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## The *Hamlet* Project in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Years of Apprenticeship*

**Abstract:** Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, published in 1795, provides a fictional account of a theatrical production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Its initiator is young Wilhelm, whose experiences with this project, in the context of the novel, mark a decisive stage in his education and personal development; as well as, on another level, in the formation of a German national theatre, the mapping out of a theatrical space peculiar to the German national character. To realize his project Wilhelm has to negotiate with his manager and his fellow-actors; these negotiations can be considered reflections of the cultural aspirations and constraints prevalent late 18<sup>th</sup>-century Germany:

– The project itself, as represented by Wilhelm, appears to be informed by a cultural movement towards emancipation from French culture: The character of Hamlet was interpreted as representing a role model for young Germans.

– Informed by a theatrical practice based on French conventions, the manager objects to the lack of dramaturgical coherence of the Shakespeare play. As a compromise, Wilhelm composes an adapted version in which references to Wittenberg, Poland, France and England as well as several minor characters are cut, but the Hamlet scenes and speeches are retained.

– Wilhelm and his friends also take account of German audiences' preferences and capacities.

The *Hamlet* project in *Wilhelm Meister* can be considered a case study of cultural appropriation. Shakespeare becomes a cultural import, used to define and map a cultural space for the German middle class, which in the nineteenth century set store by the quality of its educational make-up.

**Keywords:** German theatre, French theatre, eighteenth century, Goethe, *Hamlet*, adaptation, society, aristocracy, middle class, bourgeois habitus, cultural capital, education, Globe-to-Globe *Hamlet*.

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In Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister's Years of Apprenticeship*, the protagonist, young Wilhelm Meister [William Master], escapes from the bourgeois existence of a well-to-do merchant by first falling in love with an actress and then becoming a member of a company of itinerant actors and street artists. When he and his troupe are invited into an aristocratic household and come into contact with educated men and women, he learns about Shakespeare and is soon quite fascinated, in spite of, or because of, the fact that Shakespeare's plays run counter to what he had so far considered the rules of dramatic propriety. His literary and theatrical education culminates in the production of a version of *Hamlet* adapted by himself, and starring himself in the title role.

While the novel has usually been considered to be a seminal example of a 'Bildungsroman,' or novel of apprenticeship (cf. esp. Berger; Swales 142), it can also be considered a fictional account of the foundation of a national German literary culture. Wilhelm's dissatisfaction with his cultural environment and his quest for enlarging his cultural horizon can be considered emblematic of the cultural position of Germany as a whole. From the beginning, Wilhelm is conscious of his ambitions:

[...] in selbstgefälliger Bescheidenheit erblickte er in sich den trefflichen Schauspieler, den Schöpfer eines künftigen Nationaltheaters, nach dem er so vielfältig hatte seufzen hören. (138)

[...] in complacent modesty he saw himself as the outstanding actor and creator of a future national theatre, on behalf of whose establishment he had heard so many sigh. (24)

Though there seems to be no national theatre yet, there are various forms of dramatical practice, all of which appear derivative. Neither the *Puppenspiel* [puppet theatre] (1.2) used to represent Biblical stories, nor a collection of plays entitled "Deutsche Schaubühne" [German stage], which contains dramatical adaptations of old Italian romances, nor plays about medieval knights "new at that time" (91) could satisfy Wilhelm's aspirations.

The low esteem in which German acting was held by educated people can be seen in the troupe's encounter with a count and a countess: The count, who is in the process of preparing a reception for a visiting prince, remarks:

Wenn es Franzosen wären [...] könnten wir dem Prinzen eine unerwartete Freude machen und ihm bei uns seine Lieblingsunterhaltung verschaffen. (237)

If they had been French [...] we would have given the Prince an unexpected pleasure and have provided him with his favorite entertainment. (110)

The countess, however, prevails with her husband to engage the troupe, "wenn sie schon unglücklicherweise nur Deutsche sind" (237) [even if unfortunately

they are only Germans] (110). Wilhelm is very happy to be received into an aristocratic household, and promptly falls in love with the countess. This incident is certainly characteristic of the divide prevalent in eighteenth-century German theatrical life between “French theatre companies and Italian opera companies” who performed at court, and the *Wanderbühne* [travelling theatre] which “had to move regularly from place to place” (Sharpe, “Weimar theatre” 116).

