From Goethe to Gundolf

Essays on German Literature and Culture
12. The ‘Schillerfeier’ of 1859 and the ‘Shakespearefest’ of 1864

With Some Remarks on Theodor Fontane’s Contributions

Occasional poetry has a double focus. It may involve the immediate (or seemingly immediate) reaction to events (victories, celebrations). It may stand back from those events, in reflection or reconsideration of the implications of adventitious happening, and try to wrap mere contingency in some explanatory religious or ethical or philosophical envelope. The event may, on the other hand, bring to the surface untried forms and formulations, now ‘occasioned’. The centenary of Friedrich Schiller’s birth in 1859 was, like our millennium, an event plotted and prepared for, and it reflected that directional quality. It was also an occasion that touched off spontaneous reactions. The story of Schiller as a subject in German poetry does not of course start in 1859, nor does it end there. Conrad Ferdinand Meyer’s later poem and anthology piece ‘Schillers Bestattung/Schiller’s Burial’ (1882) can afford to be sparse and economical in detail because it comes towards the end of a biographical (hagiographical) and historicizing century that had both documented Schiller and rhetoricized his achievement. It sets aside the merely

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1 An earlier version of this chapter was published with the same title in History and Literature. Essays in Honor of Karl S. Guthke, ed. by William Collins Donahue and Scott Denham (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2000), 351–65.
circumstantial and gives us the punchline, ‘Der Menschheit Genius war’s’.\(^4\) Like Karl Gutzkow’s earlier remark on the same subject — ‘Es war der Genius des deutschen Volks’\(^5\) — it ends the anecdotal speculation begun, say, by Gustav Schwab’s biography of 1840, and now states a myth. At the other end of the scale, Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s poem ‘Epilog zu Schillers “Glocke”/Epilogue to Schiller’s “Bell”’ of 1805 is also an occasional poem (his attempt at a more elaborate apotheosis of Schiller in 1805 collapsed).\(^6\) Unlike the Romantics, who saw the vacant throne left by Schiller rather than his actual achievement, Goethe used his authority to foreclose such counterclaims and to reinstate Schiller in the national canon where he felt him to belong:

\begin{verbatim}
Denn er war unser! Mag das stolze Wort
Den lautem Schmerz gewaltig übertönen!
Er mochte sich bei uns im sichern Port,
Nach wildem Sturm, zum Daurenden gewöhnen.
Indessen schritt sein Geist gewaltig fort
Ins Ewige des Wahren, Guten, Schönen,
Und hinter ihm, in wesenlosem Scheine,
Lag, was uns alle bändigt, das Gemeine.\(^7\)
\end{verbatim}

Those words, ‘Denn er war unser!’ might be a stumbling-block to some in 1805, but in 1859 few would dare to contradict their self-evident validity. The irony was that, at face value, they were equally applicable


\(^5\) ‘It was the genius of the German people’. Karl Gutzkow, Vom Baum der Erkenntnis, Werke, ed. by Reinhold Gensel, 12 vols (Berlin, Leipzig, Vienna, Stuttgart: Bong, n.d. [1910]), XII, 119, also 282f.


\(^7\) ‘For he was ours! And may the mighty word
Sound louder than our cries of pain!
He felt at ease with us in our safe port,
The storm now past, to settle was his gain.
His spirit now in giant strides set forth
Towards eternal truth and goodness, beauty’s fame,
Behind him lay, reduced to dimmest light,
What binds us all, the base and common plight’. Schiller, I, 484.
to Shakespeare in 1864, indeed after Franz Dingelstedt’s proprietary statement of 1858, ‘Unser Shakspeare’, the present tense would seem more appropriate.

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This is, rightly speaking, a large subject, and one whose wider implications I do not wish to explore. The commemoration of Schiller’s hundredth birthday in 1859, however strong it might have been on ideology, hardly produced much poetry of the quality of Goethe’s in 1805. The event proper commands more attention. It has national, nation-wide and international significance — celebrated in 440 German and fifty foreign towns — ‘zu Melbourne in Australien wie zu Valparaiso am Stillen Ozean’ in Jacob Burckhardt’s embracing phrase — and as such it has been documented in almost exhaustive detail. Quite the same cannot be said of the Shakespeare festivities in Germany in 1864. On a much more modest scale and with another emphasis, it too is an important event for German ‘Bildungsbürgertum’ (educated middle class). Whereas the national occasion could command names to conjure with — Jacob Grimm, Paul Heyse, Ferdinand Freiligrath, Friedrich Theodor Vischer, the young and still unknown Wilhelm Raabe, and just across the border Jacob Burckhardt and Gottfried Keller, to mention but a few — the international happening was by its very nature more restricted. There were a few who lent their voices to both events, notable Shakespearean scholars or translators featuring prominently in 1859: Hermann Marggraff, Friedrich von Bodenstedt, Franz Dingelstedt, Rudolph Genée (and in exile, Freiligrath and Georg Herwegh). Karl Gutzkow, forgetting his earlier animus against Schiller, is represented at

