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Theory and Practice in English Studies. 2022, vol. 11, iss. 1, pp. 13-30

ISSN 1805-0859 (online)

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Access Date: 16. 02. 2024
Version: 20220831

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MUNI ARTS

Theory and Practice in English Studies
Volume 11, No. 1, 2022
E-ISSN: 1805-0859

"HOW HE MET THE SPECTATOR'S HEART AND HELD IT TIGHT": ON F. L. SCHRÖDER'S AND J. F. H. BROCKMANN'S *HAMLET* IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY GERMANY

Beatrice Berselli

Abstract

This article proposes an analysis of J. F. H. Brockmann's *Hamlet* performance based on F. L. Schröder's adaptation of 20th September 1776 in Hamburg, which is regarded as the beginning of Shakespeare's conquest of the German stage. After inserting Schröder's work within the Shakespeare-debate of eighteenth-century Germany between the advocates of the French-inspired *Regelpoetik* on the one hand and the adversaries of Germany's dependency on French culture on the other, its *mise en scène* is read on the backdrop of Schröder's 'revolutionary' conceptions of acting as inspired by the Italian actor Francesco Riccoboni. Secondly, and most importantly, the essay explores J. F. Brockmann's performance of Hamlet as conveyed by Schink's and Chodowiecki's literary and figurative attestations. In this regard, it offers a comparison between Schröder's and Brockmann's Hamlets facing the ghost, which proves crucial in order to understand the difference between two competing, but at the same time innovative, acting styles on the German stage of the time. This intertwining of eighteenth-century German literature, figurative arts and performance theories will lead to an as yet unattempted foray into Schröder's and Brockmann's interpretations of *Hamlet*, which from that moment on enjoyed constant appreciation throughout the centuries and led to Shakespeare's success all over Germany.

Keywords

Hamlet, William Shakespeare, Friedrich Ludwig Schröder, Johann Franz Hieronymus Brockmann, drama, adaptation, performance

* * *

He [Brockmann] could only say a few words to show his gratitude to the audience: tears prevented him from speaking. His performance was indeed as beautiful as touching. We all cried with him.
(Ruppert, quoted in Häublein 2015, 84)

SHAKESPEARE'S *Hamlet* is one of the most discussed and performed works in the Western literary canon. Its enigmatic plot, drawn from Saxo Grammaticus' chronicles, and above all its fascinating but at the same time elusive protagonist, caught in the intellectual dilemma between complex thinking and political action, are exactly what makes this play interesting and constantly open not only to new interpretations, but also adaptations. In particular, this study deals with the reception of *Hamlet* in the second half of the eighteenth-century Germany, when the play established itself on the German stage reaching the peak of its success. The first important event dates back to the year 1776, when the theatre manager and actor F. L. Schröder (1744–1816), inspired by the first remarkable translation of 22 Shakespearean plays by C. M. Wieland (trans. 1762–66) and by F. von Heufeld's first attempt of *Hamlet*-adaptation (1773) at the Habsburg Court Theatre in Prague, produced his own version of *Hamlet* in Hamburg[1] followed by its *mise-en-scéne* with the actor J. F. H. Brockmann (1745–1812) in the title-role. Both Schröder and Brockmann contributed to the birth of a veritable *Hamlet*-fever in Germany of the eighteenth century, coming at an important juncture in the development of a German national theatre.

Before getting into the main topic of the study, it is useful to provide readers with a brief introduction concerning the historical background of the early Shakespeare's reception in the German context of the time, which is crucial for understanding the reasons behind the success of Schröder's adaptation and Brockmann's performance as Hamlet. Until the middle of the eighteenth century, Shakespeare had been little more than a name in Germany, as the "old imperial race of Middle Europe knew basically only two sources of poetical art from abroad: the ancients introduced by our clergy and schools, and French authors introduced by our nobility" (Brandl, quoted in Macey 1971–72, 261). In this context, only unattributed versions survived in the early reception of Shakespeare in Germany (Paulin 2003, 4).

It is only with K. W. von Borcke's translation of *Julius Caesar* (1741) that a Shakespeare's text appeared under Shakespeare's name for the first time, this contributing to arouse an important, highly controversial discussion about the reception

[1] The reception and appreciation of English theatre were particularly intensive in Hamburg, a liberal and progressive city overlooking the North Sea, where both the commercial and social exchange with England was actively afforded: there, people could read more easily the reports of many German travelers coming back from England, thus following English theater life with greater interest than in the rest of Europe (cf. Häublein 2015, 72). Its theatre was the first major center for the spread of the Shakespearean dramaturgy.

