for example, a manuscript of another copy at Kassel, perhaps composed at the court of Moritz, that seems influenced primarily by Hans Sach’s 1553 play.) We have a complex enough set of sources that discussing linear relationships seems almost impossible: there’s a circularity inherent in the 1620 text, relying both on Dekker and the German prose work, which itself had been a source for Dekker (perhaps with an English translation serving as intermediary). Instead of origin and adaptation, then, the theater presents a convoluted picture of mutually influencing sources and traditions, all tied together in a network, all sources available to the travelers as they adapted their text. As 14

each performance varies, the borders of the work become more obscure; and if a digital edition can expand indefinitely to include related material, where should the line be drawn?

Even if we could recover the history of adaptation, however, these texts would not actually capture the kind of performance that made these players an international success. They used this complex tradition in spontaneous and contingent ways, catering their plays to their audiences[Limon 1985]. Drawing on popular scenes, players felt free even to stitch scenes from various plays together if they had proven successful in the past [Haekel 2004]. Tiffany Stern has shown that many early modern playwrights saw themselves as “patchers,” and, if Gabriel Egan has qualified this for the London stage, it seems abundantly clear that the travelers worked with plays as piecemeal products; they apparently worried little about the integrity of the “whole” [Stern 2009][Cordner 2014]. In the first decade, while players performed in English to German-speaking audiences, short, visual stories replete with shared iconography certainly helped mitigate the language barrier; but this necessity, reimagining plays as storehouses of performance episodes, shifting authority to the performer, who would respond to what worked on these foreign stages, fits poorly in a printed codex. Indeed, as Richard Preiss has demonstrated with clowning, to set in print the antics of Pickelherring reimagines them not as extemporaneous wit, but as an authored dialogue. [Preiss 2014]

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Much of the history of scholarship on this theater has been determined both by the challenges that the episodic character of this theater poses to source studies and the challenges that the extemporaneous style poses to aesthetic judgement. In the early twentieth century, these plays received rather desultory attention primarily for their connection to canonized playwrights. Almost always, early scholarship on the traveling theater was tied specifically to Shakespeare and fueled by the desire to trace these plays back to their prestigious originals and show how fully the players had corrupted Shakespeare’s art.[Cohn 1865][Brennecke 1964]. While, therefore, the archival scholarship was often excellent, and these sources remain valuable resources for the study of the travelers, they tend to privilege original English versions, denigrate the remaining playtexts associated with the theater, and oversimplify the relationship among the various plays because of a desire for simple and unidirectional connections. Indeed, it is the adaptable and episodic character of the theater, frustrating these attempts at tracking influence, that often elicited the most critical ire. For Albert Cohn, one of the earliest and most influential scholars of the travelers, this defined their failure:

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There is no inward connection among the parts; we see a succession of moving incidents, adventures of all sorts, intended to excite the interest of the spectators, to gratify their curiosity and their love of spectacle, or to tickle their risible muscles, but all these incidents are merely placed side by side without any internal unity. [Cohn 1865, cvi]

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Cohn concentrates specifically on the lack of “wholeness” or coherence, framing his discussion of the *Engelische Comedien* by focusing on their “patched” character: he finds them in a “cruelly mutilated state” [Cohn 1865, cvi]; their “corruption and mutilation are quite inexplicable,” [Cohn 1865, cvi] he adds, if they had worked directly from the originals. Cohn’s image visualizes the original playtexts as complete texts – a whole codex – and the German adaptations as partial, incomplete – leaves ripped apart and regathered in an aesthetic abomination.

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In the translation of *Fortunatus*, this piecemeal quality has similarly been disparaged. The story of Fortunatus, like the legend of Faustus and other popular folk stories that the travelers took on the road, was itself composite and episodic. One early scholar describes both the prose-version and the adapted plays as “an aggregate of very heterogeneous elements and a series of episodes, loosely appended and easily detached” [Herford 1886, 203]. For early critics, this typified the play’s aesthetic failures; for the players, it presented opportunities. The element drawing perhaps the strongest critique appears multiple times in the play: “Hier agiret Pickelhering”. Here Pickelhering performs. Those cryptic words end the first two acts and appear three times in the third act, and they advertise the extemporaneous and hybrid nature of this performance. According to Paul Harms, they almost certainly could not have been performed and resulted instead from a garbled memory of Dekker’s “Shadow” character. Once again reading the text as a unified whole, Harms proclaims: “Die englischen komödianten studierten die Wirkung, welche ihr Spiel auf das Publikum ausübte, sicherlich genau, und sie werden wohl kaum in dem Augenblick, wo die Spannung den höchsten Grad erreicht hatte, durch ein unorganisches Zwischenspiel sich um den Effekt gebracht haben” [Harms 1891, 7]. “The English Comedians studied the works which they performed to the public, surely enough, and they would hardly have broken

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the effect in the instant where the suspense had reached the highest level through an inorganic interlude.”