8 Franz Dingelstedt, Studien und Copien nach Shakspeare (Pesth: Hartleben, 1858), 5.
9 An indication of the extent of the celebrations may be gained from two contemporary publications: Adolph Büchting, Verzeichniss der zur hundertjährigen Geburtsfeier Friedrich von Schiller’s erschiienenen Bücher, Kunstblätter, Kunstwerke, Musikalien, Denkmünzen etc. [...] (Nordhausen: Büchting, 1860) and Karl Tropus, Schiller-Denkmal, 2 vols (Berlin: Riegel, 1860) (henceforth cited as Schiller-Denkmal). In addition, the names are listed in Karl Goedeke, Grundriß zur Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung, continued by Edmund Goetze et al., 10 vols (Dresden: Ehlermann, 1893), V, i, 128–32.
both events.\textsuperscript{11} Friedrich Hebbel, ambivalent as ever on the subject of the relative merits of the two great poets, restricted his views on Schiller to a smaller circle, having refused Dingelstede’s suggestion that he might complete Schiller’s unfinished \textit{Demetrius}.\textsuperscript{12} In 1864, he was already dead. Otto Ludwig, his trenchant distinction between Shakespeare and Schiller not yet available to the reading public, took no part. Franz Grillparzer’s scepticism towards the event kept him from delivering the speech he had written.\textsuperscript{13} Both occasions produced institutions, the ‘Schillerstiftung’, and the ‘Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft’, respectively, and it is fair to say that the ‘official’ and ‘institutional’ set the tone for both 1859 and 1864. Then there was Theodor Fontane, addressing the ‘Tunnel’ society in 1859 with the poem ‘Zum Schillerfest des “Tunnel”’/For the “Tunnel”’s Schiller Festival’ and in 1864 delivering the extended speech known as ‘Zum Shakespeare-Fest’. In the scheme of things in both years, and among the many names of the great and the good, Fontane’s could as yet mean little to most of his contemporaries. 1859 was not another stepping-stone to higher preferment and enhanced reputation, as it was, say, for his old associate Heyse.\textsuperscript{14}

Inside Fontane studies, it is not a subject that has commanded much interest. This need not matter unduly, for surely his later theatrical criticism is the major area in his oeuvre where Schiller and Shakespeare meet. That critical corpus serves a double function. The following remark from 1873 is not untypical: ‘Meine Empfindung verwirft Uriel Acosta und ist umgekehrt nicht nur durch alles Shakespearsche hingerissen, sondern sogar auch durch die Räuber’.\textsuperscript{15} Schiller and Shakespeare serve to remind his readers that there is a canon superior to contemporaries like Paul Lindau, Rudolf Gottschall, Ernst von Wildenbruch (or — the example cited — Karl Gutzkow). At the same time, however, Fontane is


\textsuperscript{13} Schiller, I, 428f., 583f.

\textsuperscript{14} Heyse’s contributions can be found in Paul Heyse, \textit{Lyrische Dichtungen}, 4 vols (Stuttgart and Berlin: Cotta, 1911), II, 319–25.

\textsuperscript{15} ‘My feeling rejects Uriel Acosta [a play by Gutzkow], but by the same token is not just enraptured by all of Shakespeare, but also by the Robbers’. Theodor Fontane, \textit{Werke, Schriften und Brieve}, ed. by Walter Keitel and Helmuth Nürnberger, 20 vols (Munich: Hanser, 1964–84). Henceforth cited as \textit{SW}, followed by section, volume and page number; here IV (\textit{Brieve}), i, 431f.
making important distinctions and registering preferences, inside both Schiller’s and Shakespeare’s oeuvre as they appear in Berlin productions. My concern here is not to open up a far-ranging discussion of Fontane’s attitudes to Schiller and Shakespeare — ‘ein zu weites Feld’ — but to set him in a more general context where he also has his place.

Before turning specifically to Fontane, it may do to sketch in a little of the background to the two events in which he shared. Neither occasion — if we except the unforeseen and unforeseeable political development of the Schleswig-Holstein crisis in 1864 — seemed to do little more than confirm tendencies and developments already culminant. Who needed the fortuitous cycle of birthdates to remind one of reputations already securely and firmly established? Certainly the animadversions expressed about Shakespeare in 1864 had been common currency for the best part of half a century and hardly needed the rhetorical reiterations and insistences of German professors and ‘Oberlehrer’. No one was in doubt as to Shakespeare’s supernal and universal genius: history’s arsenal of commensurate names would include Homer, or Michelangelo, Columbus or Raphael. There was general agreement, too, on the Germanic brotherhood that embraced Shakespeare, with the added piquancy that the German part of that confraternity had turned the tables on the English and was now, by general admission, taking the lead in Shakespearean appreciation and scholarship. Direct comparisons between Shakespeare and Schiller (or Goethe) on the other hand, were a problem (only really solved by Friedrich Gundolf’s ideologically charged Shakespeare und der deutsche Geist/Shakespeare and the German Spirit of 1911). They were best avoided.