In the aristocratic circles within which Wilhelm now moves, he meets with other instances of a disparagement of German culture. Aurelia, an actress, points out:

Sie [die deutsche Nation] kam mir im ganzen so linkisch vor, so übel erzogen, so schlecht unterrichtet, so leer von gefälligem Wesen, so geschmacklos. Oft rief ich aus: es kann doch kein Deutscher einen Schuh zuschnallen, der es nicht von einer fremden Nation gelernt hat! (336)

[...] they [the Germans] seemed to me as a whole to be so gauche, so badly brought up and educated, so devoid of charm and so lacking in taste. I often used to exclaim: ‘No German can even buckle up a shoe unless he has learnt how from some foreign people!’ (197).

What counted as ‘culture’ was imported from France, including the French language, the language used by polite people, as well as French literature. The aristocratic idea of German inferiority, however, is corroborated by the narrative plot. Before falling in with the count and countess, the troupe members find themselves at an inn, where Wilhelm reads out a fashionable play about chivalry. The reactions of his audience are described with quite a bit of irony:

Jedermann war von dem Feuer des edelsten Nationalgeistes entzündet. Wie sehr gefiel es dieser deutschen Gesellschaft, sich ihrem Charakter gemäß auf eigenem Grund und Boden poetisch zu ergötzen! (216)

Everyone was inflamed by the fire of the noblest national spirit. How pleased this company of Germans was to enjoy themselves in poetic style in accordance with their own character on their very ground! (91)

The actors’ enjoyment is augmented by heavy drinking, culminating in an orgy of drunkenness and noisy, boisterous behavior. Wilhelm has to bribe “die Scharwache” (217) [the patrol] (92) to avoid detention.

On another level, German inferiority is represented by Mignon, a rather odd little girl with Italian origins who Wilhelm has taken into his charge and who is commonly interpreted as the irrational, inspired side of Wilhelm’s artistic personality (cf. e. g. Schlaffer 73-79; Fick 83-99). She sings to Wilhelm about the country where the citron-trees bloom and asks Wilhelm to take her back to

Italy as she is freezing here [in Germany] (107). The northern climate of Germany obviously parallels the inadequacy of the German cultural heritage when compared to the classical legacy of Italy. There is, of course, also a political correlative to this inferiority complex: Unlike France and Britain, Germany did not have political unity or a cultural center. This state of affairs was fine with many aristocrats who were content with the limitations of their political power as long as they could continue to enjoy their privileges.

Intellectual circles, however, started to rebel against what was felt to be French cultural dominance, and they sometimes sought to appropriate Shakespeare as a counterpoise to French classical drama and as a patron saint of German cultural emancipation. This position was held most conspicuously by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing who claimed that the Germans are more affected by the great, the terrible, and the melancholy (as represented by Shakespeare) than the mannerly, the tender, and the amorous (as represented by French drama) (Lessing 36; cf. Kullmann 73 and Sharpe, "Weimar theatre," 117). Wilhelm's ambition to be instrumental in the creation of a national theatre can certainly be placed in the context of widespread endeavors by German intellectuals in the second half of the eighteenth century, in which the Weimar court theatre managed by Goethe played a conspicuous part (cf. Sharpe, "Weimar theatre," esp. 117-18).

To delineate Wilhelm's quest for a national German theatre and to examine the role assigned to Shakespeare within this quest I should like to make use of two terms popularized by Pierre Bourdieu, "habitus" and "cultural capital." According to Bourdieu, cultural practices, which include literary and artistic tastes, serve to mark the practitioner as a member of a certain social class and to distinguish him and his class from others (Bourdieu 30-32, et passim). Certain practices to which members of in-groups have access function as "cultural capital" (Bourdieu 54-55, et passim), which, like economic capital, can be invested towards economic profit and social distinction, thereby strengthening social inequality.