Despite Harms’ distaste for the extemporaneous elements, however, these brief scenes fit perfectly with what we know about the theater. We hear continually of the success of interludes, the popularity of the stage clown, and the use of visual icons and music. ^[1] While failing in the text, then, these scenes apparently succeeded on stage, as Pickelhering remained one of the most popular and recognizable characters of the English travelers throughout the century. The problem, we might argue, comes from a breakdown in the remediation as the work moves from stage to page, encouraging us to search for “wholeness”.

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The original author or compiler sought to stress the reciprocity between print and performance and, in his title, almost erases the translation that occurs in this move to printing the plays (for the first time): “der Gestalt in offenen Druck gegeben/ dass sie gar leicht darauss spielweiss widerumb angerichtet... können” [[Meinus] 1620]. “Given form in print that they might easily be reworked from there for performance.” Meinus apparently desired the collection to be used as performance texts, and the works often reflect this connection to performance on stage. The stage directions are far more robust than in contemporary English editions, including even minor actions and emotions that they players expressed. Some speeches, moreover, seem as if Meinus attempts to capture exactly the performance he had witnessed. In one of the Pickelhering interludes, for example, we have a long and flowing sentence from a troubled old man:

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Hum / hum / hum / alle meine Nachbarn / hum hum / hum / die thun mir sagen / hum / hum / hum / wie meine Fraw Maria / hum / hum / eine lose Hure seyn / hum / hum / hum / und bey den Schwager auch wol schlaffen sol / wol schlaffen sol / hum / hum / welches denn traun ein grosses were / ein grosses were / hum / hum / ich kan es nicht gläuben / noch nicht gläuben / hum hum / nein noch nicht gläuben kan ich das / denn die Fraw helt mich auch gar zu werth und lieb / ja grewlich lieb hat sie mich / O ein tugendtsam Weib / in 9. Herren Landen wird ihres gleichen nicht gefunden werden

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[[Meinus] 1620]

Hum, hum, hum, all my neighbors, hum, hum, hum, they say to me, hum, hum, hum, how my wife Maria, hum, hum, is a loose whore, hum, hum, hum, and will also sleep with her brother-in-law, hum, hum, which then would be a big thing, in truth, a big thing, hum, hum, I can't believe it, still can't believe, hum hum, No, I still cannot believe that, for my wife holds me in such high regard and love, yes, an outrageous love she has for me. O a virtuous wife, in nine kingdoms her like isn't to be found!

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The sprawling, repetitive sentence presumably mimics the deliberative and anxious action of the old man, uncertain about his soon-to-be bride. Not only the diction – with the inclusion of guttural fussing (“hum hum”) – but even the punctuation highlights this performative aspect, with pauses (/) littered across the page, and even the odd double-colon (: / :). ^[2] Meinus, it seems, means to capture the dynamism of the plays in performance, but also struggled with the remediation, the impossibility of rendering performance entirely with punctuation.

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In printing the plays, they were locked into a static form that belied the dynamic quality of the theater, and thus subject to a measure of “wholeness” and “unity” that seems entirely inappropriate to the kind of theater these players practiced. The messiness of the previous speech, with its odd punctuation, offers only one instance of this marked failure. More fully, we see the inability to capture the extemporaneous elements in the placeholders, the “etc.’s.” in actors’ speeches and stage directions. As Laurie Maguire has shown, “etc.’s” were much more open and ambiguous in the early modern theater, and could serve a range of purposes, from a bawdy pun to representing interruption. In this play, however, almost always the “etc.’s” offer the actors freedom in their performance [Maguire 2018]. “Etc.” appears eleven times, four times in a spoken line and seven times in stage directions, generally calling for either repetition (as when a disguised Fortunatus calls out apples to sell: “Beautiful apples of Damascus, etc. Beauty of youth, buy apples of Damascus, which will give you a beautiful countenance. Apples of Damascus, etc.”) or for an embellished action on the

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stage: “[Now Andolusia comes. Sets Agrippina angrily on the ground. Goes around like a bear. Throws a rock. Turns his eyes in his head. She shivers and quakes, etc.]” Despite the very detailed account of Andolusia’s action, the “etc.” at the end of the line appears to grant both actors permission to extend this visual and emotion-wrought scene. Almost dumb-show-like in its visual interpretability, this kind of action seems particularly useful for this cross-cultural performance, especially before the works were translated, as this theater performed across languages.