One could distinguish the national (Schiller) from the universal (Shakespeare), and accord to each its validity. Or one could invoke the powerful ideological mythologies and self-assured teleological reductionisms that associated the renewal of German literature proper with the ‘Geistesheld’ Lessing, the true forerunner of Weimar greatness, and his crucial sponsoring of Shakespeare against the French. This did

17 Friedrich Gundolf, Shakespeare und der deutsche Geist (Berlin: Bondi, 1911).
not involve reading the small print of Lessing’s seventeenth *Literaturbrief* of 1759, an approach not seemly to the broad-brush technique of nineteenth-century German literary historiography.¹⁸

These positions were not without their differentiations, paradoxes, and inconsistencies. There was what appeared like a tacit agreement between the older Romantics, August Wilhelm Schlegel and Ludwig Tieck, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, to raise Shakespeare above any indigenous dramatic production, notably Schiller’s. Instead, the aim was to make Shakespeare the exemplar of principles, features and ideas that knew no national or temporal constraints. In reality however, useful though it may be to compare the older Romantics and Hegel in their respective attitudes to Shakespeare and Schiller, there are major divergences. Schlegel saw Aeschylus, Sophocles and Shakespeare as supernal representatives of the tragic, equally valid, yet separated through time, culture, and religion, the ‘Classical’ as against the ‘Romantic’. Hegel by contrast, perceived in Shakespeare’s major figures affinities with the ultimate creations of classical Greek tragedy; only Shakespeare’s modern, ‘innerlich’ position was for him the last strand of Romantic art before its dissolution into subjectivity.¹⁹

Where they converged was in the Romantic disapproval of Schiller and their cult of Shakespeare, and in Hegel’s interest in Shakespeare as the representative of the post-classical, Romantic drama, and his growing disenchantment with Schiller the dramatist and thinker.²⁰ Be that as it may, sets of prejudices — the Romantics’ animus against Schiller, or their Bardolatry — were hardly good either for dramatic production or for a proper understanding of one’s own indigenous traditions. The first major reaction against this comes, not by chance, from Christian Dietrich Grabbe, a dramatist beholden to both Shakespearean and Schillerian practice, but concerned also to find a ‘national’ style: in his

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Über die Shakespearo-Manie/On Shakespeare-Mania of 1827. The attempts by the first major nineteenth-century literary historians — August Koberstein, Georg Gottfried Gervinus, Julian Schmidt, Hermann Hettner, August Friedrich Vilmar — to accord Schiller his rightful place in ‘Nationalliteratur’ and to counteract both Romantic and Young German strictures, were also not without their problems.\(^\text{21}\) For often these same historians, like Koberstein, Gervinus and Schmidt, were also votaries of Shakespeare, who if pressed would make unflattering contrasts between the merits of Shakespeare’s Elizabethan age, and current literary and cultural conditions in Germany. The Shakespeare cult could conveniently join forces with neo-Hegelian aesthetics, more often than not lacking Hegel’s differentiated analysis — Hermann Ulrici, Heinrich Theodor Rötscher, Friedrich Theodor Vischer — and inclined to see in Shakespeare’s world the workings of a ‘Grundidee’ or a ‘Weltgesetz’.\(^\text{22}\)

That is, in Gustav Freytag’s later phrase, the ‘ideal nexus’ of the discussion of Schiller and Shakespeare, the debate reserved for the aestheticians, the theoreticians, and the professoriate. But what of its ‘pragmatic’ coefficient, the popular reception, the reactions of the general educated reader? In the 1840s, it is Shakespeare’s Hamlet who appears, in Ferdinand Freiligrath’s terms at least (‘Deutschland ist Hamlet’), to be a symbol more appropriate to Germany’s political condition than, say, Schiller’s Marquis Posa. But even Freiligrath’s famous reference should not be exaggerated beyond its immediate significance. Above all, one should not overlook the place of Schiller in the articulation of national political aspirations. Whatever doubts literary historians or aestheticians might express, Schiller was assuming a commanding status, backed by a popular movement of considerable momentum. Some of this energy was directed towards the fostering of local patriotic pride: the celebrations of the Stuttgart ‘Liederkranz’ in 1825 and 1826, for


\(^{22}\) ‘Basic idea’, ‘world law’. 
instance, or the unveiling in Stuttgart of Thorwaldsen’s statue of Schiller in 1839 (before the monuments to Goethe in Frankfurt and to Lessing in Braunschweig), or Andreas Streicher’s, Gustav Schwab’s and Hermann Kurz’s biographies. The ‘Schiller-Vereine’ of the 1840s, in Leipzig, in Breslau (Hoffmann von Fallersleben), and in Stuttgart, were actual centres of ‘Vormärz’ opposition and liberal aspiration. In some sense, therefore, the particular national, political and cultural significance of the Schiller year of 1859, without which the occasion could not have burgeoned into what it did, lay very much in galvanizing forces already present, active, and vociferous.  

Could the same be said about Shakespeare? At such a popular level, clearly not. The claim that Shakespeare was ‘ours’ did not need Dingelstedt’s much quoted declaration of 1858, for it had been current at least since Tieck and Schlegel. Everything seemed to speak for the validity of the statement made in 1864 by a Marburg professor: ‘Jetzt steht der britische Shakespeare im deutschen Gewande in der Bibliothek eines jeden gebildeten deutschen Hausvaters’, and there would be not just the ‘Schlegel-Tieck’ translation, but many different versions to choose from. Bibliographical evidence alone indicates a wide range of reception, from ‘Familien-Shakespeare’ or popular biography, translations of Shakespeareana from the English or the French, or illustrated works, to studies of characters or scholarly enquiries into matters of text or dating. Again, the year 1864 merely crystallizes momentarily a whole process; yet it, too, has its unmistakable time reference.