of Shakespeare in Germany between two opposing tendencies in the eighteenth-century drama – the French-inspired *Regelpoetik* on the one hand and the English-inspired drama criticizing Germany's dependency on French culture on the other. The "imperious advocate of a restrained, rule-governed poetics J. C. Gottsched" (Theisen 2006, 505), strongly influenced by Voltaire's dominating French point of view, who in a letter to d' Argental referred to Shakespeare as a "histrion barbare" (Voltaire 1964, 204),[2] denounced the typical Shakespearean traits emerging from Borcke's translation in his treatise *Versuch einer critischen Dichtkunst* (1730). After alluding to the lack of order and consistency which resulted mainly from Shakespeare's violation of neo-classical rules, Gottsched blamed Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* for having "so much vile action that no one can read it without disgust" (Gottsched 1962, 613, translation mine[3]). J. E. Schlegel, too, criticized Shakespeare's frequent "bad language," referring to his witty plays and overstated metaphors as "shortcomings" indicative of the poor and popular taste characteristic of the Elizabethan age "that couldn't be excused as *nature*" (Schlegel 1887, 78). F. C. Nicolai in his *Briefe über den itzigen Zustand der schönen Wissenschaften in Deutschland* (1755) similarly attacked Shakespeare's disrespect of rules, lack of erudition and his tendency to mix the tragic, the comic and the lyrical in a context where themes and motifs were still bound to social hierarchies and ranks. At the same time, however, Nicolai is one of the first scholars who praised the Bard's "crafted powerful, many-sided characters that could serve as a model for the renewal of German theatre" (Nicolai 1894, 87).

In fact, on the other hand, Borcke's translation of *Julius Caesar* gave young German enthusiasts their first glimpse of a new poetic drama with the possibility of a revitalization of their national theatre, in this way contributing to a progressive disappearance of French playwrights from the German *Spielpläne* and to the incorporation of Shakespeare into the German tradition within half a century. By the middle of the eighteenth century, with the rise of the bourgeoisie and permanent theatres,[4]

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[2] Voltaire criticized Shakespeare, particularly his *Hamlet.* In his preface of *Semiramis* (1748), he argued that: "*Hamlet* is a gross and barbarous piece and would never be borne by the lowest rabble in France or Italy. Hamlet runs mad in the second act, and his mistress in the third; the prince kills the father of his mistress and fancies he is killing a rat; and the heroine of the play throws herself into the river. They dig her grave on the stage, and the grave-diggers, holding the dead men's skulls in their hands, talk nonsense worthy of them. Hamlet answers their abominable stuff by some whimsies not less disgusting . . . Hamlet, his mother, and father-in-law, drink together on the stage. They sing at table, quarrel, beat and kill one another. One would think the whole piece was the product of the imagination of a drunken savage" (Voltaire 2015, 15, translation mine).

[3] If not indicated otherwise, all translations from the non-English sources are done by the author of the article.

[4] From the 1760s theatres in Germany had become permanent and hosted the most disparate spectators: the parterre was reserved to lower class and bourgeoise, and the galleries to the aristocracy. This

modern society had become too complex for its theatrical representation: as "religious, political, intellectual and cultural upheavals were shifting focal points from aristocratic ruling courts to burgeoning commercial towns" (McCarthy 2013, 4), middle-class protagonists, with their everyday life concerns and ordinary situations, were gradually substituting the noble, larger-than-life, aristocratic heroes and fustian language of French court theatre. Therefore, Shakespeare started to be perceived as a modern poet, whose characters and plays offered the basis for a new kind of drama able to capture every situation and social stratum under the conditions of modern complexity and fragmentation. This "tendency" began with G. E. Lessing and culminated with the so-called *Sturm und Drang* movement. The vigor of Lessing's attacks on Voltaire and the French school removed most of the bias against the great English dramatist and paved the way for a more favorable reception of him. Lessing, for instance, criticized Gottsched's tendency to "frenchify" the German stage while ignoring the fact that German taste leaned more naturally in the direction of England.[5] His famous *17. Literaturbrief* (1759) opens with an open attack on French tradition, ranking Shakespeare's *Othello, King Lear* and *Hamlet* next to Sophocles's *Oedipus* in their power over our passions.[6] In particular, Lessing was fascinated by Shakespeare's ability to catch "the fleeting shadows of individual forms, to capture the language characteristic of the most diverse classes, ages or passions" (Theisen 2006, 508) and to portray characters who, as Harold Bloom put it, "imitated . . . *essential* human nature" (Bloom 1998, 3). J. W. Goethe, too, while writing his admiration of Shakespeare in his treatise *Zum Schäkespeares Tag* (1771), publicly denounced the French *Regelpoetik* as a "tiresome restraint for our imagination" (Goethe 1962, 212).[7] In other words, Shakespeare stood more and more "as the token figure for a liberal departure from normative poetics" (Theisen 2006, 505).

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of course raised the issue of the mediation between the different tastes of a composite public which German playwrights tried to resolve through a new, modern kind of repertoire in both content and form.

