

**Angermion**



# Angermion

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# “Our inimitable Shakespeare is a Stumbling-block to the whole Tribe of these rigid Criticks”

English and German Women in Eighteenth-Century Debates on Shakespeare

## 1

In the preface to the *Dutch Lover*, performed in 1673, Aphra Behn justifies her profession as dramatist claiming a strong affinity between women and Shakespeare: “We all well know that the immortal Shakespeare’s Plays (who was not guilty of much more of this than often falls to women’s share) have better pleas’d the World than Jonson’s works”<sup>1</sup>. Drawing from Shakespeare’s presumed ignorance, his “small latine, and less Greek”,<sup>2</sup> Behn’s words not only suggest an association between Shakespeare’s lack of knowledge and that of women, but also become emblematic of the significant role that English women would play, from the last decades of the seventeenth century onwards, in the promotion of Shakespeare as a cultural figure that deserved to be more carefully interrogated in England and, as today we well know, abroad. Since then, Shakespeare has continued to be seen as a national but also global emblematic figure. The analysis of his reception, appropriation and criticism has always been helpful in exploring the way in which languages, ideas and models travel through time and space, acquiring new political-cultural meanings, and becoming important elements of exchange – *Kulturtransfer*– between different cultures. Compelling in this respect are the recent

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The title quotation is taken from: Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, vol. 3, ed. Henry Morley (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1891), available at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/12030/12030-h/SV3/Spectator3.html#toc.>, accessed 15 January 2020.

1 Aphra Behn, “Epistle to the Reader,” in *Women Critics 1660–1820: An Anthology*, ed. by The Folger Collective on Early Women Critics, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), pp. 18–20, here p. 20.

2 Ben Jonson, “To the Memory of My Beloved. The Author Mr. William Shakespeare and What he hath left us,” in *Shakespeare Criticism. A Selection, 1623–1840*, ed. by D. N. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 3–5, here p. 4.

debates about the role of Sonnet 66, with its first line that sounds so deeply embedded in the political wrongs of the poet's time, "Tired with all these, for restful death I cry". These have emphasised the ideological function that the sonnet played in a twentieth-century Europe suffering under totalitarian regimes. In Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Russia and the Netherlands, Manfred Pfister argues, "this particular sonnet was singled out again and again as a kind of samizdat text which, protected by Shakespeare's cultural prestige, permitted critics and artists to ventilate their political anger and dismay at the various totalitarian authorities tongue-tying them and corrupting and exploiting the people"<sup>3</sup>.

Despite the illuminating example provided by Behn near the end of the seventeenth century and the thought-provoking remediations of Shakespeare's sonnets and plays<sup>4</sup> that are still part of globalized cultural systems, the growth of interest in Shakespeare started in the eighteenth century and was marked by a multi-layered transmission characterised by disputes pro and contra Shakespeare in editions, adaptations, criticism and translations of Shakespeare's plays both at home and abroad. This process opened up a literary debate that turned the works by and on Shakespeare into literary and cultural products that were theorized as representative of a particular national taste, as well as able to traverse and even transcend, in particular from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, their national, linguistic, and even temporal origins.

The first French translation of the Shakespearean plays by Pierre Antoine de La Place, who used Pope's edition published in 1725, appeared in 1747–49, while the German translation by Christoph Martin Wieland, who mainly followed La Place's version, appeared in 1762–66 and included 22 of Shakespeare's plays. Thus, the growth of interest in Shakespeare in Europe,<sup>5</sup> and in Germany in par-

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<sup>3</sup> Manfred Pfister, "Route 66 and no End: Further Fortunes of Shakespeare's Sonnet," *Linguaculture*, 2 (2010): 39–50, here 40. On this topic see also Manfred Pfister, "Route 66: The Political Performance of Shakespeare's Sonnet 66," in "Germany and Elsewhere", *Shakespeare-Jahrbuch*, 137 (2001): 115–131.

<sup>4</sup> See Christy Desmet and Suyata Iyengar, "Adaptation, Appropriation, or What you Will," *Shakespeare*, 11 (2015): 10–19; *Shakespeare and the Ethics of Appropriation*, ed. by Alexa Huang and Elizabeth Rivlin (New York: Palgrave, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> On the reception of Shakespeare in France and on the role played by Voltaire as both critic and translator of Shakespeare's plays, see J. Bochner, "Shakespeare in France. A Survey of Dominant Opinion, 1733–1830," *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, 39 (1965): 44–65; P. E. Cranston, "'Rome en anglaise se prononce Roum ...', Shakespeare versions by Voltaire," *Modern Language Notes*, 90 (1975): 809–837; Michèle Willens, "Voltaire," in *Voltaire, Goethe, Schlegel, Coleridge. Great Shakespearians*, vol. III, ed. by Roger Paulin (London-New York: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2010), pp. 5–43.



ticular, is not produced initially by the direct knowledge of his plays, by the staging or reading of his works, but by the translation, sometimes mediated through a first French version, of English essays, prefaces, and journals. This critical material contained passages from Shakespeare’s plays, referred to performances of Shakespeare on the English stage, and entered the debates concerning the irregularity of his theatre and the originality of his characters and themes.

Today, studies on Shakespeare’s reception in the eighteenth century have demonstrated how his transformation into a cult figure also for nations other than England was in fact influenced by the aesthetic and the ideological image of the dramatist that was exported across the continent through the translation of the emergent English literary criticism. Both English and German critics agree that it is about 1740 that Shakespeare officially appears in Germany.