The ‘Schillerfeier’ of 1859, and its correlatives, the ‘Schillerstiftung’ and the ‘Schillerpreis’ — on this all modern scholars are agreed — was an eminently political occasion. It united all liberal and national

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12. The ‘Schillerfeier’ of 1859 and the ‘Shakespearefest’ of 1864

forces across a wide spectrum of the population and across the divides of educational attainment. It was perhaps short on landowners and peasants, on Catholic clergy, officers or the nobility, as those least affected by the atmosphere of liberalism that characterizes the late 1850s and the early 1860s. That such a popular demonstration did not attend the truly muted celebrations of Goethe’s anniversary in 1849 is a tribute to the change in course since that year of reaction. Yet we should not forget Gottfried Kinkel, Freiligrath and Georg Herwegh, who added their voices to the general jubilation, while still exiles from the year of revolutions. It was a reflection of Schiller’s status as ‘Nationaldichter’, despite the monumental symbol of Ernst Rietschel’s statue in Weimar, on which both poets, Goethe and Schiller, clasp the same laurels. On the intellectual level, Rudolf Haym’s article in the recently-founded *Preussische Jahrbücher* sums up the best national, liberal and cultural expectations of the event:


erschienen, die uns noch vorenthalten sind, und zu denen wir daher in einer Stimmung emporblicken, welche die Grundstimmung sämtlicher Schillerschen Dichtungen ist.26

Yet one senses that this nobility of tone — Jacob Grimm reaches similar heights, like Burckhardt, who understandably omits any reference to the German nation — was reserved for the discriminating audience or reader. When Dr. Oskar Jäger (later head of the Königl. Friedrich Wilhelm Gymnasium in Cologne and a pillar of Wilhelmian rectitude) addresses the festive gathering in Prussian Wetzlar, he also stresses to his young charges the ‘Einmütigkeit’ occasioned by the event, but casts an eye back to Schiller’s place (as he saw it) in the political developments around 1813, his ‘nationale Gesinnung’, his role as ‘Seher’. Stepping outside of the assembly hall and into the open, he declares his hand: ‘Ja, meine Herren, jetzt, wo unter den Auspizien eines hochherzigen Regenten Preußen die Fahne dieser maßvollen und männlichen Freiheit den deutschen Stämmen voranträgt’27 (the rest is predictable). Again, one senses that the authorities, elsewhere nervous about the occasion getting out of hand and provoking civil disorder, would warm to the appropriateness of these sentiments. Perhaps it is worth recalling that the ‘Schillerfeier’, for all its laudable and almost universally expressed notions of ‘bürgerliche Freiheit’,28 did not infect all its participants

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26 ‘Like no other poet he lives immortal in the hearts of his people. The world has seen the unforgettable spectacle of the divided tribes, our people torn apart in great numbers, scattered throughout the globe, meeting together in the veneration of this poet, just as once the Greeks did in their praise and appreciation of Homer. This November celebration, as one of the festive speeches we have read called it, was a ‘true victory festival of the mind’, a testimony to the lasting power and imperishable liveliness of the workings of the spirit. It was above all a national festival. The German people admitted that, however outwardly torn, it is inwardly indestructible, and that the symbols of its unity are more dear to it than anything else. But more than that. One can say that immortality and fame like this has never before been bestowed. For with the poet’s greatness we have celebrated what he was still lacking in ultimate perfection. By celebrating the man with the poet, he has appeared as a symbol of all the moral qualities that we are still lacking and towards which we cast our eyes, filled with the same sensation that the whole of Schiller’s poetry engenders in us’. Rudolf Haym, ‘Schiller an seinem hundertjährigen Jubiläum’, Gesammelte Aufsätze (Berlin: Weidmann, 1903), 49–120 (118f).

27 ‘Accord’; ‘national feeling’; ‘seer’; ‘Yes, gentlemen, now that, under the auspices of a magnanimous regent, Prussia bears the banner of this measured and manly freedom to the German lands’. Oskar Jäger, Zu Schillers Gedächtnis (Wetzlar: n.p., 1859); Jäger, Pro Dom. Reden und Aufsätze (Berlin: Seehagen, 1894), 3–10 (3, 7, 9).

28 ‘Civic freedom’.
with high solemnity: Gottfried Keller’s, Paul Heyse’s and Friedrich Hebbel’s private reactions are revealing.29 It also had elements that were less spontaneous. On November 9, 1859, by royal decree of the regent of Prussia, was issued the declaration of the ‘Schillerpreis’ and the ‘Schillerstiftung’.30 If the popular demonstrations reflected political liberalization (however short-lived) and liberal notions of ‘Volk’ and culture, the ‘Schillerpreis’ was a more overt attempt at annexing for cultural politics the name of the greatest German dramatist, to harness the theatre, the temple of art, the ‘sittliche Idee des Staates’ (Rudolf Gottschall’s words).31 The great and good on the jury — Leopold von Ranke, Theodor Mommsen, Johann Gustav Droysen, Georg Gottfried Gervinus, Gustav Freytag, later Hermann Hettner, Julian Schmidt, Heinrich von Treitschke and Wilhelm Scherer — and their association with this attempt to raise literary standards in the drama, had little effect on the generally mediocre level of those honoured (only Hebbel and Otto Ludwig stand out, both now spent forces).

