

## THE KNOWLEDGE OF SHAKESPEARE ON THE CONTINENT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

THE question of continental interest in Shakespeare during the period immediately preceding the publication of Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques*, was discussed, for Germany, by R. Genée in his valuable *Shakespeare in Deutschland* more than thirty years ago; for France more recently by J. J. Jusserand<sup>1</sup>. My object in the following notes is to add some facts to the evidence already collected, and to indicate the relations in which several of the items stand to their English sources and to each other.

The earliest mention of the name Shakespeare in a book printed on the continent, is to be found in the *Unterricht von der Teutschen Sprache und Poesie*, published at Kiel in 1682 by the famous 'Polyhistor,' Daniel Georg Morhof:

Der John Dryden hat gar wohl gelahrt von der Dramaticâ Poesi geschriben. Die Engelländer die er hierin anführt, sein Shakespeare, Fletcher, Beaumont, von welchen ich nichts gesehen habe<sup>2</sup>.

And in Adrien Baillet's *Jugemens des Savans*, printed at Paris in 1685-86, the name Shakespeare appears for the first time in a French book, it being included in a list of the principal poets of the British islands<sup>3</sup>.

But for both France and Germany the first knowledge of the English poet which went beyond the mere name, was drawn from Sir

<sup>1</sup> R. Genée, *Geschichte der Shakespeare'schen Dramen in Deutschland*, Leipzig, 1870, and J. J. Jusserand, *Shakespeare en France sous l'ancien régime*, Paris, 1898 (English translation, London, 1899), where references to other literature on the subject will be found.

<sup>2</sup> In the chapter *Von der Engelländer Poeterey*, p. 250 (the passage is quoted by A. Koberstein, *Vermischte Aufsätze*, Leipzig, 1858, pp. 163 ff., and by Genée, p. 60). The name 'Shakespeare' also occurs in the summary of Morhof's chapter (p. 227) and in a quotation from Camden's *Remains* (p. 232). In a subsequent chapter *Von den Schauspielen*, Jonson and Milton are mentioned, not Shakespeare. Later editions of the *Unterricht* appeared in 1700 and 1718.

<sup>3</sup> Jusserand, p. 141 (English translation, p. 176). On a still earlier ms. notice of Shakespeare in France, see p. 137 (170).

William Temple's widely-read *Essay on Poetry*. A French translation of this essay appeared in the *Œuvres mêlées* of Temple, published at Utrecht in 1693 and frequently in subsequent years. Here (p. 366) occurs the statement: 'Je ne suis point étonné de voir jeter des cris & répandre des larmes à beaucoup de Gens, lors qu'ils lisent certaines Tragédies de *Schake-spear*.' Here, too, was to be read that claim for the superiority of the English dramatist to all others ancient or modern, in the quality of 'humeur,' Shakespeare having been the first to introduce it on the English stage.

The second reference to Shakespeare in a book written by a German is based on Temple. It occurs in a tract, *Vindiciae nominis Germanici, contra quosdam obtrectatores Gallos* (Amsterdam, 1694), one of the many replies to the famous charge brought against the Germans by Bouhours, that they were deficient in 'esprit.' The tract takes the form of a letter by J. F. C. (i.e. J. F. Cramer<sup>1</sup>) to F. B. Carpzow. On p. 35 is to be found the following:

Quantam autem poetices vernaculae facultatem habeant Angli, non ita pridem demonstravit Templeus Eques...Sidnejum, Equitem Anglum, omnibus & Anglis & exteris Poëtis, qui aut nostra aut majorum nostrorum aetate ingenii laude praestiterunt, antepone longo intervallo; Spencerum comparare cum Petrarcha & Ronsardo? Shakespearium cum Molerio, in genere comico; & in ludicra dictione, Joannem Minceum, Equitem, praeferre etiam Tasso & Scarroni, vir complurium linguarum & omnium hujus generis elegantiarum callentissimus non dubitat<sup>2</sup>.