“Man kannte Shakespeare bestenfalls vom Hörensagen, man wußte nicht von ihm. Dieser Zustand änderte sich etwa um das Jahr 1740, als Shakespeare in den Kreisen der bürgerlichen Intelligenz in Deutschland mehr und mehr bekannt wurde”,<sup>6</sup> argues Wolfgang Stellmacher in one of the first studies on Shakespeare in Germany published in 1978, after the well-known *Shakespeare und der Deutsche Geist* written by Friedrich Gundolf in 1911.<sup>7</sup> Roger Paulin reminds us more recently that Shakespeare was a name to be quoted, where “notions of creativity, inventiveness, imagination or fulness are to the fore.”<sup>8</sup> At the time, in Germany, there was in fact “little knowledge of the texts of his plays and even less desire to feel their full impact” until the translation of *Julius Caesar* in 1741 by the Prussian diplomat Caspar Wilhelm von Borck, who was at the time the head of the Prussian Legation in London, “the first sustained version of a Shakespeare play in German and the first full Shakespeare translation (and not adaptation) into a foreign language of any kind”.<sup>9</sup> Unlike Christoph Martin Wieland, who would translate Shakespeare’s play moving from La Place’s French translation, Borck translated directly from the English version. Although, as the title *Versuch einer gebundenen Uebersetzung des Trauer-Spiels von dem Tode des Julius Caesar. Aus dem Engli-*

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6 Wolfgang Stellmacher, *Herders Shakespeare-Bild. Shakespeare-Rezeption im Sturm und Drang: dynamisches Weltbild und bürgerliches Nationaldrama* (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1978), p. 6.

7 *Shakespeare und der Deutsche Geist* was the extended version of Gundolf’s postdoctoral habilitation thesis. See Andreas Höfele, *No Hamlets. German Shakespeare from Nietzsche to Carl Schmitz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 73.

8 Roger Paulin, “Shakespeare and Germany,” in *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Fiona Ritchie and Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 314–330, here p. 315.

9 Paulin, “Shakespeare and Germany,” p. 315.

*schen Werke des Shakespear* and the author's preface to his translation clearly anticipated, Borck tried to excuse himself for his translation –he overtly defines his translation as an 'attempt', a "Versuch"–, it is difficult to deny, as Joachim Müller rightly observes, that his translation from the English language was perceived as a deep provocation:

Nicht zu leugnen, dass sich hinter der Selbstglossierung auch ein beträchtliches Selbstbewusstsein bemerkbar macht. Der Verfasser will wohl auch die deutsche literarische Öffentlichkeit mit seiner Übersetzung eines Shakespeare-Stückes provozieren, da man hier vom originalen Shakespeare so gut wie keine Kenntnis nimmt<sup>10</sup>.

Johann Christoph Gottsched, the great defender of neoclassical taste and theatre who was deeply engaged in the reformation of the *Haupt- und Staatsaktionen* of the German acting troupes and stage, looked upon this translation with great disdain. Since *Julius Caesar* did not respect neoclassical rules, he negatively reviewed Borck's translation and even accused him and those who attempted similar enterprises, arguing in his *Beyträgen zur Critischen Historie der Deutschen Sprache, Poesie und Beredsamkeit* that:

Die Übersetzungssucht ist so stark unter uns eingerissen, daß man ohne Unterschied Gutes und Böses in unsre Sprache bringt. [...] Die elendeste Haupt- und Staatsaction unserer gemeinen Comödianten ist kaum so voll Schnitzer und Fehler wider die Regeln der Schaubühne und gesunden Vernunft, als dieses Stück Shakespeares ist<sup>11</sup>.

It is within this framework that I would like to examine the influence of women in the rise of Shakespeare criticism both in England and in Germany in the first half of the Eighteenth century since, so far, women do not seem to have been considered as relevant agents in the development of this relentless process. In particular, I intend to interrogate the possible influence of the English actresses who, having the possibility to interpret Shakespeare's female roles for the first time, discursively contributed to the development of a new taste and sensibility and, in so doing, to the process of canonization of Shakespeare as a national emblem to be 'exported' via journals and the emergent literary criticism on the continent. By specifically referring to the German context, I also aim to explore the role that women played not as actresses –Shakespeare was not performed on the

<sup>10</sup> Joachim Müller, "Shakespeare und ein deutscher Anfang. Die von Borcksche Übersetzung des Julius Cäsar von 1741 im Streitfeld von Gottsched und Johann Elias Schlegel," in *Sitzungsberichte der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaft zu Leipzig* (Berlin [DDR], 1977), p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Johann Christoph Gottsched, *Beyträge zur Critischen Historie der Deutschen Sprache, Poesie und Beredsamkeit*, "Nachricht von neuen hieher gehörigen Sachen", vol. 7 (Leipzig: Bey Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf, 1741), p. 516.