As the ‘Schillerfeier’ merged into the ‘Shakespearefest’, the irony was that these years, while reflecting the high status of dramatic art, its classical authority and the canonicity of its major representatives (with Shakespeare in first place of esteem), were generally ones of epigonal formalism and imitation, accompanied by a dearth of real talent.32 Grillparzer was silent; Hebbel and Ludwig, as mentioned, were cut off through the supervision of circumstances. As Helmut Schanze has shown, 1859 is symbolic in seeing the publication of two major works which dispense with conventional dramatic theory: the third edition of Arthur Schopenhauer’s Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung/The World as Will and Representation, and the posthumous Philosophie der Kunst/Philosophy of Art of F. W. J. Schelling.33 These exceptions apart, the problems

30 Cf. Sowa, Der Staat, 30–125 (42).
31 ‘The moral idea of the state’. Ibid., 42.
attendant on celebrations of this kind were that they elevated poets to paradigms or absolutes, and placed them on pedestals beyond the reach of the young and not-so-young alike. They imposed patterns — the historical drama springs most readily to mind — that had once been appropriate in their own time, in both Shakespeare’s and Schiller’s, indeed eminently worthy of emulation, but that were not endlessly transferrable to Hohenstaufens, or Habsburgs — or Hohenzollerns. These awarenesses form part of the current general discussion of dramatic technique, which, while not coinciding exactly with these celebrations, certainly provided its broad theoretical background. What is more, they bring together the names of Shakespeare and Schiller as role models for a German tragedy of the future.\(^{34}\)

For all that its rhetorical gesturings and orotundity seemed to indicate a rehearsal of 1859, the ‘Shakespearefest’ of 1864 nevertheless had accentuations of its own. Even those who saw the links between the occasions were aware of this. Dr. Paul Möbius, who addressed the festive assembly in Leipzig, makes this point:

> Selbst das wichtigste und großartigste von allen, die Schillerfeier von 1859, durch welche erst der Grund für die nachfolgenden gegebt wurde, so verschiedenartig noch während der Festtage selbst ihre eigentliche Bedeutung aufgefaßt wurde, galt zuletzt doch nichts Anderem, als was nachher ein Schützenfest zu Frankfurt, ein Turnfes zu Leipzig und endlich in ebendemselben Jahre die erhabene Gedenkfeier unseres Vaterlandes von französischer Knechtschaft noch zu klarerem Ausdrucke bringen sollte.

> Es war die herzerhebende Freude, in dem Dichter einen Mittelpunkt für alle Stämme und Parteien der Nation gefunden zu haben, einen Mittelpunkt, der Bürgschaft zu geben schien, daß der Geist, der schon vorhanden, sich zuletzt doch noch eine Form verschaffen werde, die auch den rauhesten Stürmen der Wirklichkeit Widerstand zu leisten vermöge.

> Und heute feiern wir abermals das Geburtsfest eines Dichters und abermals ist es nicht unsere Stadt, nicht unser Land allein, das an dieser Feier Theil nimmt. Schon längst drang die Kunde zu uns, daß auch diesmal, ähnlich wie 1859, an den Orten der verschiedensten Länder, ja

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\(^{34}\) For an indication of the extent of these discussions, see the bibliography in Realismus und Gründerzeit. Manifeste und Dokumente zur deutschen Literatur 1848–1880, vol. I, ed. by Max Bücher, Werner Hahl, Georg Jäger and Reinhard Wittmann (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1976), 452–56.
Of note is that insight that a poet has become the ‘Mittelpunkt für alle Stämme und Parteien der Nation’.

Certainly in 1859 Schiller the poet was the focus for whatever was associated with the idea of a nation. But could Shakespeare fulfil such a function in 1864? Clearly not in the same way. For Möbius, in common with most speakers, goes on to stress the special nature of the Shakespeare celebrations. Here, also, two different strands are apparent. Clearly this cannot be a national occasion except in a very general sense; rather, other phrases from Möbius like ‘Blick auf das Ewige’ or ‘Weltbürgertum’ indicate the overarching, universal appeal of the Shakespearean achievement, one that, if pressed, speakers might declare to be superior to Goethe’s or Schiller’s, indeed the greatest of all time. But, whether in verse pageants, declamations, speeches or whatever — all along the lines of 1859 — particular German concerns obtrude. The main note is ‘er ist unser’; we have annexed him and Germany is his ‘zweite Heimath,’ the scene of a new

35 ‘Even the greatest and most signal of all, the Schiller celebrations of 1859, which laid the ground for the ones that followed, despite the differences in their actual significance, that became manifest as they unfolded, was in reality aimed at nothing which would not be expressed at rifle-club festivals in Frankfurt or a gymnastics display in Leipzig, and in the same year as the mighty commemoration of our fatherland’s liberation from French vassalage.

It warmed the heart to find the poet providing a focal point, an earnest, for all the regions and parties of the nation, for our hopes, that the spirit, already present, will find a form that will be able to withstand even the roughest storms of reality.

And today we celebrate again the birthday of a poet, and again it is not our city, not our country alone, that joins in this festival. We have long since received the news that this time, like as in 1859, in places in the most disparate countries, or continents, where German meets German, they come together to celebrate and to mark the memory of the great Shakespeare’. Paul Möbius, Shakespeare als Dichter der Naturwahrheit. Festrede bei der Shakespearefeier zu Leipzig am 23. April 1864 gehalten (Leipzig: Voigt & Günther, 1864), 5f.

36 ‘Focal point for all regions and parties of the nation’.


38 ‘He is ours’. J. J. Rietmann, Shakspeare und seine Bedeutung. Festrede gesprochen an der Shakespearefeier in St. Gallen (St. Gallen: Huber, 1864), 13.