[5] "The Shakespearean theater, with its bend towards the great, the terrible and the melancholic had more affinity with and more effect on the German disposition than French classicist theatre" (Lessing 2010, 334).

[6] "After Sophocles's *Oedipus*, no play in the world can have more power over our passions than *Othello, King Lear* and *Hamlet* . . . And the *Zaire* of Voltaire, how far is it beneath the Moor of Venice (*Othello*) of which it is a weak copy and from whom the whole character of Orosman has been borrowed?" (Lessing 2014, 70)

[7] Shakespeare's influence is much evident in Goethe's drama *Götz* (1773), which, as he wrote in his *Dichtung und Wahrheit,* he completed in just six weeks without any plan, whereby he freed himself from the rule of dramatic unity beyond place or time to imitate the irregularity of Shakespearean drama (cf. Goethe 2007, 199). With a sequence of more than fifty scenes that showed the most varied hierarchies and social settings, *Götz*'s heroes, too, were consciously made to imitate great men of action in the Shakespearean manner. Like the Shakespearean tragedies, *Götz,* too, focused on dramatic scenarios of loyalty and deceit "and revolves around the 'secret hinge' that Goethe much appreciated in Shakespeare's drama, where the belief in freedom of will, so characteristic of the modern individual, collides with the necessary development of the larger historical whole" (Theisen 2006, 511).

In this renewed context, the performative style too, needed more simple, energetic, yet precise and realistic acting devoted to the *imitatio naturae* (cf. Fischer Lichte 1992, 51–70) to invigorate the audiences, far from the mechanical and rigid "adroit art of improvisation that had been employed in the performances of French tragedy" (Williams 1986, 301), detached from the character and the dramatic situation. To this aim, Shakespeare's plays were considered particularly suitable: the clever "economy" and immediacy of words in their dialogues, for instance, made it difficult for the actors to fall into long and extravagant sentences; their characters, whose inner emotional state was not explicitly expressed, contributed directly to the consolidation of an effective acting style devoted to nature, which exploited gestures, facial expressions and the language of the body to reflect colliding psychological processes.[8] All this is particularly evident in F. L. Schröder's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Though adapting Shakespeare in Germany was a great challenge in the eighteenth century, not simply because of the contrasting viewpoints among the critics, but also because his plays were generally considered "readable, though not playable" (Marx 2018, 82), no assessor of contemporary public taste was more accurate in this task than Schröder, "whose adaptations were skillfully enough designed to establish a compromise between contemporary taste and Shakespeare" (Williams 1986, 295). His first adaptation of *Hamlet* was staged in Hamburg on 20th September 1776 and was met with enthusiasm by the spectators. As the *Hamburger Adress-Comptoir-Nachrichten* reports,

> at the three successive performances of *Hamlet* in Hamburg the numerous audiences were so attentive, so transported, that it seemed as if there was only one person present, only one pair of eyes, only one pair of hands, because the stillness was so universal, the silence so numbed. There was wonder, weeping, and applause, which spoke for itself. (Weilen 1914, 37)

From that moment on, till the late nineteenth century, the play was performed with an uncommon regularity. Of course, its success depended on many factors, but it has to be traced primarily in the quality of the script thought for a successful performance – Schröder's repertoire, and particularly his adaptation of *Hamlet*, in fact, brought important innovations to the German theatre. Through Schröder's important contribution, actors were no more imitators of *dramatis personae*, but,

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[8] The success of the English actor, theatre manager and playwright David Garrick (1717–1779) was rooted not by chance in his striking, highly innovative performances of Shakespearean roles, which were known in Germany thanks to G. C. Lichtenberg's *Briefe aus London* (1775).

exactly like poets, creators of characters through the exercise of the individual imagination and a direct observation of reality, so that they turned to be real models of behavior for the public of the time.

In formulating his own ideas on acting, Schröder was strongly influenced by the theoretical ideals of the Italian actor Francesco Riccoboni (1707–1772), whose French treatise *L'Art du Theâtre* translated into German by Lessing,[9] he used as an artistic guide during his third directorship of the Hamburg Theatre. In his theatrical suggestions, Riccoboni demanded a "realistic" kind of spectacle[10] that had to go "two fingers over the natural" (Riccoboni, quoted in Birkner 2007, 22). He touched on what for German theorists and dramaturgs would become the pivot around which to build a new conception of the actor's work, which was far more complex than the memorization and mere declamation of the poetic verse. To grasp both the dramaturgical significance of their part and the specific dramatic situation they were immersed in, actors had to both study deeply their role and master their own physical means and emotions through precise psychological and anthropological competences.[11] In this view, they were characterized by what Riccoboni called *jeu mute* or "silent play," namely an active participation in the action through gestures even when they themselves did not speak.[12]

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[9] Cf. G. E. Lessing's *Der Schauspieler* (1754). The stance of François Riccoboni against the declamatory recitation contained in *L'Art du Théâtre* was probably the reason why Lessing chose to translate the treatise immediately into German.