Finally, and perhaps most characteristic of this theater, we see the centrality and spontaneity of performance in both the detail and the occasional ambiguity in stage directions, especially, again, in the calls for Pickelhering to perform: “Hier agiret Pickelhering”. Pickelhering might act differently each time, playing on the audience, drawing extemporaneously on the materials of this particular stage or the beliefs of this particular community. As current research on this theater has stressed, Pickelhering was essential to the travelers’ popularity[Alexander 2014]; and yet, his kind of performance is erased in print. With the obvious absence of a performance archive, scholars encountered only the “shadow” of Pickelhering that remained.

The point, here, is that for this kind of transnational theater, based in adaptation and extemporaneous performance, a print edition misrepresents the players, and the inevitable flattening explains much of the critical dismissal of this theater. Both the research foci (which texts are related) and, perhaps more controversially, the aesthetic assumptions (in praise of “wholeness”) of early scholarship on this theater was inevitably tied to the material technology of the works studied – the printed playtext. Our judgement of the theater is refracted through aesthetic appraisals of the printed remnants. The traveling players, however, could easily cut and replace, add and subtract, scenes and elements from their performances not because their theater was derivative and inferior, but because it took part in a tradition that did not privilege wholeness and sequential reading. To recreate these aspects of the theater, we need a kind of text similarly adaptable and episodic, that recovers the iconic elements and the visual elements of this theater without locking it into place; to recover Menius’s intention of plays that recreate these varied performances, we need to capture the piecemeal and extemporaneous style of the players.

The digital text, I would argue, allows us to do just that: to undercut the very notions of wholeness and plot linearity that have been insisted upon in the criticism of this theater. For several decades now, editors have been exploring the possibilities of e-space, challenging our continued reliance on the metaphors and assumptions of print, and they have developed a theory of digital publication that often aligns well with the practices of this theater in its modularity^[3] and spontaneity. For works in this theater, the mutability and multiplicity of the digital text, often stressed in scholarship, seems particularly germane, both in our attempt to re-imagine the digital text and to recover the aesthetics of the traveling theater. Over a decade ago, Jerome McGann noted that

A critical edition can clearly be built in digital form that allows a dynamical tracking and analysis of that recent literary discovery, the “readerly text.” This clearly also means that the fundamentally dynamical character of the textual condition can be digitally realized: the dialectic of the field relations between the history of the text’s transmission and the history of its reception [...] In such a case you will not want to build a model of one made thing, you will try to design a system that can simulate all the realized and realizable documentary possibilities – the possibilities that are known and recorded as well as those that have yet to be (re)constructed. [McGann 2006]

Extending this insight beyond the document to include performances, we might add that to recover the character of this early modern traveling theater, we should design an edition that highlights the spontaneity and modularity of the players’ style. To indemnify the lost records of this theater requires going beyond the traces that exist to look instead at how these dynamic plays might have been put together on stage.

The travelers’ performance and the digital text

A digital edition of this *Fortunatus*, then, might mitigate some of the challenges in understanding the success of the traveling players. As digital publication has become more prevalent, a large scholarly conversation has developed around experimenting with and theorizing the new medium. The work of digitizing texts has been so important and

productive, in fact, that scholars continue to argue for its centrality to the digital humanities more generally [Earhart 2012]. While early enthusiasm for the digital over the print form has cooled, we now have over three decades of critical work that thinks through the difference between the codex and e-space and hypothesizes the future of the book in the digital age. The purported advantages of the digital, scholars have insisted, can be immense. Most simply, digital publication allows for the almost endless inclusion of material. For editors focused on drama, the multimedia capabilities of digital publication, along with this extra space, have seemed especially promising, as editions have experimented with including video of scenes or even entire versions of their chosen play [Jenstad and Hirsch 2016][Hirsch 2011.] [Cave, Lowe, and Wolland 2006]. Scholars have also focused on how the digital environment shifts audience participation. For digital scholarly editors, for example, Peter Shillingsberg's sense of the text as work site has reshaped the kinds of things we want our editions to do [Shillingsburg 2006]. Johanna Drucker's catalogue of features offered by e-space has also been influential for editors, particularly her critique of mimicking the features of the codex and the call to instead take advantage of the ability for digital texts to be manipulated at the level of code; to be marked at each stage of manipulation; and to open collaborative spaces of exchange [Drucker 2009].