‘Bellalliance’\textsuperscript{40} (note the terminology). This, in its turn, has a double emphasis. Following Julian Schmidt’s insight of a few years earlier, it is Shakespeare the ‘Protestant’,\textsuperscript{41} the representative of a literary culture for so long denied in Germany who is ultimately responsible for the ‘Wiedergeburt des zweiten goldenen Zeitalters’\textsuperscript{42} across the water, who is the ‘Vater und Meister’\textsuperscript{43} of modern German poetry. But this annexation has meant that the Germans — Coleridge, after all, had said it — are now the true guardians of the sacred flame of the Shakespearean heritage (‘am Hausaltare deutscher Nation’).\textsuperscript{44} In this Germanic brotherhood, ‘Fleisch vom eignen Fleisch’, ‘Blut vom eignen Blut’,\textsuperscript{45} it is Shakespeare who represents the deepest and most lasting bond. For it was ‘deutsches Talent, deutscher Geschmack, deutscher Scharfsinn und deutscher Fleiß’\textsuperscript{46} that had been largely responsible for the current revival of things Shakespearean, the restoration of the Shakespearean text, or philosophical and historical insights into the plays themselves. And it is true that the translations into English of major German Shakespeare scholars like Hermann Ulrici, Georg Gotfried Gervinus, later Karl Elze, or the seeming over-representation of Germans in the notes to the great Variorum edition started in 1874, might well bear this out. The main product of the German Shakespeare celebrations of 1864 is of course the foundation of the ‘Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft’\textsuperscript{47}. This is not the place to discuss the significance of that society. Suffice it to say, however, that the statement of intent prepared in 1863 by Wilhelm Oechelhäuser, later its president, stresses the wider, national, propaedeutic function of the society and its forthcoming celebration:

\begin{quote}
Es wird vielmehr in dieser Beziehung die wesentliche Aufgabe des beginnenden vierten Jahrhunderts nach Shakespeare’s Geburt bleiben,
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[40] A reference to the battle of Waterloo. Kuenzel, \textit{William Shakespeare}, 44.
\item[41] Lua, \textit{William Shakespeare}, 11.
\item[44] ‘At the tutelary altar of the German nation’. Ibid.
\item[46] ‘German talent, German taste, German intelligence, and German industry’. Kreyssig, \textit{Ueber die sittliche}, 8.
\end{footnotes}
There is an irony that this takes place against a background where the first cloud to overshadow Anglo-German political relations had appeared on the horizon: the Schleswig-Holstein affair. Several anniversary speakers are at pains to remind their audiences that the England with whom they are culturally bonded is not that of Palmerston, Russell and the free press. The ‘Shakespeare-Gesellschaft’ is, of course, too fastidious to bring politics of this nature into its founding statements (a scruple which it abandons but briefly in 1870–71). It is also worth reflecting that the great period of early Victorian reception of things German — Fontane still experiences its high point while in London — was now moving into a less uncritical phase. And there is in German historiography and historical thinking the awareness that, whereas Shakespeare might represent the highest modern human achievement in poetry, he does not possess the ‘innere geistige Reife’ of the classical German tradition or its association with philosophy and scholarship and its rooting in antiquity. Nor does the open-handed acceptance of the Shakespearean Weltanschauung and its political and intellectual implications involve an identity with his present-day countrymen or their institutions.

Which brings me back to Theodor Fontane. Any reader of his works and letters will need no reminder of the respect and love that both Schiller and Wilhelm Oechelhaueser [sic], ‘Die deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft’, Shakespeareana (Berlin: Springer, 1894), 1–22 (3f.).
and Shakespeare enjoy in his esteem. It is not unqualified or uncritical, especially in Schiller’s case. The words in a letter to Maximilian Ludwig of 1878 — ‘Daß ich im Uebrigen meinen Schiller aufrichtiger liebe und bewundere, als es das nachplappernde Phrasenvolk, das Salon und Schule unsicher macht, beim besten Willen imstande ist, brauche ich Ihnen nicht erst zu versichern’\textsuperscript{51} — come after fairly uncharitable remarks on \textit{Die Räuber/The Robbers}. Even at the very beginning of his poetic career, brought up as he was on a forced diet of Schillerian ballads, he had made fun of the Schiller cult. His occasional poem ‘Zum Schillerfest des “Tunnel”’ is a toast or ‘Trinkspruch’, an occasional poem, which gains its dignity from the ‘occasion’:

\begin{Verbatim}
Es sprach Apoll: “Ich bin der Lieder müde 
Zu Ehren all der Damons und Damöte,
Ich mag nicht mehr, was unwahr und was prüde”.

Und siehe da, anbrach die Morgenröte 
Der deutschen Kunst, vom Berge stieg zu Tale
Die hehre Doppelsonne Klopstock-Goethe.

Geboren war die Welt der Ideale;
Hell schien das Licht; nur für die nächt’gen Zeiten
Gebrach uns noch das Feuer der Fanale;

Gebrach uns noch das Feuer, das von Weiten
Zu Waffen ruft, von hohem Bergeskamme,
Wenn’s gilt für Sitte, Land und Thron zu streiten;

Gebrach uns noch die hohe, heil’ge Flamme,
Die unsren Sinn von Kleinheit, Selbstsucht reinigt
Und uns zusammenschweißt zu einem Stamme;

Und Schiller kam und Deutschland war geeinigt.\textsuperscript{52}
\end{Verbatim}

\textsuperscript{51} ‘That I incidentally am a far greater lover and admirer of Schiller than all the cliché-mongers who are at large in salons and schools are capable of, however hard they try, I hardly need to assure you’. \textit{SW}, IV, ii, 567.