German stage until the last decades of the eighteenth century<sup>12</sup>— but as translators of English journals and essays, thus as those who once again indirectly introduced the qualities and the imperfections of Shakespeare to the “bürgerlichen” ‘male’ “Intelligenz in Deutschland”<sup>13</sup>. It is precisely in the English journals that Shakespeare’s ability to involve the spectators and raise multifaceted emotions were often used to praise the originality of the English dramatist, to justify his irregularity<sup>14</sup>, and to question the rigidity of the French theatre and its presumed superiority over the English one. And it was mainly due to a woman, Luise Adelgunde Victorie Gottsched, whose contributions were identified by a star at the bottom of each translation, as Hilary Brown reminds us,<sup>15</sup> that first editions of *The Spectator*, *The Tatler* and *The Guardian* became available in German and to a public of readers that went beyond the well-educated *elite*. These contain letters devoted to Shakespeare, his characters, and the new pleasure of the imagination his plays were able to produce. They were thus able to reach a wider number of readers, stimulate critical thinking and exert an unexpected effect on the German language, prose and emergent literary criticism. Between 1739 and 1743 Luise, Johann Christoph Gottsched’s wife, completed the translation of the journals, and, in so doing, she was one of the main ‘means’ through which the controversial debates on Shakespeare, that triggered the rise of Shakespeare cult among German writers from 1740 on, began.

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**12** There were of course German actresses at the time, but their repertoire did not include the performance of Shakespearean plays. Significant is the role played by Karoline Neuber during the first half of the eighteenth century as a great reformer of the German stage and acting. We cannot however consider her function in this specific context since her effort mainly consisted “in imitating the neoclassical tragedies being performed at German courts by traveling troupes of French actors” in order to promote the development of “original German dramas modelled after the style of French tragedy”, Michael J. Sosulski, *Theatre and Nation in Eighteenth Century Germany* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 73.

**13** Stellmacher, *Herders Shakespeare-Bild*, p. 6.

**14** Particularly significant is the meaning of genius that Addison attributed to Shakespeare when in *The Spectator*, article no. 160, he explains Shakespeare’s irregularity and argues that a genius “is like a rich Soil in a Happy Climate, that produces a whole Wilderness of noble plants rising in a thousand beautiful Landships without any certain Order or Irregularity”. Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, vol. 2, ed. by Henry Morley (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1891), available at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/12030/12030-h/SV3/Spectator3.html#toc>, accessed 15 January 2020.

**15** Hilary Brown, *Luise Gottsched the Translator* (Rochester-Suffolk: Camden House, 2012), p. 85.

## 2

Starting from the debates within gender studies and Shakespeare criticism, Ann Thompson, Sasha Roberts, and Fiona Ritchie<sup>16</sup> have shown how Shakespeare's plays represented an important space of empowerment for English women writers of past ages, who saw in Shakespeare an author they could legitimately write about. The first critical essay ever published on Shakespeare was in fact written by Margaret Cavendish in 1664. Cavendish, who probably became acquainted with Shakespeare's work in print rather than on the stage, defended Shakespeare from the "dispraise of neoclassical criticism", exalting the realism of his characters and showing Shakespeare's protean ability to transform himself "into every one of those Persons he hath described", to "metamorphose from a man to a woman" and to present "passions so naturally, and misfortune so probably, as pierces the souls of his readers with such a True sense and feeling therof".<sup>17</sup>

It is, however, thanks to the success of Shakespearean female characters performed by actresses after the re-opening of the theatre in 1660 that we witness the development of a new sensibility centered on emotions and feelings, and thus mainly focused on the reactions of the public in response to an adaptation of a Shakespearean play.

Jacqueline Pearson has rightly demonstrated the importance of the introduction of actresses for the rise of a new sensibility thanks to their ability to affect "the drama of the period profoundly. Love and marriage and adultery could be enacted with a frankness and realism impossible in a theatre where all performers were male".<sup>18</sup> The famous actress Mary Betterton, as the poet laureate, actor and theatre manager Colley Cibber declared decades later, "was the Admiration of all true Judges of Nature and Lovers of Shakespeare, in whose plays she chiefly excels". She was so "great a Mistress of Nature", Cibber continued, that even the other famous actress Mrs Berry, who played Lady Macbeth after Mary Betterton, "could not in that part, with all her superior Strength and Melody of Voice, throw out those quick and careless Strokes of Terror from the Disorder of a Guilty Mind, which the other gave us with a Facility in her Manner that rendere'd them at once

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<sup>16</sup> *Women Reading Shakespeare. 1660–1900. An Anthology of Criticism*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Sasha Roberts (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); Fiona Ritchie, *Women and Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>17</sup> Margaret Cavendish, "Letter CXXIII," in *Shakespeare Criticism. A Selection, 1623–1840*, ed. by D. N. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 13–15, here p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> Jacqueline Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse: Images of Women and Women Dramatists, 1642–1673* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), p. 26.

tremendous and delightful”.<sup>19</sup> Likewise Elizabeth Barry, who appeared on the stage until 1710, was later defined by the actor and bookseller Thomas Davies in his *Dramatic Miscellanies: Consisting of Critical Observations on Several Plays of Shakespeare* (1783–1784), the “mistress of all the passions of the mind: love, joy, grief, rage, tenderness, and jealousy were all represented by her with equal skills and equal effect”.<sup>20</sup>

It is thus difficult to deny that the taste for Shakespeare that started to increase in England during the late seventeenth century was also the result of the new way of interpreting female characters inaugurated by actresses who, thanks to their unprecedented performance, contributed to the success of the Shakespearean plays and their adaptations for the new stage. Indeed, between the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, performance had a far greater influence on the formation of the English taste than print or the emergent criticism appearing in prefaces, introductions or general essays.<sup>21</sup>