Although debate continues over what exactly constitutes a “ digital scholarly edition,” for many theorists and practitioners, taking advantage of these new capabilities is essential in distinguishing between print and digital media. [Robinson 2013] [Sahle 2016] [Vanhoutte 2010] [Gabler 2010]. In Patrick Sahle's definition, at least, it is not the mere fact of digitization, but rather an underlying “digital paradigm” which capitalizes on the new functionalities of computer publishing: “ As long as the contents and functionalities of a typographically born and typographically envisioned edition do not really change with the conversion to digital data, we should not call these derivative editions ‘digital’. It is the conceptual framework that makes the thing – not the method of storage of the information either on paper or as bits and bytes” ” [Sahle 2016, 26–7]. This has been insisted frequently: that we cannot simply replicate the printed book online [Buzzoni 2016][Van Zundert 2016] [Bryant 2002] [Jenstad and Hirsch 2016] [Schloen and Schloen 2014]. And yet, even decades into digital publishing, we still are discovering in practice and experimentation myriad ways in which this digital paradigm might take shape. As in digital publication generally, scholarly editors have explored how the use of hypertext, fluid publication, and the multimedia capabilities of these platforms have reshaped editing. Sahle, for example, has noted an overall shift from form to content [Sahle 2016], while others have seen the de-centering of the editor and the democratization of editing [Crompton et al. 2014]. In terms of the text itself, rather than the editorial role, many scholars have noted a move to a pluralistic notion of the text, what Elena Pierazzo calls the “dynamic, Heraclitean view of texts” [Pierazzo 2016] that results from digital publication. I would like to argue further through this case study of *Fortunatus* that these features will also, inevitably, shape the aesthetics of the early modern texts we move online; indeed, as we will see shortly, the very modularity that the digital environment encourages might help us recapture the style of the traveling theater.

Aesthetics has, of course, also been a central concern for scholars of digital media, though less often raised in discussions of scholarly editing, as theorists have cataloged the changing aesthetics of the new form: how do we experience the text differently – derive pleasure from the text differently – because of these new characteristics? Much of the early response to digital publication in the 1990s exuberantly theorized the radical change that hypertext would bring about, as well as the ephemerality of the new medium [Landow 1992]. While these arguments have long been qualified, still, the facility of movement in a digital environment certainly changes the experience of reading. Commentators have long noted the continued de-centering of the author and intellectual property [O'Donnell 1998], as well as the increasingly interactive and adaptive nature of the text online [Shillingsburg 2006]. Similarly, the modularized structure of the hypertext, reflecting the web more generally, privileges a kind of episodic, context-laden writing and allows us to derive enjoyment from the text in new ways. As we have seen, the modular and collaborative ethos encouraged by the digital form strikingly reflects several neglected features of the early modern traveling theater.

As has often happened both in textual studies and humanities computing, the early modern theater, because of its eccentricities, fragmentary nature, and unpredictability, serves as an intriguing test site for practicing theory. Despite noting the tension between the past-facing textual scholarship and forward-facing interface design, Alan Galey encourages textual editors to continue their digital experimentation: “Why speculate when we can prototype? – that is, to regard the future of the book as something we create, not just observe and comment upon” [Galey 2010, 108]. A

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move away from the text, as we will see, might in fact be truer to the theater than a careful and exact rendering of the printed work online. Like many of these scholars, I am interested here in the aesthetics of form, but primarily as a way of solving the problems posed by editing the travelers' *Fortunatus*. I will attempt to show that the nonlinearity and even randomness made possible in the digital platform not only recaptures an element of these early modern players' performance erased by the codex, it also hints at the ways in which working from printed playtexts has shaped reaction to these early modern players and, indeed, distorted our focus on the traveling theater.

Coding the Theatergram

My question in this edition, then, is how might new technologies challenge the century-long interest in “wholeness” and instead help us address the impasses scholars have encountered when attempting to study this theater. The first problem, the problem of the episode, seems to me an issue that can profitably be addressed with richer metadata in editions of the traveling theater's playtexts. As we have seen, source studies alone tend to oversimplify the complex matrix of influence and borrowing. In fact, focusing on the episodic character of the players' text might help us re-conceive both the staging of early modern plays and the interrelations between national theaters. The episodic structure can be easily captured by the modularity inherent in the digital text – a simpler version, in fact, of the numerous TEI projects that code everything down to the smallest unit (as suggested by Peter Robinson in his work with Chaucer) [Robinson 1996].

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First, this markup would facilitate our attempt to track adaptation as the legend moves across the Continent, supplementing traditional approaches, and better fitting this messy history. As any critical edition requires, the digital *Fortunatus* will include a history of sources and adaptations, along with other closely-related versions of the play. Scholars involved in some of the most successful publication of early modern drama online have often stressed this expansiveness characteristic of the online edition, and it has allowed a number of innovative textual apparati [Massai 2004]. And yet, from what we know of the character of this remarkably adaptive theater, this contextual material becomes practically endless. While the borders of Shakespeare online tend to be demarcated with some solidity – though perhaps unfairly – this lesser known and more collaborative theatrical production lacks both the cultural capital and the (somewhat) clear transmission history; thus an online version of the players' *Fortunatus*, as we have seen, presents new challenges for a digital text that operates primarily by supplement.