[10] *Realism* might be a tricky word in eighteenth-century drama: it was not the kind of realism such as Hauptmann's or Strindberg's, but a release from conventional declamation, in trying to imitate nature. Denis Diderot's theories, too, might be useful to explain the right meaning of this term in the context of the eighteenth century. In his essay entitled *Paradoxe sur le comèdien* (1773), Diderot, probably inspired by Riccoboni, too, argued that in order to convey *realism* on stage and display the *illusion* of feeling, great actors must be guided by a form of *rational* intelligence, through which they had to show different emotions in the same situation, without perpetrating one or the other. Diderot developed such dramatic theory referring to Garrick's acting style, whose success in showing transitions of mind depended exactly on an in-depth study of how people reacted to different situations in real life. For this reason, his expression "could change in the course of five or six seconds from wild delight to temperate pleasure, from that to tranquility, from tranquility to surprise, from surprise to blank astonishment, from astonishment to sorrow, from that to terror, from terror to despair . . ." (cf. Diderot 1883, 38–43).

[11] These ideas probably came from the so-called *anthropological turn* of the eighteenth-century Germany that Alexander Košenina addresses in his study entitled *Anthropologie und Schauspielkunst,* in which he convincingly demonstrates that the shift from traditional and standardized conventions towards a new expressive and true-to-nature acting style was rooted in the advances in medicine, anthropology, physiognomy and experiential psychology of those years, which contributed to a greater interest in human nature and influenced the main idea that "one's psychic disposition had a direct impact on their physical condition and vice versa" (Košenina 1995, 9). This interconnection between body and soul became, of course, increasingly significant among eighteenth-century performers.

[12] Riccoboni followed the logic of the empiricist thought, which from the mid-eighteenth century under the impulse of English sensism, began to undermine the dominance of French rationalism, thus praising the activity of the senses as a means of experiencing reality.

The first scene of the fourth act of Schröder's *Hamlet* adaptation, whereby the protagonist offers a metatheatrical reflection upon theatre, demonstrates how the German playwright embraced Riccoboni's theories and put them into practice. It is the famous play-within-the-play, whose performance at court provides Hamlet with the piece of evidence he needs to prove his uncle's guilt. The aim of the *Mousetrap*, in fact, is to provoke uncontrolled emotions in the king and see if he is his father's murderer. For this reason, the prince in Schröder's adaptation, even more than in Shakespeare's play,[13] recommends the actors take on "even in the fiercest storm and whirlwind of a strong passion, a natural tone and accent, as they are spoken in everyday life and a certain moderation in controlling passions through gestures, so that the performance remains credible, noble and decent" (Schröder 1776, 68). These words are important as they are giving crucial suggestions to German actors on the innovative kind of "naturalistic" acting style Schröder was striving for,[14] whose aesthetics of representation related to the actor's ability to make the emotional life of a dramatic character so transparent that the spectator could read his thoughts and feelings merely from gestural and/or kinetic disposition (Riccoboni's *jeu mute*).[15] In Schröder's adaptation such "gestic subtext" is given by the presence of mutually coalescing codes, both linguistic and extralinguistic, expressed in semantics and syntax through deixis, "the referential axis which regulates speech-acts according to performativity, with a language that develops actions." Consequently, "characters get defined and characterized by what they say, mean or imply and even more by *how* they say it" (Serpieri 2013, 55). Schröder, for instance, improved the deictic power of his script introducing frequent exclamations like "da da liegt's!" (there, there it is!) as it will be shown later through Chodowiecki's engravings, this being a fundamental aspect

[13] "Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to / you, trippingly on the tongue: but if you mouth it / as many of your players do, I had as lief the / town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air / too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; / for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, / the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget / a temperance that may give it smoothness . . ." (Shakespeare 2016, 78).

[14] In spite of other performers that simply mastered their part without knowing the overall context of it, the actors of the *Hamburger Nationaltheater* under Schröder's artistic direction had to organize periodic meetings, during which they had to study intensively the repertoire and the roles to be performed. This included repeated rehearsals to exercise an appropriate tone and accent, discussions among Schröder and the actors about the tasks and the means to reach an effective style of acting, as well as a whole interpretative analysis of the adapted work (cf. Bellavia 2011, 6).