Ritchie reminds us that due to the advantages of the presence of women on the stage, dramatists added extra female characters, for example a sister for Miranda in *The Tempest*, or expanded minor female roles in Shakespeare’s plays.<sup>22</sup> While Michael Dobson, moving from the success of the she-tragedy which largely derived from Shakespearean adaptations, shows how playwrights of the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century “share a growing perception and promotion of Shakespeare as both national father and a domestic one”. Shakespeare’s plays could appear or could be made to appear “in a tragic repertoire dominated by female pathos”<sup>23</sup>. And this, mainly because Shakespeare adaptations focused on the role of women in order to heighten their suffering for the pleasure of the audience. Therefore, it seems to be not by chance that female performance also had a profound effect on the presentation of Shakespeare’s plays themselves. Female characters were performed lying enticingly defenceless and often in a state of undress, as seems to be confirmed by the frontispiece engrav-

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**19** Colley Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber, Written by Himself*, 1740, ed. by Robert W. Lowe, 2 vols. (London, 1899), pp. 161f.

**20** Thomas Davies, *Dramatic Miscellanies: Consisting of Critical Observations on Several Plays of Shakespeare, 1783–1784*, quoted in Don-John Dugas, *Marketing the Bard. Shakespeare in Performance and Print, 1660–1740* (Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2010), 61.

**21** On this specific issue see Don-John Dugas, *Marketing the Bard. Shakespeare in Performance and Print, 1660–1740* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006), pp. 1f.

**22** F. Ritchie, “Women and Shakespeare in the Restoration and Eighteenth Century,” *Literature Compass*, 5/6 (2008): 1154–1168.

**23** Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet. Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660–1769* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 97.

ings to *Othello*, *Cymbeline* and *Antony and Cleopatra* in Rowe's edition (1709) of Shakespeare where, as Ritchie reminds us, "all show the heroines in this type of scenario and these illustrations suggest how the plays might have been staged"<sup>24</sup>.

It is precisely the 'pleasure' of the audience that is at the very core of John Hughes' extended review on a performance of *Othello* published in *The Guardian* in 1713 (no. 37) that he himself attended. After having declared that he did not look much at the stage but formed for "my self a new satisfaction in keeping an Eye on the faces of my little audience and observing, as it were by reflection, the different Passions of the Play represented in their Countenances", he shows his contempt for those who criticize Shakespeare for his irregularities. He argues that "it would be a poor Employment in a Critick to observe upon the Faults and shew no taste for the Beauties in a Work that has always struck the most sensible part of our Audience in a very forcible Manner." And that

the chief Subject of this Piece is the Passion of Jealousie, which the Poet has represented at large in its birth, its various Workings and Agonies, and its horrid Consequences. From this Passion, and the Innocence and Simplicity of the person suspected, arises a very moving distress [...].<sup>25</sup>

It is evident that the critic is not only interested in the actors' and actresses' performances, that is, how they interpret Shakespeare's characters, but in seeing how this interpretation, and that of Desdemona in particular, with her "Innocence" and "Simplicity", affect and involve the spectators around him. In this respect, it is compelling that the first ever professional female performance on the English stage is believed to have been in Shakespeare's *Othello* in 1660. Here an unknown actress, probably Anne Marshall who took leading roles in Killigrew's acting company, brilliantly performed the part of Desdemona after being selected from amongst four actresses.<sup>26</sup> Hughes' defence of Shakespeare's originality in terms of his ability to move the spectator's feelings, is perfectly in line with the debates that were at the very core of English new-born literary criticism, in which Shakespeare's theatre started to be meticulously investigated as a cultural and political model to replace the French theatre and its rules.<sup>27</sup> His praise

<sup>24</sup> Ritchie, "Women and Shakespeare," 1156.

<sup>25</sup> "Tragedy of Othello its Beauties and Defects", 23, April 1713, *The Guardian*, vols. I and II, (London, 1714), pp. 213-215.

<sup>26</sup> On this specific topic see Elizabeth Howe, *The first English Actresses: Women and Drama, 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> Particularly significant on this matter is John Dryden's famous *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, in which he openly declares that "you more than see" Shakespeare's representation of nature since "you feel it too", and also John Dennis' *On the Genius and Writing of Shakespeare* (1711),

for Shakespeare seems in fact to rebut Thomas Rymer’s demolition of *Othello* written in 1693 in his *A Short View of Tragedy*, where he not only attacked Shakespeare for his inability to respect the three unities, but also for his lack of morality in the representation of passions and love. For Rymer, it is not only Othello’s love and jealousy, or Iago’s character and speeches that are improbable, but also Desdemona’s love and sympathy for Othello, for “a Moor” who “might marry some little drab, or small-coal wench”<sup>28</sup> and not a Venetian white lady.

Compelling in this respect are also some letters that appeared in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* between 1709 and 1712. While Steele, in *The Tatler*, underlines how the description of Hamlet’s contradictory feelings performed by Mr Betterton are “each of them circumstances which dwell strongly upon the Minds of the Audience and would certainly affect their behavior on any parallel Occasions in their Lives”,<sup>29</sup> Addison, in *The Spectator*, focuses on the ability of Shakespeare to entertain his spectators with characters and actions that are more important than the faithful respect for Aristotle’s three unities defended by French critics and praised by a neoclassical taste which at the time prevailed in England and abroad. Illuminating is not only the series of essays later entitled the *Pleasure of the Imagination*, in which Shakespeare is acclaimed as an English national genius for his inimitable ability to give voice to Ghosts, Fairies, Witches and “the like Imaginary Persons, that we cannot forbear thinking them natural, [...] if there are