\textsuperscript{52} ‘Apollo spoke: “I’m tired of songs
That honour all the swains and their swainesses
And all that to untruth and prudes belongs”.
Lo and behold, the dawn undid her tresses
On German art, from mount to dale
The double sun of Klopstock–Goethe presses.
And born was now the world of true ideals;
Bright shone the light; but for the hours of night
The occasion is all-important. This is not Zurich, where Gottfried Keller produces stanza after stanza of high-sounding verse to impress elevated seriousness on his fellow-citizens. This is the more intimate atmosphere of the ‘Tunnel’ society, among fellow-poets, as it were; without the whole declamatory apparatus that lesser and greater talents were inflicting on captive audiences. Indeed one states in less hushed and reverential terms what speaker after speaker was saying (or was going to say, for the ‘Schillerfeier’ of the ‘Tunnel’ took place on the 8th, not on the 9th of November, the actual birthday).\(^{53}\) Clearly this is not a poem which sustains too great a degree of formal analysis. It is clearly tongue-in-cheek: the disjunction between the rhetorical flights it perpetrates and the rhyme framework (\textit{terza rima}) it employs, gives it away. ‘Damöte’/‘Morgenröte’ might seem bad enough, but ‘Und siehe da, anbrach die Morgenröte’ is certainly no better. One notes with interest, however, a coincidence between Fontane’s two opening stanzas and a section of Jacob Grimm’s speech, with its progression from ‘poesielose Orgons-und Damonstücke’\(^{54}\) to the heights and achievements of Klopstock and Goethe. But Grimm in his turn was rehearsing the perceptions — the clichés — attendant on nineteenth-century awareness of ‘Nationalliteratur’. The insight that the ‘Schillerfeier’ restores ‘was uns gebrach’\(^{55}\) and is a force for the spiritual unanimity that must precede actual political union, is the real point of Fontane’s poem, one in 1859 reiterated endlessly at various levels of sophistication. It is not even the only poem produced by the ‘Tunnel’ for the occasion. Fontane’s friend and fellow-poet Scherenberg delivered himself of several execrable stanzas,\(^{56}\) overladen with rhetoric and inventive conceits, against which Fontane’s seems restrained and apposite. For all that has been noted about its tone, it is enshrined in Adolph Büchting’s \textit{Verzeichniß/Directory} of 1860, an important source of

\begin{quote}
We needed fire to follow on its heels.
We needed fire to call out from the night
To arms, from highest mountain top,
For home and hearth and throne to fight;
We needed sacred lofty flame — no sop —
To clear our minds in pettiness benighted
And weld us in one undivided knot.
And Schiller came: and Germany was united’.
\end{quote}

\(^{53}\) \textit{Ibid.}, I, 470.

\(^{54}\) ‘Orgons and Damos and their unpoetic stuff’. \textit{Schiller}, I, 444.

\(^{55}\) ‘What we were lacking’.

\(^{56}\) \textit{Schiller-Denkmal}, I, 199–221.
information about the 1859 celebrations, and its text graces Tropus’s *Schiller-Denkmal* of the same year.

Fontane’s Shakespeare piece was, however, not published in his lifetime and has not been the subject of any significant critical interest. We need not take too seriously his diary entry that it was ‘aufs Papier hingeschmissen wohl oder übel’. He had made notes, which suggests a degree of reflexion. In essence, however, he needed no preparation. Shakespeare was already long since enshrined in his scheme of things, through a knowledge of the text, and experience of live performance at home and in London. Fontane is part of the generation that includes Freiligrath, Herwegh and Bodenstedt; like the first two, he is aware of the political charge of the Shakespearean text (as in that early poem, ‘Shakespeare an einen deutschen Fürsten/Shakespeare to a German Prince’); like all three of them, he does not regard the so-called ‘Schlegel-Tieck’ version as definitive. There had been the rash experiment of a *Hamlet* translation (a version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is lost), the theatre criticism from London, with its emphasis on authenticity and closeness to human experience. He had noted the way in which Shakespeare was still a ‘Dichter des Volks’ in England, part of an almost unbroken tradition of theatrical performance and role creation — in contrast with Germany, where Schiller had that function, whereas Shakespeare is ‘etwas Apartes’. It is worth mentioning that his two other English-language role models, Walter Scott and Charles Dickens, are in a sense part of a wider texture of Shakespeare reception, through the intertextual allusions which form part of the tissue of their

58 *Schiller-Denkmal*, I, 121.
59 The full text is published, as ‘Rede zum Shakespeare-Fest’, in *SW, Aufsätze*, I, 195–204.
60 ‘Dashed off as it comes’. *SW, Aufsätze*, I, 798.
62 *SW*, I, 758f.
64 ‘Something very special’. Ibid., 107.
work. Both Shakespeare and Scott come together to influence those early historical fragments, Wolsey, and especially the drama Carl Stuart. Fontane is aware of the discussion of Shakespeare in his formative years as a writer (Wagner’s Das Drama der Zukunft [sic], for instance) without necessarily subscribing to its proprietary claims. Above all — and this is crucial for his Shakespeare speech and marks it out from all others in 1864 known to me at least — he had been to the sacred place of pilgrimage, Stratford, the ‘Pilgerstätte’, the ‘Wallfahrtsort’. Again, that gave his remarks the stamp of authenticity that a more literary approach could not.