[15] In this regard, contemporary audience might have been familiar with what, in the eighteenth-century Europe, was called the *art of gesture*, "a bodily incarnation of the verbal into a living drama" (Bigliazzi 2013, 77), which used "vocabulary of basic gestures, each with an individual meaning known to all in advance and all performed in accordance with given techniques and precepts of style" (Kofler 2013, 192): depictive (*malende*) gestures were mainly indicative or imitative; expressive (*ausdrückende*) were symptomatic of the internal passions of the characters.

to suggest to the actors a perfect symmetry and simultaneity of word and gesture. It is no coincidence that Gerhard Müller-Schwefe defined Schröder's adaptation as,

> *Theatrical score* (*theatralische Partitur*), whose lasting effect is based not on the word or content but on the impression induced by the text, which affects the spectators through facial expressions, gestures, movements and other acoustic and visual devices. Schröder conceived his adaptation exactly like this, thus focusing particularly on the non-verbal means of expressions. (Schwefe, quoted in Häublein 2015, 67)

If Schröder's adaptation established a compromise between the audience's taste and Shakespeare and provided the actors with a valid basis to exercise a new, effective style of acting, the actor J. F. H. Brockmann was probably of greater importance, as he was both the actual medium through which the German audience was brought closer to Shakespeare's beauties and also the first who at least tried to embody the kind of acting as demanded by his director. His performance of Hamlet was an overwhelming success of historic importance: thanks to his interpretation, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* became the new myth of German literature. As a guest in Berlin in 1777–78, too, Brockmann's performances of the role "earned him ovations unprecedented in the history of the German theatre" (Williams, 303), so that Moses Mendelssohn spoke of a proper *Hamlet-hysteria*.[16]

Brockmann, with his highly illusionary, enchanting and compelling way of recitation, and his protean skills in portraying different and at times opposing feelings and attitudes, was the perfect example of the *ansprechende Gestalt* (appealing figure) first theorized by Riccoboni and much appreciated by Schröder. His capacity to embody and convey mixed and contrasting emotions by means of facial expressions made him a master of all the softer features and transitions of humanity. The most important and detailed description of Brockmann's Berlin performance confirming this is given by Friedrich Schink in his seventy-page descriptive study *Ueber Brockmanns Hamlet* (1778):

> I think Brockmann's Hamlet is a true work of genius . . . in the first scene he walks slowly and trembling, with the most eloquent expression of pain, his eyes downcast, his arms crossed, a true ideal image for a painter who

[16] "Once I came back from Hannover, everyone was so enthusiastic about Brockmann's vivid performance of *Hamlet*, that even in all kitchens and servants' rooms nothing else was spoken of. The playhouse was so crowded, that it was very hard to find a place: it was a proper *Hamlet-hysteria*" (Mendelssohn, quoted in Weilen 1914, 63).

> wants to sketch pain! While the King speaks, he remains silent, yet his silence is more eloquent than a profusion of words. He sighs deeply from his chest, his eyes burst into tears and his knees tremble. Meanwhile, in the midst of these signs of sadness, we notice clearly enough the struggle of the strongest passion. (Schink, quoted in Weilen 1914, 42–43)

Schink goes on by commenting on Hamlet's encounter with his friends Gustav, Bernfield and Ellrich in the tenth scene of the first act of Schröder's adaptation, in which Brockmann foregrounds an extreme fluctuation of passions and feelings. First comes melancholy, then disgust and finally pain. "Particularly," Schink continues,

> what makes Brockmann a great actor is the extraordinary eloquence of his face, i.e., his mimicry. His eyes, wet by tears, are kept downcast and a dark veil of bad thoughts covers his forehead. His friends join the scene, Hamlet recognizes them, he wipes his eyes and stifles his tears. A cheerful smile crosses his cheeks and eyes, but it is only the smile of a dawning day . . . Here you can see the *Virtuoso* and the master in his art. He playfully jumps from one passion to another and masters every kind of expression. His nuances are fine and worthy of such a great artist (Schink, quoted in Weilen 1914, 43).

Not only did Brockmann's Berlin production win the German audience's and scholars' favor beyond expectation, but it was also documented by Daniel Chodowiecki, painter, etcher and later director of the Berlin Academy of Art. His twelve *Hamlet* engravings were published in the *Berliner Genealogischen Taschenkalender* of 1779 (Kofler 2013, 188) and help to understand better how Schröder's adaptation of *Hamlet* was performed.

On the sixth of the twelve engravings (see Figure 1), Brockmann/Hamlet appears "absorbed by the most serious reflections about to be or not to be" (Birkner 2007, 24). There is no single detail seeming artificial in this scene. Here, Brockmann's mimicry breaks with the French artificial acting style of the time and goes hand in hand with Riccoboni's innovative art of gesture in displaying Hamlet's personality. Looking at the image, Hamlet's words „Schlafen? Vielleicht auch träumen. Da, da liegt's!" (To sleep? Perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub!)[17] are emphasized by an outstretched finger, through which Brockmann highlights Hamlet's feeling of "visualizing" his "dreams" in front of him.

[17] Significant is Schröder's elimination of the Shakespearean "rub" in Act III, Scene II (Shakespeare 2016, 64), through which he underlines more the resoluteness and determination of his Hamlet, rather than his reflective nature.