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where Shakespeare’s genius and originality are seen as the product of his Britishness. Referring to Shakespeare’s knowledge of the Ancients, Dennis provocatively asks: “For nothing can be more wrong than to conclude from this that Shakespear was conversant with the Ancients; [...] For whether is it more honourable for this Island to have produc’d a Man who, without any Acquaintance with the Ancients, or any but a slander and superficial one, appears to be their Equal or their Superior by the Force of Genius and Nature, or to have bred one who, knowing the Ancients, falls infinitely short of them in Art, and consequently in nature itself”. John Dryden, *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, in *English Critical Essays, XVI–XVIII*, ed. by E. D. Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947), pp. 103–174, here p. 149; John Dennis, *On the Genius and Writing of Shakespeare*, in *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare*, ed. by D. N. Smith (Glasgow: J. Mac Le hose, 1903), pp. 24–46, here pp. 41f.

**28** Thomas Rymer, “A Short View of Tragedy. Its Original Excellency, and Corruption. With Some Reflections on Shakespeare, and other Practitioners for the Stage” [1663], in *Shakespeare. The Critical Heritage*, vol. II, 1693–1733, ed. by B. Vickers (London: Routledge, 1974), pp. 25–60, here p. 29.

**29** Richard Steele, *The Tatler: A New Edition*, vol. II, no. 71 (London: C. Stower Printer, 1808), pp. 238–244, here p. 242.

such Beings in the World, it looks highly probable they should talk and act as he has represented them”,<sup>30</sup> but also his article no. 592.

Drawing from the importance of the actors and actresses in interpreting a play-text, Addison openly accuses his neoclassical peers who blame Shakespeare for his irregularity and shows how Shakespeare’s ability to attract his spectators, captivating them in his characters’ feelings, emotions and worries, cannot be judged according to a set of empty rules. A system of models which pretends to reform the originality of the Shakespearean plays following principles which have no foundation in nature and are imposed by what he polemically defines in another article, no. 40, “a chimerical notion of poetical justice”<sup>31</sup>.

In article no. 592, Addison thus contends that he does not

indeed wonder that the Actors should be such professed Enemies to those among our nation who are commonly known by the name of criticks, since it is a rule amongst these gentlemen to fall upon a play, not because it is ill written but because it takes. Several of them lay it down as a maxim, that whatever Dramatick Performance has a long Run, must of necessity be good for nothing; as though the first precept in Poetry were not to please. [...] The words Unity, Action, Sentiment, and Diction pronounced with an air of authority give them a figure among unlearned readers, who are apt to believe they are very deep, because they are unintelligible<sup>32</sup>.

He concludes his analysis by showing proudly how “Our inimitable Shakespeare is a Stumbling-block to the whole Tribe of these rigid Criticks”,<sup>33</sup> to those detractors who pretended to condemn or amend Shakespeare’s characters moving from a false notion of “political justice”.

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**30** Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, vol. 3, ed. by Henry Morley (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1891), available at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/12030/12030-h/SV3/Spectator3.html#toc>, accessed 15 January 2020.

**31** These are the words that Addison uses with reference to *King Lear* whose end and plot had been changed by Nahum Tate in his adaptation of the play in order to fulfil the neoclassical taste. According to Addison *King Lear* is “an admirable Tragedy [...] as Shakespeare wrote it; but as it is reformed according to the chimerical Notion of poetical Justice, in my humble Opinion it has lost half its Beauty”. Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, vol. 1, ed. by Henry Morley (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1891), available at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/12030/12030-h/SV1/Spectator1.html>, accessed 15 January 2020.

**32** Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, vol. 3, ed. by Henry Morley (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1891), available at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/12030/12030-h/SV3/Spectator3.html#toc>, accessed 15 January 2020.

**33** Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, vol. 3, ed. by Henry Morley (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1891), available at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/12030/12030-h/SV3/Spectator3.html#toc>, accessed 15 January 2020.



It is clear that the performances of Shakespearean actors, and in particular actresses, helped to question the validity of neoclassical rules. In so doing they also participated in the creation of a new national taste, as the possessive “our” employed by Addison suggests. This emergent national taste legitimated its distinctiveness by promoting the ability of a writer, “our inimitable Shakespeare”, to affect his/her contemporary spectators and readers through the representation of emotions, feelings, passions and recognisable, thus familiar and even national, characteristics and traits. These new skills became increasingly more important than the capacity to comply with empty rules and roles, or to present situations and characters that were too distant in time and space to move and influence a contemporary English audience.

These are the polemics that, together with the description of English uses and manners, permeated those pages of the English journals that were made available in Germany through the translation of Luise Gottsched, who strongly believed that *The Spectator*, as Hilary Brown has demonstrated, had much to teach Germany’s youth.<sup>34</sup> In one letter sent to her friend Dorothea von Rünckel in 1755, years after her translation of *The Spectator*, Luise Gottsched confirmed her happiness and pride at having been informed that her friend’s daughter was reading her translation. She not only shows her enthusiasm, but encourages the young girl to further read the journal and even learn the English language, which might be useful for fruitful discussions and possible improvements in the art of translation:

Wie sehr freue ich mich, daß Ihre Tochter den Zuschauer liest. [...] Sagen Sie ihr: sie solle bald englisch lernen, damit sie ihrer Freundin, (denn diesen Platz hoffe ich auch bey Ihrer Tochter zu behaupten,) alle die im Uebersetzen von ihr begangenen Fehler zeigen könne. Wie zärtlich will ich diese für ihren Tadel umarmen<sup>35</sup>.