In January, 1702, the *Acta Eruditorum*, that magnificent monument of German learning, industry and cosmopolitan literary interests, had a little more information to offer on the subject of Shakespeare. In a review of Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poetry*, the critic, in summarising the work, quotes (p. 38) the following passage, which could hardly have failed to impress the German mind:

Tantis enim eum laudibus effert, ut si non ingenio, certe arte superatum ab eo putet ipsum Shakespearium, qui ut eruditus minus fuit, ita ingenio modernos omnes Poëtas & tantum non veteres quoque superasse fertur, ut Halesius nihil uspiam apud Poëtas pulcrum exstare judicaverit, quod non multo elegantius aliquo in dramate expresserit Shakespearium. Ne vero solus sapere videretur Johnson, cuncta Beaumontii censurae subjecit, qui ut post Shakespearium inclaruit, ita dotes insitas magis studio percoluit...

<sup>1</sup> See *Recueil de Littérature, de Philosophie et d'Histoire*, Amsterdam, 1730, p. 14, also the article on Cramer in the *Allgem. deutsche Biographie*.

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to the Staatsbibliothek in Munich for helping me to trace this interesting pamphlet; but there is also a copy in the British Museum. It was reviewed in the *Acta Eruditorum* for 1895, p. 39 (cp. Hettner, *Literaturgesch. d. 18. Jahrh.* 4, III. i, p. 163), where the statement with reference to the English poets is repeated: '...et inter Anglos quidem eminere Sidneium, Spencerum, Shakespearium, Minceum, teste Equite de Temple.' 'Minceus' is the once famous Sir John Mennes (in the French translation of Temple, 'le chevalier Jean Mince').

In the course of the next few years the continent seems to have made little progress in its knowledge of Shakespeare. In 1708 the *Journal des Sçavans*, in a preliminary announcement of Rowe's edition of Shakespeare, mentioned that this was 'le plus fameux des Poètes Anglois pour le tragique<sup>1</sup>,' and, about the same time, a Hamburg poet, Barthold Feind, again falling back on Temple as his authority, wrote in his *Gedancken von der Opera*:

Mr. le Chevalier *Temple* in seinem mehrmahls angeführten *Essai de la Poësie* erzehlet p. 374, daß etliche, wenn sie des renommirten Englischen Tragici *Shakespear* Trauer-Spiele verlesen hören, offi lautes Halses an zu schreyen gefangen, und häufige Thränen vergossen<sup>2</sup>.

As far as the general public was concerned, a more important word in praise of Shakespeare was that in A. Boyer's *Dialogues familiers* (in English and French) appended to various widely-used grammars for the use of French and English learners of the respective languages, by Boyer himself and by G. Miège. The statement is (I quote only the French version):

Pour ce qui est des Poètes, il n'y a point de Nation qui puisse entrer en comparaison avec la nôtre. Il est vray; car nous avons un *Pindare* & un *Horace*, en *Cowley*, & en *Oldham*; un *Terence* en *Ben. Johnson*; un *Sophocle*, & un *Euripide* en *Shakespear*; un *Homere* & un *Virgile* en *Milton*; & presque tous ces Poètes ensemble en *Dryden* seul<sup>3</sup>.

The biographical lexicons published on the continent in the closing years of the seventeenth century had completely ignored the existence of Shakespeare, even when they devoted comparatively long notices to Milton<sup>4</sup>. The first compiler to repair the omission was J. F. Buddeus, who in his *Allgemeines historisches Lexicon*, published at Leipzig in four volumes in 1709, inserted (vol. iv. p. 428) the following notice of Shakespeare:

Shakespear, (William) geboren in Stratton an der Avon, in der Engländischen Provinz Warwickshire, war ein berühmter poet, ob er wohl keine sonderbare gelehrsamkeit hatte, weßwegen

<sup>1</sup> *Supplément du Journal des Sçavans* (Oct. 1708), p. 396. Two years later the same periodical announced the appearance of the edition: 'Le Sieur Tonson Libraire de cette Ville, commence à vendre la nouvelle édition des Oeuvres de Shakees Pear en six vol. in 8°. M. Row l'a revûe & corrigée, & il y a joint une Dissertation tres-curieuse sur la Vie & les Ouvrages de ce Poëte' (1710, p. 110). Both passages are quoted by M. Jusserand.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by both Koberstein and Genée. It is to be found in B. Feind's *Deutsche Gedichte*, i. Stade, 1708, p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> It is doubtful when this dialogue, which is not to be found in the older editions of the grammars, was first published; it would appear not to have been written until 1705. See A. Boyer, *The Compleat French-Master*, 5th ed., 1710 (Brit. Mus.), p. 377. Jusserand quotes it from a Grammar of 1715.