Figure 1: "J. H. Brockmann and D. Ackermann in Act III, Scene 9 of Hamlet" (1778) by Daniel Chodowiecki, engraving on paper © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence

In the ghost scene[18] (see Figure 2), Hamlet's cue „Seht ihr den nichts hier? Da da liegt's!" (Don't you see anything here? There it is!), the phrase "da da liegt's" comes once again, and reflects Schröder's stage direction: "Er zeigt mit dem Finger auf dem Geist" (He points with his finger at the ghost) (Schröder, quoted in Kofler 2013, 188). As Schink duly reports commenting on this scene, "the right foot and the body bending forward, the head position, everything is appropriate to the situation . . . and excellent. The queen is led to believe that he wants to go after the ghost of his father" (Schink, quoted in Weilen 1914, 45). By stepping forward and outstretching both his arms and forefingers, Brockmann emphasizes Hamlet's psychological turmoil in front of his father's ghost. At the same time, he effectively represents the deictic power of the script through the intertwining of gestural and verbal signs: he moves his finger in front of him as if he had found externally with his eyes what he felt inwardly with his keen perception, thus showing his desire "to make its unsensual ideas to sensual ones, imitate them and put it on stage as soon as they become more vivid and visible through bodily changes. This instinct is flawless everywhere" (Engel 1812, 90).

There is yet another illustration that deserves particular attention (see Figure 3). In this scene, located at the end of Act III, Hamlet leaves Ophelia with the words: "In ein Nonnenkloster geh" (Get thee to a nunnery), standing very close to Ophelia, almost leaning on her. He moves towards her, with his waving coat and steps indicating

[18] This scene was particularly praised by Lessing in his twelfth piece of his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (1767), whereby he compared the "ridiculous" ghost of Ninus in Voltaire's *Semiramis* with the ghost of Hamlet's father: "I notice a difference between the ghosts of the English and French poets. Voltaire's specter is nothing but a poetic machine, there only for the sake of the knot; it does not interest us in the least for itself. Shakespeare's ghost, on the other hand, is a real acting person whose fate we share; it arouses shudders, but also pity. This difference arose, no doubt, from the different ways in which both poets thought of ghosts in general. Voltaire regards the appearance of a deceased as a miracle; Shakespeare as a completely natural occurrence" (Lessing 2010, 84).

Figure 2: "J. H. Brockmann, D. Ackermann and F. L. Schröder in Act IV, Scene 11 of Hamlet" (1778) by Daniel Chodowiecki, engraving on paper © Museum Associates/LACMA

great haste and restlessness, as well as a visible excitement emerging from his expression. In looking at Ophelia with empathy, "Brockmann uttered the words 'Geh in ein Nonnenkloster' in a tone of gentle seriousness and persuasion; there is no better advice for you, Ophelia, than: 'Geh in ein Nonnenkloster'" (Schink, quoted in Birkner 2007, 26).

The comparison between Chodowiecki's and Johann Esaias Nison's illustrations of this scene might be helpful to understand better Brockmann's great impact on this scene. Nilson portrayed an Augsburg performance (1777) of the actor Andreas Schopf (1743–1813) performing Schröder's *Hamlet* (See Figure 4). While Brockmann's expressive movements, gestures and mimicry are symptomatic of an innovative acting style, Schopf's performance conforms to the tradition. His right hand performs a *port de bras*, which Voelcker defines as a "bare standardized and unspontaneous gesture" that had been harshly criticized by Lessing as well: "the *port de bras* consisted merely of an apparently involuntary raising of the arm and hand, which aimed at showing something through a beautiful, but distracting gesture, without thereby helping to illustrate the meaning or the sense of the speech" (Lessing, quoted in Voelcker 1916, 143).

In 1778, year and a half after the premiere of *Hamlet* in Hamburg and just week after the famed and described Berlin guest performances, Brockmann left Schröder and his company to join the Viennese *Burgtheater.* At this point, Schröder, who had so far played the ghost and the first gravedigger, decided to take on the title-role himself. When he did, he adapted *Hamlet* again, this time being more faithful to the English original, in that he incorporated direct borrowings from a new and vastly superior prose translation of Wieland's *Hamlet* by J. J. Eschenburg. Published between 1775 and 1777, Eschenburg's translation supplied a rich critical apparatus based on current English scholarship that increased theoretical interests in aesthetic and poetological questions on Shakespeare. This led Schröder to a more precise and faithful reading of the Bard and his plays. Schröder published his final version in 1778 in a collection

of plays entitled *Hamburgisches Theater*. By the way of translation, this *new* Hamlet sported even more the qualities of a man who is able to master his own fate.