### 3

In the last decades it has been demonstrated how German women too were important agents of *Kulturtransfer* and intersections between Germany and other European countries in the eighteenth century. However, unlike in other European countries, as Brown argues, in Germany,

<sup>34</sup> Brown, *Luise Gottsched the Translator*, p. 96.

<sup>35</sup> *Briefe der Frau Luise Adelgunde Victorie Gottsched geborne Kulmus*. Erster Theil, Mit Churfürstl. Sächß. gnädigster Freyheit (Dresden, 1771). Gedruckt mit Harpeterischen Schriften.

As the century progressed, [...] translation remained more socially acceptable for women than other literary activities. Proficiency in modern languages came to be regarded as a suitable part of a feminine education. [...] Moreover, translation appears to demand primarily a mediatory function and allows the translator to distance herself from the risk or taboos of original authorship [...].<sup>36</sup>

It is within this context that Luise Gottsched played an important role as a channel for a valuable and unexpected *Kulturtransfer*. Her contribution to the rise of German literature, theatre, language, and criticism has been mainly considered with respect to her work as translator of the French theatre and criticism into the German language.<sup>37</sup> Of particular interest is her contribution to her husband's multi-volume collection *Die Deutsche Schaubühne*, a compendium of German plays which nonetheless included both originals and numerous works translated from the French. Apparently still unexplored, as Roger Paulin argues, is her role in the history of Shakespeare translation in Germany. In commenting on the role of women as translators of Shakespeare's plays in the Eighteenth century, he observes:

Es gibt in der Geschichte des Transfers des Shakespeareschen Textes zwei Frauengestalten, die zumindest heute relativ bekannte Dorothea Tieck und Luise Gottsched, die Gottschedin, wie sie sogar in modernen Literaturgeschichten noch genannt wird, als Schriftstellerin zwar anerkannt, weniger dagegen als Shakespeareerkennerin [...].<sup>38</sup>

Even more overlooked, I would also add, is the peculiar and unrecognized role of Luise Gottsched within the rise of the debates on Shakespeare that started in Germany in 1740 and that were initially promoted by her husband Johann Christoph and his tutee Johann Elias Schlegel, and that also saw pages from *The Spectator* drawn on polemically. Appointed by her husband, who declared in one of his letters that for this work he relied on his hard-working wife,<sup>39</sup> between 1739 and 1743 Luise translated the bulk of *The Spectator* and by 1749 had completed the translation of *The Guardian*. For the first time, these weeklies were translated directly into German, replacing the corrupt French editions that appeared in Amsterdam in 1714 and that, as Stellmacher reminds us, "bis 1749 sechs Auflagen [erlebte]".<sup>40</sup>

**36** Hilary Brown, *Benedikte Naubert (1756–1819) and Her Relations to English Culture* (Leeds: Maney Publishing, 2005), p. 24.

**37** Susanne Kord, *Little Detours. The Letters and Plays of Luise Gottsched (1713–1762)* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000).

**38** Roger Paulin, "Luise Gottsched und Dorothea Tieck: Vom Schicksal zweier Übersetzerinnen," *Shakespeare-Jahrbuch*, 134 (1998): 108–122, here 108.

**39** Kord, *Little Detours*, p. 5.

**40** Stellmacher, *Herders Shakespeare-Bild*, p. 7.

The importance of the translation of these journals and their significance as models for the development of German journals themselves, have been well documented. They were not only crucial for the development of the German language and modern prose style, but also for the circulation of the English taste, satire, and freethinking. It is well-known that already in 1721, the Swiss writers Bodmer and Breitinger dedicated their *Die Discourse der Mahlern*, one of the first journals written in German, to the illustrious spectator of the English nation, that is to say, as Peter Michelsen reminds us, “to Addison and Steele’s *Spectator*, and they assure the reader that they ‘seek no greater honour than the knowledge that we cannot take a more excellent original as the object of our imitation.’”<sup>41</sup>

Less well recognised today is the role of Luise Gottsched who, where she could, as Brown reminds us, “left a trace of herself by speaking out in favour of people exercising their critical faculties”.<sup>42</sup> In reality, Luise Gottsched’s work was at the time well-known and appreciated by other female writers and in particular by Sophie von La Roche, who wrote in her journal *Pomona für Teutchlands Töchter* (1783) that “Wir müssen dankbar erkennen, daß Addisons Aufseher durch eine teutsche Frau, Mad. Gottsched überstezt wurde, und daß wir dadurch das Model zu unsern Wochenschriften erhielten”.<sup>43</sup>

The translation of these journals and the quality itself of her translation – she tried to translate into German passages from Shakespeare’s plays keeping, where possible, the blank verse<sup>44</sup> – introduced that image of Shakespeare, which would constitute the point of departure for the initial debates on the necessity or otherwise of imitating Shakespeare’s theatre in a nation that, in that precise historical moment,<sup>45</sup> was eager for models and national symbols. In other words, examples

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41 Peter Michelsen, “English Literature as Reflected in German Literature of the Eighteenth Century,” *Man and Nature*, 9 (1990): 91–108, here 92.