<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare's name is, for instance, not to be found in Bayle's *Dictionnaire*, in Moréri's *Supplément* (1716), nor even in the German translation of Bayle, published by Gottsched and his circle at Leipzig as late as 1741-44.

man sich desto mehr über ihn verwundern mußte. Er hatte ein scherzhafftes gemüthe, kunte aber doch auch sehr ernsthaft seyn, und vortreffliche tragödien und comödien schreiben. Er hatte viel sinnreiche und subtile streitigkeiten mit Ben-Johnson, wiewohl keiner von beyden viel damit gewann.

It is strange that this interesting notice should have hitherto escaped attention, as the *Lexicon*, which was subsequently revised by J. C. Iselin, father of the better-known historical writer, Isaak Iselin, reached a third edition in 1730. The source of the notice, it should be added, is Thomas Fuller's *History of the Worthies of England* (1662).

In 1715 the Leipzig scholar, J. B. Mencke (or rather, Ch. G. Jöcher, who was the real compiler), with the unscrupulousness which appears to be the right of all dictionary-makers, appropriated almost literally Buddeus's notice for his *Compendiöses Gelehrten-Lexicon* (Leipzig, 1715). But for the first sentence he substituted: 'Shakespear (Wilh.) ein Engl. Dramaticus, geb. zu Stratford 1564. war schlecht auferzogen, und verstund kein Latein, jedoch brachte erß in der Poesie sehr hoch.' And he added the further information: 'Er st. zu Stratford 1616. 23 Apr. im 53. Jahre. Seine Schau- und Trauer-Spiele, deren er sehr viel geschrieben, sind in VI. Theilen 1709, zu London zusammen gedruckt, und werden sehr hoch gehalten<sup>1</sup>.' This notice was reprinted without alteration in the subsequent editions of the *Lexicon* of 1725 and 1733; and when, in the years 1750—53, Jöcher published as a fourth and much enlarged edition of Mencke, his *Allgemeines Gelehrten-Lexicon*, the only addition to this naive account of Shakespeare was a mention of the fact that: 'Seine Werke sind auch zu London An. 1733 in sieben Voll. von Lud. Theobald mit viel critischen und andern Anmerkungen von neuen an das Licht gestellet worden, allwo auch von ihm mehrere Nachricht anzutreffen.' The fifth edition of Jöcher's work (1784—1822), for which Adelung and Rotermund were responsible, did not reach the letter S.

Between Mencke's *Lexicon* of 1715, and the next reference to Shakespeare in a German book—omitting the repetitions in the later editions of Buddeus-Iselin and Mencke and of Morhof's *Unterricht*—there is a gap of seventeen years, which, notwithstanding diligent search, I have been unable to fill up. The silence in Germany is remarkable, for there is no doubt that, in these years, through the medium of French sources of information, Shakespeare's name was becoming increasingly familiar to the continent. Of these French

<sup>1</sup> Mencke himself possessed the edition of 1709 (*Biblioteca Menckiana*, Leipzig, 1723, p. 562). His notice is quoted both by Koberstein and Genée.

sources<sup>1</sup>, three were of paramount importance for the spread of a knowledge of English literature: the French translation of the *Spectator* (1714), the *Dissertation* on English poetry in the *Journal littéraire* (1717), and Muralt's *Lettres sur les Anglois* (1725).

In its French garb the *Spectator* had an extraordinary vogue on the continent. The first edition appeared at Amsterdam in 1714 under the title: *Le Spectateur ou le Socrate moderne, où l'on voit un portrait naïf des moeurs de ce siècle. Traduit de l'Anglois*—and forty years later, it seemed still to be as popular as ever<sup>2</sup>. Even, however, under the most favourable circumstances, the *Spectator* was not a work which could have materially helped to familiarise a foreign people with Shakespeare, and its value in this respect was still further diminished by the fact that all the early French editions were much abbreviated. More than half the references to Shakespeare in the *Spectator* do not appear in French at all, and of the remainder, the majority are mere passing allusions or quotations. The most definite pronouncement, and one that was likely to arrest attention, is in the paper of July 1, 1712, in which Addison discusses the 'fairly way of writing':