Figure 3: "J. H. Brockmann and D. Ackermann in Act III, Scene 9 of Hamlet" (1778) by Daniel Chodowiecki, engraving on paper © Museum Associates/LACMA

Figure 4: "Andreas Schopf and Theresia Schimann in Act III, Scene 9 of Hamlet" (1777), by Johann Esaias Nilson, engraving on paper. Source: Theaterwissenschaftliche Sammlung, University of Cologne

At this point, it will be useful to draw a comparison between two competing but equally innovative acting styles, one more inclined to indulge the audience's taste (Brockmann), the other being more "faithful" to the naturalness of the Shakespearean text (Schröder). It was largely up to the actor to what degree s/he studied the play's author, the assigned role and how s/he worked out the details of its characterization.[19] This explains why Brockmann at times did not play Hamlet in the full sense of Schröder. Mendelssohn, for instance, had already doubted whether Brockmann had accurately studied the manifold variations of the moods in which the Bard let

[19] See note 14.

his Hamlet fall (cf. Mendelssohn 1972, 107–09). In fact, as an anonymous reviewer identified as Schink observes,

> Brockmann, at times, misinterpreted Hamlet, perhaps enraptured by the vivacity of his spirit and constantly stimulated by the desire to amaze and captivate an entire audience; Schröder, on the other hand, neither blinded by judgments, prejudices or authorities, nor particularly interested in the audience's positive feedback, could convey the very character of Hamlet, because he fathomed it through his great perspicacity. Brockmann played most of the monologues merely with a mournful, elegiac, and melancholic tone, whereas Schröder could stage the different affects struggling in his heart through many variations in his tone. (Schink, quoted in Weilen 1914, 53)

On the one hand Brockmann was conceived as the *erste Virtuose* who, like all the *virtuosi,* did not prioritize a particular closeness to the script and its spirit, but rather an effective staging of himself as *grand'attore* to gain the audience favor; he was "completely focused on entertaining and astounding an entire audience, the realism of his performance was limited by a slight artificial kind of acting devoted to *Schönheit*" (Schink, quoted in Weilen 1914, 44). Although Brockmann, stimulated by Schröder, introduced Riccoboni's innovative acting style and his theories on *eloquentia corporis* on the German stage for the first time, he tended, like many of his contemporaries, to use the role to show his *bravura,* thus being too much the *Hanswurst* or court jester typical of the German popular theatre and extempore performances of the 1730s and 1740s, which in the 1770s were already seen as a late baroque mannerism. "Excelling at moments requiring a lightly ironic attitude towards the world, mingled with servility and self-pity" (Williams 1986, 306), Brockmann's Hamlet could not emphasize sentiments like anger, disgust, terror and irritation at the same time, but fell sometimes into a constant, plaintive, moaning tone even in passages where bitterness should have been in the foreground. All this strongly emerged in the fourth scene of the third act, whereby Brockmann was criticized by Schink because of his way of performing his first meeting with the ghost:

> The ghost appears, Mr. Brockmann crosses himself, throws down his hat, stands with trembling knees, breaths heavily and jumps *forward* – and while the ghost approaches him, he addresses him in a broken voice. Beautiful! Excellent! But allow me the following objection! The appearance of a ghost, the appearance of my father's ghost . . . cannot but raise the highest degree of horror and surprise. Now I ask everybody if horror and surprise bend the body forward or backward? The latter I think. So, if I played Hamlet, I would follow Mr. Brockmann's nice and natural idea of crossing himself

> and throwing down his hat but bend my body *backward* . . . If I take this scene as reality . . . I feel my whole body wincing in horror, my limbs freezing, my eyes popping out, my breath shortening, my knees trembling, my voice ceasing . . . But if an actor is not able to feel such a situation, if this horror is not real but only imitated, I can only see the actor, not the man; I can only see Brockmann, not Hamlet. (Schink, quoted in and translated by Kofler 2013, 189)

If Schink praised Brockmann's gestures of crossing himself and throwing down his hat when facing the ghost, he also criticized his lack of consistency and psychological truth in this scene, as well as his incapability of communicating his fright by bending forwards (see Figure 2): here, Brockmann perpetuated the same feeling, playing the entire scene in a constantly trembling tone without paying attention to other facets of emotion, such as deep, heartfelt pity for the unfortunate ghost and overflowing bloody desire of revenge on the murderer. In this way, Brockmann could not convey a complete realistic illusion.[20]

Schröder, who in the meantime adapted *Hamlet* for the third time and therefore could deepen his studies on Shakespeare, represented the protagonist more as an embittered and cynical outsider than a sorrowing young man and in that, according to Schink, more realistically and more closely to Shakespeare's Hamlet. "[Schröder] neither overtly displayed his actorial talents, nor asked for audience approval: he was never out of his role, this was transformed entirely in his mind, as food changes into blood" (Williams 1986, 307). Schröder paid more attention than his colleague to reproducing the exact emotional substance and the spirit of the original text, so that his Hamlet dominated the scene as "a resolute avenger, a worthy son of his warrior father, imbued with an unwavering resolve to efface the affront to his parents' memory" (Checkley 1959, 414). Unlike Brockmann, Schröder did not perform Hamlet's encounter with the ghost as a confrontation with isolated gestures, but rather developed his reactions from a complete identification with the character's situation, thus proving himself even more skilled than his colleague Brockmann in showing transitions and mixed states of mind. His Hamlet, for instance, responded to the ghost as Schink thought he should:

> Astonished, Schröder/Hamlet staggered back, panting and trembling in every limb, his hat fell. His body was still bending backwards: he remained in that position for a few seconds, then gradually bent forward again, listened to the ghost and answered his words with a firm tone. By uttering the words "Wofür sollte

[20] Diderot's theories explain better the reason why Brockmann could not convey a complete realistic illusion. See note 10.

> ich mich fürchten?" (What should I be afraid of?), I noticed an extraordinary determination in his expression. In the middle of the playhouse, Hamlet was completely caught by his thoughts with a veil of shudder, as he demonstrates through his gestures. However, in the conversation with his father's spirit, there was no trace of trepidation or fear. Hamlet stood in front of him with firm courage, full of desire for discovering things that he had already partly suspected. Throughout the scene, the spectators could see alternately pity and extreme pain working in his heart. The following monologue is one of his most striking: for a while, he stares speechlessly at the ghost that has disappeared. Finally, he bursts into tears and repeats in a solemn and melancholic tone his father's last words. (Schink, quoted in Weilen 1914, 53–54)

Through his play, Schröder turned Brockmann's monotony in this scene into a rich alternation of moods: the seemingly uncontrollable, paralyzing effects of fear, which, however, are mastered by Hamlet's resoluteness in order to focus on what the ghost was saying, are expressed by Schröder at a point where it is almost impossible to distinguish between the reaction of the character and the one of the actor. Particularly, the dropping of his hat becomes the emblem of his bodily shock at the appearance of his father's spirit. His numbness to it, his turmoil which can be felt to the point of physical paralysis, reflects precisely an interaction between the powerful forces of the soul and its external expression. This scene led Schröder's Hamlet through pity to determination, "to a renewed anger that, in the monologue following, transformed itself into a violent disgust at the world in which he found himself" (Williams 1986, 306), these being feelings and expressions which characterized also Shakespeare's Hamlet and Garrick's performance. In fact, with his playing, Schröder redeemed what also Lessing had in mind when he read the passage in Shakespeare.[21]

Nevertheless, even if Schröder's performance emphasized the rigorous and cynical side of Hamlet more than his predecessor and was, according to the experts' statements completely devoted to Shakespeare's characterization and text, contemporaries still preferred Brockmann's Hamlet, whose performance not only came first and got it accepted to the general public, but was also considered an absolute novelty, especially outside Hamburg. Moreover, unlike critics like Schink, most of the audience was unfamiliar with the original Shakespearean text and was probably more sensitive to emotionally charged performances than the ones matching the ideal Shakespeare had designed:

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[21] "All our observations concentrate on Hamlet and the more signs of a mind shattered by shudders and terror we discover in him, the more willing we are to take this ghost that is causing this turmoil in him to be what he considers it to be. The ghost reaches an effect on us, more through him than through himself. The impression that the ghost has on him is transmitted to us" (Lessing 2010, 230).

> Spectators did not care much about Hamlet's reaction when facing the ghost. They appreciated more striking performances and harmonious poses. Therefore, actors took inspiration more from Brockmann and his kind of acting devoted to the *Schönheit-Prinzip* than from Schröder and his *Wahrhaftigkeitsprinzip*. The last, however, demonstrated through his Hamlet a more precise and deeper knowledge of Shakespeare. (Häublein 2015, 86)

Despite his initial harsh criticism, Schink acknowledged Brockmann's role in bringing both Hamlet and Shakespeare closer to the German public: "on the one hand he caricatured Hamlet for sure, but on the other he could guarantee his eternal triumph among the audience: the most important success for an actor lies in meeting the spectators' heart and holding it tight" (Schink, quoted in Häublein 2015, 91). As an anthropologist and psychological expert, Brockmann provided the theatre with a real case study for interpreting human mechanisms of the psyche primarily through gestures, thus mastering most of the time "a perfect harmony between facial expressions, voice (*vox*) and bodily movements (*motus*) to provoke the most extraordinary illusion among the audience" (Heeg 2000, 153). Having in mind Riccoboni's ability to convey a psychologically realistic portrayal through his *jeu mute* and Schröder's innovative theatrical practices, Brockmann too demonstrated his talent with the naturalness of his movements and emotional subtlety. The descriptions and illustrations of his bodily postures and voice modulation, indicating certain feelings and psychic processes, paid homage to a new, revolutionary acting technique based on the observations of physiognomy and the imitation of emotions, which increased the features of Hamlet´s personality and let the German spectator identify with the very nature of his character.

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