42 Brown, *Luise Gottsched the Translator*, p. 102.

43 Sophie von la Roche, quoted in Brown, *Luise Gottsched the Translator*, p. 103.

44 She reproduced in blank verse speeches of some Shakespearean plays that were quoted in the *Spectator*. For example, Theseus’s speech from act iv of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. For an in-depth analysis see Roger Paulin, “Louise Gottsched und Dorothea Tieck: Vom Schicksal zweier Übersetzerinnen,” *Shakespeare-Jahrbuch*, 134 (1998): 108–122.

45 Emblematic are Lessing’s observations at the end of his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (1767–1769), where he overtly denounces the lack of a national German theatre: “Über den gutherzigen Einfall, den Deutschen ein Nationaltheater zu verschaffen, da wir Deutsche noch keine Nation sind! Ich rede nicht von der politischen Verfassung, sondern bloß von dem sittlichen Charakter. Fast sollte man sagen, dieser sei: keinen eigenen haben zu wollen. Wir sind noch immer die geschwornen Nachahmer alles Ausländischen”. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981), p. 509. For an in-depth analysis on this topic see Lenz Prütting, “Überlegungen zur normativen und faktischen Genese eines Nationaltheaters,” *Das Ende des*

which could be used to recover and outline the existence of a national past, language, and literature. Indeed, this translation is the point of origin of the early controversy between her husband and the young Johann Elias Schlegel, a *querelle* which gave the impetus to the further debates on Shakespeare's originality and on his capacity to affect a potential national audience and, in so doing, develop a feeling of national identity. Those observations that would be elaborated by G. E. Lessing in his "17. Brief", published in *Briefe, die neueste Litteratur betreffend*<sup>46</sup> in 1759, by H. W. von Gerstenberg, in his *Briefe über Merkwürdigkeiten der Litteratur* (1766–67), and in general by J. W. Goethe, G. Herder and the *Stürmer und Dränger*.<sup>47</sup> These writers and critics firmly believed and demonstrated that Shakespeare could constitute a viable model for the growth of a distinctively German theatre, literature, and new taste. They recognized that the construction of a robust sense of national consciousness might be largely achieved through the institution of a national theatre.

In this respect it is telling that in order to complete his attack on the first translation of *Julius Caesar*, which was instead exalted by Johann Elias Schlegel in his *Vergleichung Shakespeare und Andreas Gryphs bey Gelegenheit des Versuchs einer gebundenen Übersetzung von dem Tode des Julius Caesar, aus den Englischen Werken des Shakespear*, Johann Christoph Gottsched, who had so far praised the worthy pages of *The Spectator*, cannot believe that it was Addison, whom he so deeply admired, who could have not only praised the theatre of Shakespeare, but also defined Shakespeare, in his article no. 592, a "Stumbling-block to the whole Tribe of these rigid Criticks". The Stumbling-block to those contemporary critics with whom the neoclassical Gottsched clearly aligned himself. And from whom, instead, the young Johann Elias Schlegel wanted to distance himself, as clearly

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*Stegreifspiels – Die Geburt des Nationaltheaters*, ed. by Roger Bauer and Jürgen Wertheimer (München: Fink, 1983), pp. 153–164, here p. 157.

<sup>46</sup> Well-known is Lessing's opinion on Gottsched's attempt to develop a German national theatre that emerges from this letter when he declares that "Es wäre zu wünschen, daß sich Herr Gottsched niemals mit dem Theater vermengt hätte. Seine vermeinten Verbesserungen betreffen entweder entbehrliche Kleinigkeiten, oder sind wahre Verschlimmerungen, [...] er wollte nicht sowohl unser altes Theater verbessern, als der Schöpfer eines ganz neuen sein. Und was für eines neuen? Eines Französisierenden." Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, "Briefe, die neueste Literatur betreffend," *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. II (Munich: Hanser, 1959), pp. 52f.

<sup>47</sup> On this specific issue see *Shakespeare-Rezeption. Die Diskussion um Shakespeare in Deutschland*, vol. 1: *Ausgewählte Texte von 1741 bis 1788*, ed. by Hans-Jürgen Blinn (Berlin: Schmidt 1982); *Das Shakespeare-Bild in Europa zwischen Aufklärung und Romantik*, ed. by Roger Bauer, Jürgen Wertheimer and Michael de Graat (Bern: Peter Lang, 1988); Gilberta Golinelli, *La formazione del canone shakespeareano tra identità nazionale ed estetica (Inghilterra e Germania 1700-1770)* (Bologna: Pàtron, 2003).

emerges in his *Vergleichung Shakespeare und Andreas Gryphs*, ironically published in Gottsched’s *Beyträgen zur Critischen Historie der Deutschen Sprache, Poesie und Beredsamkeit* in 1741. In his comparison between Shakespeare and the German poet Gryphius, Schlegel exalts Shakespeare’s ability to know and faithfully depict human behaviours and characteristics, approving Addison’s interpretation of Shakespeare, his characters and the ability of his theatre to reflect English temperament and to produce that kind of pleasure that arises from viewing the imitation of human actions. According to him:

Das erste, das man bey einem Schauspiele zu beobachten hat, ist die Einrichtung desselben. Aber eben dieses pfleget bey den Engelländern insgemein das letzte zu seyn. Wenn ich nach demjenigen urtheilen soll, was ich in der Englischen Schaubühne gelesen habe: so sind ihre Schauspiele mehr Nachahmungen der Personen, als Nachahmungen einer gewissen Handlung. [...] Bey dem Shakespear aber scheint überall eine noch tiefere Kenntniß der Menchen hervorzuleuchten, als by Gryph<sup>48</sup>.