Entre les *Anglois*, SHAKESPEAR l'emporte infiniment au-dessus de tous les autres. Cette noble extravagance de l'Esprit, qu'il possédoit au suprême degré, le rendoit capable de toucher ce foible superstitieux de l'Imagination de ses Lecteurs, & de réussir en de certains endroits, où il n'étoit soutenu que par la seule force de son propre Génie. Il y a quelque chose de si bizarre, & avec tout cela de si grave, dans les Discours de ses Phantômes, de ses Fées, de ses Sorciers & de ses autres Personnages chimériques, qu'on ne sauroit s'empêcher de les croire naturels, quoique nous n'ayons aucune Règle fixe pour en bien juger; & qu'on est contraint d'avouer, que, s'il y a tels Etres au Monde, il est fort probable qu'ils parleroient & agiroient de la manière dont il les a représentez.

On the first occasion when the name Shakespeare occurs ('notre fameux Shakespeare,' No. 17), the translator, who shows throughout an intimate familiarity with English conditions and affairs, adds a footnote explaining: 'Il a écrit des Tragédies, dont la plupart des Scènes sont admirables; mais il n'étoit pas tout-à-fait exact dans ses Plans, ni dans la justesse de la Composition<sup>3</sup>.'

Much better adapted for spreading a knowledge of Shakespeare

<sup>1</sup> I omit the minor notices, as I have few to add to those mentioned by M. Jusserand. See an instructive note by F. Baldensperger on *La prononciation française du nom de Shakespeare* in the *Archiv für neuere Sprachen und Litteraturen*, cxv. (1905), pp. 399 ff.

<sup>2</sup> According to L. P. Betz (*Bodmer-Denkschrift*, Zürich, 1900, p. 238), editions were published at Amsterdam in 1714, 1716-18, 1722-30, 1731-36, 1744, 1754-55; at Paris, in 1716-26, 1754 ('corrigée et augmentée') and 1754-55. The British Museum possesses an edition dated Amsterdam, 1746-50. The German translation (by Frau Gottsched), *Der Zuschauer*, dates only from 1739-43.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Jusserand, p. 142 (178).

than the *Spectateur*, although naturally appealing to a more limited public, was the *Dissertation sur la poésie angloise* which appeared in volume IX of the *Journal littéraire* (1717), pp. 157—216. After touching briefly on Prior, Butler, Rochester, Dryden, and discussing the rhymeless verse of the English, which he regards as no better than good prose, the author of this article goes on to analyse at considerable length *Paradise Lost*; he also criticises the *Faery Queen* and Addison's *Campaign*. From the epic he turns to the comedy, reproving the English writers for their coarseness and vulgarity, their unscrupulous thefts from the French; even the writers of tragedies are not free from blame in this respect. He deprecates the English contempt for the 'rules,' and this naturally brings him to Shakespeare (p. 202):

Il est probable que tous ceux qui voudront bien réfléchir sur l'essence de la Tragédie, admettront avec nous ces Regles comme les principales, & comme celles sans lesquelles une Tragédie n'est pas Tragédie. Sur ce pied-là ce ne sont point des Tragédies que les Pièces de Théâtre faites par *Shakspear*, que la plupart des Anglois regardent encore, comme le plus admirable écrivain dans ce genre-là, & à qui dans tous les prologues de ceux qui l'ont suivi, on dresse des Autels comme à un Dieu de Théâtre.

But this 'divin Shakspear' ignored the rules of his art in the most reprehensible way; and the incongruous introduction of the gravedigger scene in *Hamlet*, which shocked Voltaire, is quoted as an illustration. Besides *Hamlet*, the critic mentions *Richard III*, as an example of how 'le grand *Shakspear* a traité toute l'Histoire d'Angleterre, depuis *Guillaume le Conquerant* jusqu'au Regne sous lequel il a vécu.' *Othello* is accorded what is relatively the most detailed analysis, but the critic regards this tragedy from an even more superior standpoint. The article finishes with a few words on contemporary writers, such as Philips, Rowe and Addison. On the whole, this dissertation was the first real introduction of the English poet to the continent, and, until Voltaire published his *Lettres philosophiques* in 1734, it remained virtually the only source of detailed information.