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More recent scholarship has turned from critique of the traveler's texts to examining the complex interconnections among sources in the early modern theater, and has shown, in the words of Robert Henke and Eric Nicholson, that “the transnational dissemination of European theater resembled an amorphous net or web much more than a line” [Henke and Nicholson 2014, 6]. This critical shift to modular thinking – invoking networks to explain social phenomenon – is certainly related to technological development, and we should perhaps be wary of our theory falling into yet another pattern (everything is a network); but undoubtedly digital publication also facilitates this approach. Moreover, this editorial stance reshapes our critical approach to the text. Re-conceiving the early modern theater text in this way, we are encouraged to search not for source and adaptation, but rather nodes and points of connection. And in the case of this theater, as I have suggested, our nodes should be not the “whole” play, but rather its building blocks: the episodes within.

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Drawing on George Louise Clubb's work on the *theatergram*, a detachable and translatable story block used in drama, might help us conceptualize this network of connections [Clubb 1989]. By establishing the key story blocks and examining how they change in various editions – whether printed or recorded in the diaries of audience members -- we might more accurately speculate on the relationship between plays, troupes, and even theaters. A larger attention to these overlapping *theatergrams* in digital editions could thus prove useful for re-conceptualizing the works themselves, as well as for understanding the history of adaptation and transmission. In this edition, therefore, I have experimented with including metadata on each *theatergram* contained in the text, treating each as a detachable unit. To accomplish this fully, we need a common language of *theatergrams*. Early modern dramatic works are already divided into acts and scenes, obviously, but coding for the *theatergram* encourages us instead to look for portable storyblocks that can function on their own – or be drawn into another work. Sometimes, however, these scenes might cross traditional hierarchical divisions (of scenes and acts) and therefore challenge TEI's base in XML. TEI provides resources for

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embedding non-hierarchical structures, and perhaps the simplest and most applicable for the task of coding *theatergrams* is the `floatingText` element, which allows us to encode front and back matter for each individual *theatergram*. In fact, `floatingText` is often used for encoding plays-within-plays and dumb shows, and the *theatergram* is certainly comparable in structure to a play-within.

The `floatingText` element allows us to associate a range of metadata with each of these smaller units, including characters, setting, and properties. Stage materials, for example, are important for the material history of the travelers, as we will see shortly. I have included them with a list in the `set` element, but remain open to any more elegant or efficient means. Less materially, we might also include information about the tropes and icons referenced in each *theatergram*. Because this theater was so visual, steeped in transnational icons, the metadata might profitably build on kinds of search techniques developed for images.

As an example of *theatergram*, early in the German *Fortunatus* (as in Dekker's play), when first confronted with the option of wealth or wisdom from Fortune, three spirits appear to share their fate and the lessons they learned of the futility of riches. This scene is incidental to the main plot, the three spirits never again appearing, but it does offer a generalizable lesson that, with the appropriate costuming, could be repeated again and again on stage. Moreover, though short, its inclusion in the play's full title signals a kind of importance attached by the players to the episode. It might be coded with the `floatingText` element like this:

```
<sp>
  <speaker>FORTUNATUS.</speaker>
  <p>Oh, if I only might have a year to consider! First, wisdom, yes, wisdom.
    You are the most noble virtue, but how will wisdom be regarded in these
    times: namely, as foolishness.</p>
  <p>Next, riches. In the whole world, you're esteemed most highly, for so it
    goes in our time, that if a person is graced with all the virtues and
    has no money, it's all for nothing.</p>
  <p>Third, strength. One hears in these times of the most powerful, how they
    came to the most wretched ends because they relied entirely on their
    strength.</p>
  <p>Fourth, health. Yes, this is to be wished for nearest God on Earth. But
    still, if one doesn't have any money with it, they must plague their
    healthy body with hunger and thirst.</p>
  <p>Fifth, beauty. Yes, in most of the tragedies one can find how wretchedly
    and miserably the most beautiful people had to end their lives.</p>
  <p>Sixth, long life. Yes, that would also be very good, but if I should
    suffer poverty along with it, I'd only wish that life might be shortened
    for me. But who are these who step in here so dejectedly?</p>
</sp>
<floatingText type="theatergram">
  <front>
    <castList>
      <castItem> The first spirit.</castItem>
      <castItem> The second spirit.</castItem>
      <castItem> The third spirit.</castItem>
    </castList>
    <set>
      <list>
        <item> Costuming for a Spanish king</item>
        <item> Costuming for a Holy Roman Emperor</item>
      </list>
    </set>
  </front>
  <body>
    <stage>Three spirits now come bound in chains and speak.</stage>
  </body>
  <sp>
    <speaker>The first spirit.</speaker>
    <p>Alas, we poor, damned souls, who can never more find any peace,
```