It is thus within this wider debate that the translation of *The Spectator* needs to be re-evaluated. In this connection, in Gottscheds *Anmerkungen über das 592. Stück des Zuschauers*, a number of *The Spectator* that his wife Luise<sup>49</sup> was at the time translating, his attack is no longer addressed to the translator of *Julius Caesar*. His strong disapproval is of Shakespeare himself and of those English critics who in applauding Shakespeare’s irregularities weakened his credibility and his plans. These critics could in fact undermine his attempts to develop a national theatre based on didacticism, classical rules and their remediations through French models and theatre. After declaring that it is impossible that this article has been written by Addison or even Steele, “Es scheint auch dasselbe gar nicht aus der Feder des größten Addison, oder des berühmten Steele geflossen zu seyn”,<sup>50</sup> Gottsched tries to discourage German readers not from reading *The Spectator*, but from reading Shakespeare and his now accessible *Julius Caesar*. He in fact argues that:

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**48** Johann Elias Schlegel, “Vergleichung Shakespeare und Andreas Gryphs bey Gelegenheit des Versuchs einer gebundenen Übersetzung von dem Tode des Julius Caesar, aus den Englischen Werken des Shakespear,” in *Beyträge zur Critischen Historie der Deutschen Sprache, Poesie und Beredsamkeit*, “Nachricht von neuen hieher gehörigen Sachen”, vol. 7 (Leipzig: Bey Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf, 1741), p. 550.

**49** It is important to underline that in 1735 Luise Gottsched had already translated into German Addison’s *Cato*.

**50** Johann Christoph Gottsched, *Beyträge zur Critischen Historie der Deutschen Sprache, Poesie und Beredsamkeit*, vol. 8 (Leipzig: Bey Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf, 1742), pp. 160.

Wer von Shakespeares Sachen nichts gelesen hat, der sollte fast denken: es müßte doch wohl recht was schönes sein, welches den Abgang aller Regeln so leichtlich ersetzen kann. Allein man irret sich sehr. Die Unordnung und Unwahrscheinlichkeit, welche aus dieser Hindansetzung [sic] der Regeln entspringen, die sind auch bey dem Shakespear so handgreiflich und ekelhaft, daß wohl niemand, der nur je etwas vermüftigers gelesen, daran ein Belieben tragen wird<sup>51</sup>.

And furthermore, to demonstrate that he perfectly knew Shakespeare's theatre and that his knowledge not only derived from the indirect interpretation of an English journal, which was mainly translated by his wife, he declares: "Sein *Julius Caesar*, der noch dazu von den meisten für sein bestes Stück gehalten wird, hat so viel niederträchtiges an sich, daß ihn kein Mensch ohne Eckel lesen kann"<sup>52</sup>.

It is evident then that the translation of *The Spectator*, a work that, as Luise Gottsched believed "viel Nutzen bringen kann",<sup>53</sup> turned out to be a dangerous boomerang. Indeed, what was presented to the emergent German readers was not simply the well-educated Mr. Spectator and his small band of associates who represented different sections of contemporary English society, but the originality of Shakespeare's theatre as well as its approval and convincing defence.

In fact, Luise Gottsched's new German translation of *The Spectator* succeeded in transferring the cultural, political, and even subversive meanings into another language. It faithfully reproduced the contents of Addison's *Spectator* and was able to maintain the persuasive defence of Shakespeare's "Unvergleichbarkeit" that clearly emerges from the subversive no. 592 of the English journal. Here Addison, as we have seen, reveals the failure of the whole tribe of rigid (neoclassical) critics who, in front of such a "Stumbling-block", can only acknowledge the failure of neoclassical criticism and thus admit their limits:

Ich wundere mich in der That gar nicht, daß unsere Comödianten solche offenbare Feinde derer Männer unter uns sind, die man unter dem Namen der Kunstrichter kennet, weil es eine Gewohnheit dieser Herren ist, über ein Stück loszuziehen; nicht darum, weil es schlecht geschrieben ist, sondern weil es gefällt. Viele von ihnen nehmen es als einen Grundsatz, daß ein Stück, welches lange im Schwange bleibt, nichts taugt, als ob die erste Regel in der Poesie, die Kunst zu misfallen wäre. [...] Die Wörter: Einheit, Vortrag, Ausdruck und Gedanken, die genen [sic] ihnen, wenn sie dieselben mit hohem Muthe aussprechen, ein gewisses Ansehen, den unwissenden Leuten, die geneigt sind, zu glauben, sie schieben sehr hoch, weil sie unverständig schreiben. [...]

51 Gottsched, *Beyträge zur Critischen Historie der Deutschen Sprache*, vol. 8, pp. 160f.

52 Gottsched, *Beyträgen zur Critischen Historie der Deutschen Sprache*, vol. 8, pp. 160f.

53 Brown, *Luise Gottsched the Translator*, p. 96.

Unser unvergleichliche Shakespear, its ein rechter Stein des Anstoßens für alle solche Tadler<sup>54</sup>.

In so doing the apparently less remarkable and risky translation by a woman contributed to stimulating the growth of the Shakespeare debate in eighteenth-century Germany and, thereby, to the rise of his cult and enduring fame and appropriation.

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**54** Joseph Addison, “Das 592. Stück,” in *Der Zuschauer. Aus dem Englischen übersetzt. Achter und Letzter Theil* (Leipzig: Bey Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf, 1743), pp. 157, 158, 159.