As the son of a well-to-do merchant, Wilhelm's 'native' cultural habitus is characterized by hard work and honest dealings with money along with a rather sparse use of cultural products and practices. Children may occasionally play with puppets, and adults may seek amusement in a theatre now and then, but they should take great care not to overdo it. The point is that distinctions should be observed with regard to the uncultured masses on the one hand, and the artists' bohemian lifestyle and precarious economic affairs on the other. At the beginning of the novel, Wilhelm chooses to change the bourgeois habitus for the artistic one (this can be seen as a parallel of 26-year-old Goethe's own decision to leave Frankfurt, the city of capitalism and trade, [cf. Borchmeyer 67]), while still trying to retain some elements of the former. He is aware of economic affairs and tries to set the activities of his troupe on a firm financial

footing. Wilhelm then learns about an aristocratic habitus based on French manners and a taste for French classical drama. Distinction is achieved by repudiating any attempts at culture by the aristocrats' German compatriots. At first, Wilhelm willingly ventures to adopt this habitus, but he is soon disillusioned, as the Prince, while professing his love for French theatre, appears uninterested in the finer points of the respective merits of Corneille and Racine (133-34).

It is at this stage that the Prince's minister, Jarno, asks Wilhelm if he has ever seen a play by Shakespeare (134). Wilhelm first repeats the current prejudice toward Shakespeare's plays being "solche seltsamen Ungeheuer [...] die über alle Wahrscheinlichkeit, allen Wohlstand hinauszuschreiten scheinen" (264) [strange monsters which seem to stride out beyond all probability and propriety] (134). After having consented to read some of the plays, however, he is fascinated by them:

[...] mit unbekannter Bewegung wurden tausend Empfindungen und Fähigkeiten in ihm rege, von denen er keinen Begriff und keine Ahnung gehabt hatte. (269)

[...] a thousand feelings and potentialities, of which he had had no notion or idea, stirred within him with unknown movement (138).

To him the plays transcend any idea of literature:

Es sind keine Gedichte! Man glaubt vor den aufgeschlagenen ungeheuren Büchern des Schicksals zu stehen, in denen der Sturmwind des bewegtesten Lebens saust und sie mit Gewalt rasch hin und wider blättert. Ich bin über die Stärke und Zartheit, über die Gewalt und Ruhe so erstaunt und außer aller Fassung gebracht, dass ich nur mit Sehnsucht auf die Zeit warte, da ich mich in einem Zustand befinden werde weiterzulesen. (ch. 3.11; 275)

[...] They are not literary works! You believe that you are standing before the huge, open books of fate in which the high wind of life at its most agitated storms, turning the pages back and forth rapidly and with violence. I am so astonished and disconcerted by the strength and delicacy, the violence and calm, that I can only wait with longing for the time when I shall be in a position to be able to go on reading. (143)

The new "feelings and potentialities" offered by Shakespeare could be considered "cultural capital" which allows Wilhelm to transcend the aristocratic habitus fixed on French practices (cf. Berger 59) and tastes and to start mapping out a new cultural space, or to define a new habitus he thinks is appropriate to Germany.

When talking to Serlo, the theatrical manager, Wilhelm admits his "particular liking for Shakespeare" and hints at "the impact that these fine plays

would be bound to make in Germany” (184). Serlo answers that he would have put on the play of *Hamlet* a long time before “if it had only been possible” (185). Shakespeare, it appears, is too big for the stage, from the theatre manager’s practical point of view. To the prejudice concerning form and language, then, are added the practical necessities of the dramatic production.