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```

        we must float around until the end of the world. O Fortunatus,
        we see that Fortune would impart her gifts to you, but look to
        yourself, and do not take them, for with them you shall come
        into corruption. She also imparted her gifts to me and made me
        king of Spain, but cursed be the hour that I partook of them,
        and you, Fortune, I curse you fully!</p>
</sp>

<sp>
    <speaker>The second spirit.</speaker>
    <p>I advise you poor people, do not accept her gifts. She also
    became favorable to me and made me a most powerful emperor, yes,
    and through that I lost both body and life, yes, even my poor
    soul. And therefore, O Fortune, I curse you fully!</p>
</sp>

<sp>
    <speaker>The third spirit.</speaker>
    <p>O Fortune, how sadly have you deceived me! If you had left me
    alone and not raised me to such honor, I would be in eternal
    rest. Now, however, I must float here and there and can find no
    place to stay. O Fortunatus, take nothing from her, otherwise
    she'll deceive you even as she did me. No we must leave from
    here. O be fully cursed, you granter of misfortune!</p>
</sp>

<sp>
    <speaker>Fortuna</speaker>
    <p>Fly away, fly away, you great fools. It's of no use to you any
    longer, and that you lost your lives and souls is not my fault,
    but rather your own, for I gave you the gifts well, but you
    gladly misused them. But you, Fortunatus, hurry up and say which
    of my six gifts you choose, for in a short while the hour of
    your fortune is passed.</p>
</sp>