That is not to say that Fontane’s speech does not have a specifically German emphasis or an accentuation that is peculiarly his own. With others as well, he distinguishes Schiller the ‘Lieblingsdichter’ of 1859 from the superior genius of Shakespeare. The Germanophile proprietary claim ‘Shakespeare ist unser’ is qualified by the later reference to ‘[die] ganz[e] gebildet[e] Welt’ (another important difference from Schiller), the universal commonality of Shakespearean connoisseurship and appreciation that knows no national boundaries. Fontane is steering a middle course between crude German partisanship (there is no mention of Schleswig-Holstein, for instance, a subject about which he has decided views) and an uncritical Anglophile stance. For all his fascination with English historical fact and fiction, he is not willing, as Gervinus or Julian Schmidt had been, to berate his fellow-countrymen for their failure to achieve a symbiosis of political and literary culture like that from which Shakespeare once emerged. At most the Histories could serve that function. The great tragedies — Hamlet, King Lear, Othello, Romeo and Juliet — are however free of these associations: their presentation of the human heart is the key to their appeal in all ages and nations. This point, it need hardly be said, had been common currency in German Shakespeare appreciation since Herder and was one of the first indications of an independence from English-language criticism.

Quoting the words ‘Wunderkind’ or ‘Naturkind’, Fontane evokes

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65 Ibid., 99.
66 Ibid., 202.
67 ‘Favourite poet’. Ibid., 195.
68 ‘Shakespeare is ours’. Ibid.
69 ‘The whole of the educated world’. Ibid., 196.
70 ‘Wondrous child’; ‘nature’s child’. Ibid., 197.
the oldest strands of Shakespearean reception and not the nineteenth century’s sophistication, and frees notions like ‘nature’s child’ or ‘negative capability’ from any anchorage in space and time and sites such genius anywhere — if need be, in Germany.

Fontane’s seemingly magisterial dismissal of the old biographical, anecdotal approach to Shakespeare — another of the nineteenth century’s obsessions — is however subject to gradations. Instead, he turns to topography: London and Stratford. Here, too, there are clear affinities with his own preoccupations, which find their expression not only in Ein Sommer in London/A Summer in London, Aus England/From England and Jenseit des Tweed/Beyond the Tweed, but also in his first major literary achievement, Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg/Walks through the March of Brandenburg. London (and to some extent Manchester) emerges in Fontane’s account not so much as the living site of past history, but as the repository of evidence and documentation of that past. London, the huge seething city, then as we now know at the apogee of its world-wide influence, lacks in Fontane’s eyes the quality of a past time-frame, of history caught in arrest, of living historical associations. This he finds in Waltham Abbey, in Oxford, in Chester, almost everywhere in Scotland (he turns aside from a visit to Glasgow) — and not least in Stratford. England, a country so obsessed with the changes conditional on world trade and naval and military might, has swept away so much of the old — in London more radically than elsewhere — and has thrown up edifices of the new. Thus Shakespeare’s London (Fontane accepts the effects of the Great Fire) exists only in images and documents or inscriptions. Its icon is not some haunt on the South Bank, but the bust in Poets’ Corner (and Fontane cannot resist the reference to Shakespeare’s near-neighbour in that place, Handel, a near-topos of German Shakespearean studies). Warwickshire, and more especially Stratford itself, is an enclave amid change and progress (witness its proximity to the cradle of the Industrial Revolution). Its cultural roots go even deeper than Shakespeare, back to the old folk ballads of a pre-industrial, pre-enclosure era. Thus Stratford — and Fontane knows all the other literary associations of Warwickshire — is all the more precious for having living traces of ‘das alte heitre Land’. But we are, as it were, with the writer all the time; he accompanies us

71 ‘The old happy land’. Ibid., 201.
to this place of pilgrimage (‘Pilgerstätte’, ‘Wallfahrtsort’); we stoop to enter the humble birthplace, we add our fingers to the thousands who have touched its walls. We are made aware — Washington Irving, who becomes a kind of spiritual ancestor of the Wanderungen,\footnote{Ibid., 202.} made the same point much earlier — that this may be against all reason and factual foundation, but we enter willingly and consciously into these pious delusions. And our human sense and our experience of life is invoked when Fontane examines the inscription on Shakespeare’s tomb and declares: ‘Es sind Worte, die nichts andres ausdrücken wollen, als die tiefe Sehnsucht nach Ruhe’.\footnote{‘They are words that express nothing more than the deep longing for peace’. Ibid., 204.} The vignettes, the linking of history and personal musing, the blending of the concretely factual with wider spheres of human experience, that ‘wir’ that involves us vicariously in the experience — all these point forward to the Fontane of Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg, on which he was then working . And — to revert to our overall theme — among the many speeches delivered on the occasion of Shakespeare’s tercentenary, it is unique for these very qualities. But let us not forget that the technique being unfolded in the Shakespeare piece and in the Wanderungen is also the basis of his later mature novel style: the importance of ‘place’, but above all its symbolism and human associations, the awareness that the particular and the local also involve, if not the universal, but certainly insights conditional on the widest range of human experience and (if we could but see it) human wisdom.