Wilhelm, however, goes on to pursue his plan for the performance of *Hamlet*. The difficulties of this endeavor appear to mirror the reluctance of German theatre to accept Shakespeare’s dramaturgy. In the novel, the *Hamlet* production appears as a collaborative effort, a compromise between various ideas about the nature and purpose of literary art. The project is described extensively in books 4 and 5 of the eight books of *Wilhelm Meister* and thus occupies a central position. While talking to Serlo, the theatrical manager, Wilhelm provides an outline of his view of the play which centers around the hero’s character:

[...] mir ist deutlich, dass Shakespeare habe schildern wollen: eine große Tat, auf eine Seele gelegt, die der Tat nicht gewachsen ist. Und in diesem Sinne find ich das Stück durchgängig gearbeitet. Hier wird ein Eichbaum in ein köstliches Gefäß gepflanzt, das nur liebliche Blumen in seinen Schoß hätte aufnehmen sollen; die Wurzeln dehnen sich aus, das Gefäß wird vernichtet.

Ein schönes, reines, edles, höchst moralisches Wesen, ohne die sinnliche Stärke, die den Helden macht, geht unter einer Last zugrunde, die es weder tragen noch abwerfen kann; jede Pflicht ist ihm heilig, diese zu schwer. Das Unmögliche wird von ihm gefordert, nicht das Unmögliche an sich, sondern das, was ihm unmöglich ist. Wie er sich windet, dreht, ängstigt, vor- und zurücktritt, immer erinnert wird, sich immer erinnert und zuletzt fast seinen Zweck aus dem Sinne verliert, ohne doch jemals wieder froh zu werden! (323)

[...] it is clear to me that what Shakespeare wanted to describe was a great deed laid upon a person who was not equal to it. And I see the play as consistently constructed with this in mind. An oak tree is here planted in an exquisite vessel that should only have received sweet flowers into its bosom; the roots spread, and the vessel is destroyed.

A fine, pure, noble, most highly moral person, lacking the sensuous strength that makes a hero, collapses beneath a burden that he can neither bear nor throw off; all duty is sacred to him, but this obligation is too heavy. The impossible is being asked of him, not the impossible in itself, but what is impossible for him. How he twists and turns, fears, steps back and forth, is constantly reminded, reminds himself constantly, and in the end almost loses sight of his purpose, though without ever becoming happy again! (186)

What becomes evident here is the concept that interpretation, i.e. the analysis of a literary character, can be an excellent instrument of self-discovery. The exercise of figuring out Hamlet’s personality as well as the ways and means of

acting his part on stage, implies Wilhelm's growing awareness of his own strengths and weaknesses (on Wilhelm's "identification with Hamlet" cf. Roberts 27, et passim). Studying Shakespeare is studying the art of introspection in order to assert one's individuality. From today's point of view, it is obvious that to reach this interpretation certain cultural issues and contexts have to be disregarded, like the ambivalences of courtly life or the uncertainty about the viability of the various Christian denominations. The Christian opposition to revenge is disregarded as well, and the killing of the king, which in Shakespeare's time was a contested ethical issue, becomes any 'great deed' or even 'duty' which may be laid upon an individual.

This partial identification with the hero, however, is only one aspect of the process of achieving 'Bildung,' or personality formation, by means of the theatre. The other one lies in learning to appreciate the play as a well-structured work of art, as an aesthetic whole. Admiring a work of art can thus lead up to the desire to structure one's own life based on the principles of "order, good taste and thought" (189). The correct tastes and thoughts thus achieved go beyond the insistence of form found in French theatre and become seminal to a new cultural 'habitus,' that of *Bildungsbürgertum*, which refers to people who belong to the middle class but who base their claim to distinction on a superior education along with superior cultural practices and who often pursue trades and professions which require long (and often academic) training. We thus witness in this novel the gradual disappearance of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century aristocratic habitus and the emergence of a new ideal of middle-class existence, an ideal which goes beyond the honest solidity which characterized the household of Wilhelm's father, the man of business. Good taste and correct, enlightened (or "post-Christian", cf. Sharpe, "Introduction" 5) ethical thinking allows one to become a respected and respectable member of a certain social class which distinguishes itself from all those deficient in education, including the aristocracy, the world of honest tradesmen, the bohemian world of itinerant artists, and, of course, the lower orders.