<sp>
    <speaker>FORTUNATUS.</speaker>
    <p>Bountiful Goddess, I choose riches, so that I always have plenty
    of gold and money.</p>
</sp>
</body>
</floatingText>

```

While this is far shorter than most *theatergrams*, it conveys a sense of how we might define the characters, properties, and even images that constitute this packagable story block. The episode captures the adaptation of the theater, since it helps connect it to Dekker's work (which included a similar scene) and distance it from the original prose editions (which did not). And, if three kings in royal regalia show up elsewhere to lament the cruelty of Fortune, we might speculate that these scenes are in some way connected. Data about visual icons and properties can help reimagine connections between plays, since these travelers, limited by what they could physically carry, must often have reused their materials of performance. Examples of overlapping properties are manifold for the traveling theater; we might wonder, for example, whether the horns given to Agrippina and the earls in *Fortunatus* were the same property used in the scene from *Faustus* (in the B text) in which Faustus gives a skeptical knight horns. Tracking the use of this object might link the two plays and provide insight into when the scene was added to *Faustus*.

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Additional metadata at the level of the theatergram, moreover, would facilitate a better understanding of how context and resources shaped the episodic character of this theater. In the early twenty-first century, scholars revitalized the study of stage properties, as cultural materialists demonstrated the embeddedness of these products in economic, social, and religious systems of meaning. Indeed, in this scholarship, the circulation of props outside the theater becomes as important as their role on the stage. The travelers carried props and costuming across various regions of

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Northern Europe, and these materials themselves often marked the theater's success and sanction. We have significant archival records – perhaps even better than our performance records – of the gifts of stage properties and costuming given by dukes to the travelers. Because these materials of performance were expensive, court books often recorded in detail what was purchased for the players. In 1612, for example, we know the Brandenburg players were given 70 ells of red silk; 50 ells of red cord; monks' dresses; eighteen large and seventeen long plumes; a sword with a gold hilt; a wooden shield; four death heads; a painted cloud; and various carvings [Cohn 1865, 85]. Most of these materials were associated with the *Turkish Triumph Comedy*, but inevitably, such expensive gifts would be reused and reshape later performance of other plays. Connecting plays to the materials necessary to stage them, therefore, once again helps us understand the relationship between the economic history and performance history of these players.

As with all editing, deciding what constitutes a *theatergram* and what material to include is an interpretive act. But it is based in the materials and conditions of the travelers' performance, and it might help us begin visualizing the nodes and connections in this great web of early modern theater.

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An aesthetics of randomness and the episodic

The problem of performance style is more complex and opens long-running debates over editing early modern drama for performance. While the online *Fortunatus* is not intended as a performance edition (but aimed at readers: students and scholars), increased attention to issues of performance in editing certainly facilitates a recovery of the strengths of the travelers and should shape any new edition of their plays [Worthen 1997][Jenkins and Sanders 2014][Holland and Orgel 2006][Cave, Lowe, and Wolland 2006][Thompson and McMullen 2014][Erne and Kidnie 2004][Cordner 2002][Orgel 2006][Kidnie 2014]. Scholars have also begun exploring the intersections between digital texts and performance [Galey and Niles 2017]. My chief interest, however, is in capitalizing on the digital text to make the history and aesthetics of the traveling theater more apparent. The traveling theater, I would argue, represents a special case in which not only do we have few existing playtexts, long considered derivative of other plays, and almost no record of performance history, but the playtexts themselves point to the importance of spontaneous, contingent (context-based) performance. We might also add that the tension between authority and collaborative performance does not exist for the traveling theater's texts; they are attached to no author, but rather evidence of how the English plays were adapted during performance in European contexts.

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Coding the theatergram already shifts our focus from the whole to the episode, inevitably influencing our critical insights. Beyond this, however, new capabilities of the digital medium might usefully illuminate the traveling theater's performance, in part because the modular style (plays built from small, interchangeable storyblocks) and spontaneity (plays changed based on context in impromptu performance) are especially congenial to the digital text. We might, for example, note simply the expansion of space and the multimodality common to the digital edition. Perhaps videos of Pickelhering characters, or at least the clowning tradition that stems from these characters, are available on Youtube. Certainly, experimentation with multimodality in performance editions has proven successful [Jenstad and Hirsch 2016][Roberts-Smith et al. 2013]. As the editors of the experimental and influential *Richard Brome Online* have argued, "where there is no substantial stage history of a playwright's canon, then editing to illuminate the *theatrical* strengths of the texts becomes more urgent" [Cave, Lowe, and Wolland 2006], and videos of actors performing these roles, like the *Brome Online* edition provides, could help readers understand the success of these plays. Yet such videos, while very useful for imagining the multiplicity of performance, would be only a static way of filling in the placeholder provided by the stage direction, and once again would not necessarily replicate the adaptation and dynamism of the actual performances. I have therefore also experimented with a simple Javascript program, which randomly presents one of the Pickelhering interludes included in the collection in the space of the stage direction calling for Pickelhering to act. Seven of these interludes were contained within the collection, ranging from short plays to long songs, and each capitalizes on the non-linguistic strengths of this theater: slap-stick comedy, music, acrobatics. This, certainly, would still never perfectly replicate the player's performance, which remains its own distinct form; players often navigated their contexts and appealed directly to their audiences in sophisticated ways, habits of performance that a randomly generated text would belie. This form does, however, ensure that different readers would experience a slightly different play; the overlapping themes between *Fortunatus* and the recorded Pickelhering plays, from gender competition to class resentment, might highlight different elements of the central, *Fortunatus* plot. More simply, and yet I think more

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importantly, the text changes with each reading, and the possibilities in the digital space for animation allow us to recreate at least the experience of reading a work with changing parts. In this, perhaps, even the aesthetic value of wholeness might be challenged.

[4]

The program is quite simple, modeled after the number of random generators operating online. It uses a Request command to pull the text from a file in a folder of Pickelhering Plays, and Math.random() to ensure that each time the play loads a new, random Pickelhering interlude is selected. Currently, readers must click on the stage direction to display the text of the interlude, though it would, of course, be simple to immediately include the text.

```
<head>
  <script type="text/javascript"> filenames = [ 'IX.txt', 'X.txt',
    'XI.txt', 'XII.txt', 'XIII.txt', 'XIV.txt' ]; var filename =
    filenames[Math.floor(Math.random()*filenames.length)]; var
    http_request = new XMLHttpRequest(); function makeRequest() {
    http_request.onreadystatechange = handleCheckboxRequest;
    http_request.open('GET',filename,true); http_request.send(null); }
    function handleCheckboxRequest() { if (http_request.readyState == 4
    && http_request.status == 200) {
    document.getElementById('PickelheringPlay').innerHTML =
    http_request.responseText; } } </script>
  <title> Pickelhering Plays </title>
</head>
      <body>
        <h1>Pickelhering Spiel Randomizer </h1>
        <sp>
          <speaker>Andolosia.</speaker>
          <p>Now might I be merry, for I have already
            swayed my pious and
            riches. Everyone knows
            Agrippina of England,
            her in beauty. Now
            and to serve them.
            London. O, might I
            king so truly that
            far too common. Thus,
            behalf, so that if luck
            her grace. </p>
            simple brother to let me have the sack of
            to speak of the extreme beauty of Princess
            so that no one in the entire world surpasses
            it's my earnest desire to see young women,
            Therefore, I'll immediately direct myself to
            have been born of royal blood, I'd serve the
            he would have to give her to me; but I am
            I'll hold a tournament every day on her
            will be favorable to me, I might come into
          </sp>
          <div class="top">
            <a href="javascript://" onclick="makeRequest()"
              style="font-style:italic"> Here Pickelhering
            </div>
            <div id="PickelheringPlay"/>
          </div>
          <sp>
            <speaker>Andolosia.</speaker>
            <p>Now I am in London, where I have neglected
              nothing for the love
              tournaments, in which I
              of my princes, with presents, gifts, and
              have maintained myself so that no one has
```

yet conquered me. But
yesterday evening the
Near him sat his
over whom I am now
ferverently in love, so
O woe to me that I
heart that cannot be
lowly, because I was
there is nothing more
enjoying. I, too, can
of love. Yet what
great duke or count
queen, and Agrippina to
royally.</p>

</sp>

<stage>Goes in.</stage>

</body>

great ache and pain is in my heart, for
king invited me as a guest to his table.
exuberantly beautiful daughter, Agrippina,
even more fervent than before, and more
that I almost couldn't eat or drink anymore.
came here, for here I received a fire in my
put out, for Agrippina, you consider me too
born in a poor, not a royal, family. O,
difficult on earth than to love without
now complain, that I am just a little slave
doesn't love do? I will hold myself like a
because I can, and will invite the king,
a banquet again, which shall then be held

As this short example shows, this randomness both employs and also frustrates some of our central methods for reading plays, for making sense of plot and subplot. Trained to value wholeness, we inevitably attempt to integrate and synthesize, to show how the juxtaposition of the interlude might comment on the main plot. At the same time, the randomness that is a feature of this text insists that, however true those congruities might be, they are coincidental rather than intentional; the subplot has no necessary role, and will, in fact, likely be changed if you refresh your browser. We might even imagine a productive course discussion in which students have read different interludes. At the very least, this kind of program offers a textual representation of the fact that, when dealing with plays, the same work doesn't always contain even the same "linguistic code" (to borrow McGann's language).

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Conclusion

If, as I have tried to show, the form of the codex has shaped our response to the early modern traveling theater, the question becomes how will new forms of digital publication reshape this response: how will the aesthetics of the digital reveal – and perhaps also distort – the travelers' plays that have come down to us from early modernity? While my use of TEI offers nothing new, the focus on *theatergrams* shifts our critical focus and forces us to interact with the text in a new way; we might, I suggest, discover quite a bit that was missed when constrained too tightly by our desire for "wholeness".

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Early criticism of this theater was very much a book-based criticism. Understandably, as these were the only remnants they had from which to work, the nineteenth century pioneers tied research and response to the travelers to text rather than performance, influencing the kind of aesthetic judgements they made. My claim throughout, however, has been that as we migrate these texts into a new medium, we have the opportunity to recover characteristics of the original performance – spontaneity, randomness, episode – not only to help us better understand and experience the theater's success, but also to solve some of the critical problems posed by the traveling theater.

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Of course, this is a long way from conservative textual scholarship, and one might argue that, in creating this episodic

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text, not only am I failing to capture the actual character of performance, but I am equally failing to capture the codex in which these works first appeared; that instead, I have Frankensteined into existence a new work. And this is certainly true: we have no way of knowing if these included interludes were the ones performed with *Fortunatus*, nor how various *theatergrams* changed in performance. The digital environment provides options for the reader/user, however, and I hope this criticism is blunted by the fact that a reader might simply read through a careful diplomatic transcription of the 1620 text, ignoring the interludes. In the randomness of the episode, I am interested more in the form than content – and in what the experience of reading might tell us about the interaction of form and content. I am interested in trying to understand what made this episodic, spontaneous performance so successful, to get away from the texts “mutilated” into the codex. One might even make the argument, as many have, that the move from print to digital is one from wholeness – a finished, closed product most often read linearly – to modularity – an open process, connected with hyperlinks, blurring lines between text and context. But perhaps in this move, we more closely approach the ethos and aesthetics of the early modern travelers.

Notes

[1] We might also add, as scholarship on clowning and performance has shown, the interruptions were not as far from performance in London as Harms imagined.

[2] Scholars have long discussed issues with editing early modern punctuation. Claire M. Bourne, for example, has read the pilcrows commonly used in early modern printed play books as “a typographical means by which to render dramatic form and its effects legible in print” [Bourne 2014]

[3] We might think of the plays episodes as modular in use, since they could be cut, added, and recombined during multiple performances.

[4] Editors with DRE will be responsible for the final coding; the following is simply an example of the kind of randomness that can be integrated into an edition of this kind. The English excerpts are from my translation of the German play.

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