One of the advantages of this new cultural habitus lies in the fact that it allows for a certain amount of deviancy. When Aurelia, a lady who is suffering from "the pangs of despised love," examines the part of Ophelia which she is going to take in the production, she is reminded of her grief but also enabled to "give a local habitation and a name" to it:

Nur auf das Kunstwerk, dessen Zusammenhang und Vollkommenheit gerichtet, ahnete er nicht, daß seine Freundin eine ganz andere Wirkung empfand, nicht, daß ein eigener tiefer Schmerz durch diese dramatischen Schattenbilder in ihr lebhaft erregt ward. (324)

Directing his attention only onto the work of art, its coherence and perfection, he [Wilhelm] did not realize that his companion was experiencing quite

different feelings, and that a deep private sorrow was being aroused within her by these dramatic phantoms. (187)

Wilhelm proceeds to provide an analysis of Ophelia's character which may strike the modern reader as rather advanced. When, for example, Aurelia objects to the bawdy songs sung by Ophelia in her state of madness, Wilhelm quite convincingly points out that the "sounds of lasciviousness echoed secretly in her soul" before (194), and are revealed once she loses "all control of herself" (194). Shakespeare and Shakespearean interpretation thus give a shape to Aurelia's predicament and maybe help her accept it.

As we see, the production of *Hamlet* envisaged by Wilhelm owes a lot to both careful reading and the requirements of a late eighteenth-century German intellectual society. To realize this production, however, practical obstacles have to be met. Serlo, the theatrical manager, does not see a way of producing *Hamlet* in its entirety; he advises Wilhelm "to cut from the tragedy whatever would not or could not be fitted in, and to compress several characters into one" (224), adducing his own practical experience. As there are many plays which "go beyond the limits of the personnel, the scenery, the mechanics of the stage, of the time, the dialogue and the physical strength of the actors" (224-25), especially in Germany, "wretched mutilation" (224) is inevitable. Wilhelm then devises a plan for a revised version of *Hamlet*: While the "inner relationships and events, the powerful effects which arise out of the characters and actions of the main figures" (225) are excellent, the "external relationships of the characters by which they are transported from one place to another" (225) are defective. Many of the "circumstances and happenings" recorded in *Hamlet* could "add substance to a novel but [...] are most harmful to the dramatic unity of this play" (226).

While both Serlo and Wilhelm acknowledge the suitability of Shakespeare in their endeavor to reform the German stage and create an aesthetic sensibility, they object to the text of the play for different reasons. While Serlo refers to the material poverty of the German stage, Wilhelm addresses the 'rule' of dramatic unity, which had been ascribed to the theatre of the ancient Greeks and Romans and was certainly practiced in the French theatre.

The version of *Hamlet* proposed by Wilhelm thus constitutes a compromise between various cultural and economic requirements, and the result of the collaboration of the literary expert, the theatrical expert, and the prospective actors and actresses: The Danish governor of conquered Norway sends Horatio to Denmark "to press for the arming of the fleet" (226). The new Danish king then sends Laertes to Norway to announce the fleet's imminent arrival. When Hamlet communicates to Horatio that his father was killed by the present king, Horatio tells him to go to Norway and come back with an army.



The King and Queen also send Hamlet to Norway, accompanied by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and, as in the original, he returns to meet Laertes at Ophelia's grave. At the end, Hamlet gives his "voice" (*Hamlet*, 5.2.309) not to Fortinbras, but to Horatio (226-27).

Serlo, the manager, immediately accepts this proposal, and says the production can go forward. While the *Hamlet* version outlined might horrify many present-day lovers of Shakespeare, we should take a look at the principles which obviously inform this design:

– Wilhelm's main anxiety is to keep as much as possible of Shakespeare's text, particularly the passages which surround the protagonist, Hamlet. It is to his character that Wilhelm accords a central position. Wilhelm's misinterpretation of Hamlet as a weakling with a beautiful soul who cannot make up his mind, would become famous and influential.

– The cuttings and straightenings of the plot seem to be due to two distinct motivations. One of them is not to overtax the audience (based on the ambivalent attitude towards the audience displayed by Goethe as manager of the Weimar court theatre cf. Sharpe, "Weimar theatre" 123) because they shouldn't be expected to keep too many places in mind, thus the surrounding world is reduced to one single locale, Norway. The number of characters is cut for the same reason. As Serlo remarks:

Ich finde Ihren Gedanken recht gut: denn außer den zwei einzigen fernen Bildern, Norwegen und der Flotte, braucht der Zuschauer sich nichts zu denken; das übrige sieht er alles, das übrige geht alles vor, anstatt daß sonst seine Einbildungskraft in der ganzen Welt herumgejagt würde. (368)

I find your idea really attractive; for apart from the two single remote images of Norway and the fleet, the audience doesn't need to *think* about anything: they *see* everything else, it all happens, instead of their imaginations being chased around the whole world, as would otherwise be the case. (227)

– The other motivation appears to be the endeavor to present a play which can be appreciated as an aesthetic whole – which German audiences, according to Wilhelm and Serlo, were not used to doing:

Wenig Deutsche, und vielleicht nur wenige Menschen aller neuern Nationen, haben Gefühl für ein ästhetisches Ganze; sie loben und tadeln nur stellenweise [...] (366)

There are few Germans, and perhaps only a few people from all the nations of today, who have feeling for an aesthetic whole; they only praise and blame in a partial way [...]. (225)

In other words, the theatre is to provide some kind of aesthetic education to the German public. They should learn to appreciate a well-regulated work of art, and in this way educate themselves to regulate their own lives according to the principles of order and beauty. This motivation is definitely informed by French theatrical practice, as well as the ‘classical doctrine’ of French theatre which is based on the notion of the three unities of action, time, and place, which was ascribed to Aristotle.

While the production of *Hamlet* is successful, the underlying conflicts will surface again in discussions between Serlo and Wilhelm. Serlo provides a theory of the relationship between the theatre and real life:

Eine jede gute Sozietät existiert nur unter gewissen Bedingungen, so auch ein gutes Theater. Gewisse Manieren und Redensarten, gewisse Gegenstände und Arten des Betragens müssen ausgeschlossen sein. Man wird nicht ärmer, wenn man sein Hauswesen zusammenzieht.

Sie waren hierüber mehr oder weniger einig und uneinig. Wilhelm und die meisten waren auf der Seite des englischen, Serlo und einige auf der Seite des französischen Theaters. (408)

[...] Every good society exists only under certain conditions, and the same is true of a good theatre. Certain manners and ways of speech must be barred, as must certain objects and ways of behaving. One does not become poorer when one concentrates one’s domestic concerns.

They were more or less in agreement and not in agreement with this. Wilhelm and the majority were on the side of the English style of theatre, while Serlo and some others supported French theatre. (261)

Serlo here refers to the doctrine of *bienséance* [good taste]. In classical French theatre certain words and phrases which were considered vulgar were avoided. In learning to appreciate these rules and limits, Serlo contends, audiences can also learn self-control, and, we could add, conformity to the standards of bourgeois society.

Wilhelm – and Goethe – were certainly in agreement with Serlo as to the educative function of the theatre (cf. Sharpe, “Weimar theatre,” 123). What they disagreed about was the direction this education should take. Should the emphasis lie in conforming to certain rules, as in French culture, or in cultivating an independent, proud, and noble identity, as was ascribed to Shakespeare? While the outcome appears as a kind of synthesis of English and French theatrical patterns and traditions, education, or ‘Bildung,’ is certainly among the most important functions ascribed to the theatre, to a much greater extent than in seventeenth-century French literary discourse, let alone English Renaissance discussions. The quest for emancipation from the overpowering influence of French culture which dominated German discussion from the middle of the

eighteenth century onwards (cf. Sharpe, "Weimar theatre," 116-17, 122), can also be understood as a juncture in the class struggle. Individual character formation parallels the establishment of a distinct cultural identity for the new ruling class; no longer a world of princes, counts, and barons, this new sphere included the educated upper middle class, or the *Bildungsbürgertum*, people who would pursue clerical work or an academic profession during the day and in the evening go to the theatre or a concert or read a work of literature.

The *Hamlet* project delineated in *Wilhelm Meister* can be considered a fictional account of the work Goethe, together with Schiller and some other important intellectuals and poets, was engaged in in the service of the Duke of Weimar (for more on the paradox of little, insignificant Weimar becoming a center of world culture cf. Borchmeyer 45-53), whose own cultural habitus certainly did not conform with aristocratic standards (Borchmeyer 69-70). More specifically, Goethe's activities as director and reformer of the Weimar theatre (cf. Safranski 437-440, Sharpe, "Weimar theatre") are part of the "Weimarer Klassik" in which a reception of Shakespeare played a major role. What went on in the Weimar court had an enormous impact on the formation of a "geistige Lebensform" [mental way of life] (Borchmeyer 45) proper to the new ruling classes of Germany. In his own quest for "Bildung," published and propagated in his autobiographical writings (cf. e.g. Mahoney), Goethe became a role model for nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German intellectuals (cf. Sharpe, "Introduction" 2). To this day, people belonging to the *Bildungsbürgertum* may demonstrate their cultural identity by displaying sets of the collected works of Goethe, and sometimes Shakespeare, in their drawing rooms. Frequenting the theatre as well as the opera and the concert hall still serves as a hallmark of education which distinguishes attendees from the mass of the uneducated.

In recent decades, however, attempts have been made to use the cultural capital offered by Shakespeare to map out a new cultural identity for people who do not belong either to the *Bildungsbürgertum* or to the cultural tradition of a country of Western Europe. One of these projects is certainly the recent "Globe to Globe" *Hamlet*. The statement of intent made by Dominic Dromgoole, the director, which was published on the project's website, can certainly be compared to those voiced in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*:

Globe to Globe *Hamlet* was created with the aim of performing *Hamlet* to as many people as possible, in as diverse a range of places as possible. The central principle of the tour is that Shakespeare can entertain and speak to anyone, no matter where they are on earth, and that no country or people are not better off for the lively presence of *Hamlet*.

Like Wilhelm in Goethe's novel, Dromgoole emphasizes the capacity of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to cross cultural boundaries, and, again like Wilhelm, he emphasizes the educational function of the play.

The performance records published on the website do indeed appear to corroborate the idea that Shakespeare can 'break boundaries' and 'push back borders': The Globe company managed to stage *Hamlet* in places as foreign and diverse as Saudi-Arabia, Somaliland, and civil-war ridden Ukraine, and invariably received praise and encouragement.

A crucial difference with the project recorded in Goethe's novel, however, should not be overlooked: If the Globe company managed to tour 197 countries in the years 2014 to 2016, this is evidently due to the worldwide cultural prestige the Stratford dramatist acquired by the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is not a single record of a shock experienced because of the structure or content of the play. In eighteenth-century Germany, however, Wilhelm and his friends staged Shakespeare to an audience who, while they had heard little or nothing of the English dramatist, entertained a definite and rather specific idea of what a theatrical play should be like. It was the very shock over Shakespeare's "strange monsters" which brought about Wilhelm's fascination with Shakespeare's plays and gave a new direction to his life and attitudes; and it was the shock in store for the audiences which may have led to the development of a new cultural "habitus." Today, however, Shakespeare's plays have apparently lost their capacity to shock readers and audiences in the same way, and we may wonder if the plays' emancipatory potential is as powerful as it was in eighteenth-century Germany.

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