What the third authority on English matters, the Swiss writer B at de Muralt, in his *Lettres sur les Anglois et les Franois* (1725), had to say on the subject of Shakespeare, is of very minor importance, he being more interested in the English adaptor of *L'Avare*, 'Schadvel'; but his views on Shakespeare are worth quoting, if only because his book penetrated into circles which had no access to the *Journal littéraire*. The first edition of the *Lettres* was published at Bern in 1725, the second—nominally, at least—at Cologne, in 1727<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See O. von Greyerz, *B at de Muralt*, Frauenfeld, 1888; Greyerz has also edited the *Lettres sur les Anglais et les Franais*, Bern, 1897.

Si les Anglois, (he says in the second letter), pouvoient se resoudre à y être plus simples, & à étudier davantage le Langage de la Nature, ils excelleront sans doute dans le Tragique par dessus tous les Peuples de l'Europe. L'Angleterre est un País de Passions & de Catastrophes, jusques là que *Schakspear*, un de leurs meilleurs anciens Poètes, a mis une grande partie de leur Histoire en Tragédies. D'ailleurs, le Génie de la Nation est pour le Sérieux; leur langue est forte et succinte, telle qu'il la faut pour exprimer les passions. Ainsi leurs Tragédies ont d'excellens endroits, & un grand nombre; mais elles ont les mêmes défauts que leurs Comédies, & je pense quelques autres de plus.

With such sources of knowledge more or less accessible, the scanty paragraph which was inserted in the second edition of the *Engeländische Kirch- und Schulen-Staat* (1732) by the Hanoverian theologian H. L. Bentheim, seems somewhat belated; the notice, which is again taken from Fuller's *Worthies*, will be found on p. 976:

§ 151. William Shakespear, kam zu Stradford in Warwickshire auf diese Welt. Seine Gelehrtheit war sehr schlecht, und daher verwunderte man sich um destomehr, daß er ein fürtrefflicher Poeta war. Er hatte einen sinnreichen Kopff, voller Schertz, und war in Tragoedien und Comoedien so glücklich, daß er auch einen Heraclitum zum Lachen, und einen Democritum zum Weinen bringen konnte<sup>1</sup>.

The earliest reference to Shakespeare which I have been able to trace in Italian sources, has something more than Italian interest. It is to be found in a letter which prefaces the tragedy *Il Cesare* by Antonio Conti, published in 1726. Conti was a cultured Venetian abbé, who, attracted mainly by the brilliancy of English scientific discovery and the fame of the Royal Society, came to London in 1715. He was provided with excellent introductions and was soon on friendly terms with the English scholars and scientists of the day, including Newton. In 1716, when he went over to Germany with the English court, he was charged with the important mission of mediating between the English philosopher and Leibniz; but before he reached Hanover Leibniz was dead. Of delicate health and constantly afflicted with asthma, he found that the air of London, rendered heavy 'per la mistura delle particelle del carbon di terra,' did not agree with him, and on the advice of friends and doctors, he gave up his scientific studies and retired to the country. As a residence he selected 'Kinsington,' where he enjoyed the intimacy of the Duke of Buckingham, and the latter reawakened in him those literary interests which he had, so far, not had time to cultivate in England. The Duke showed him his tragedies

<sup>1</sup> See also Genée, p. 62. In the chapter on Oxford there is another mention of the poet with reference to Otway: 'Thomas Otway, ein guter Poete und belobter Comoedien-Schreiber; welcher aber den Shakspear fein auszusprechen wußte' (p. 435). The first edition of the *Kirch- und Schulen-Staat* (Leipzig, 1694) contains no reference to Shakespeare, although Milton, Butler and Chaucer are mentioned. The author, it ought to be added, died in 1723.

on the subject of Caesar and Brutus—adaptations of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*—and Conti's ambition was fired to write a similar work. The first result was *Il Cesare*, which, however, was not finished until after Conti returned to France in 1718. In Paris he read the drama aloud in several literary circles, and copies of it in manuscript passed from hand to hand. Ultimately Cardinal Bentivoglio, then the Papal Nuncio in Paris, without consulting the author, had the tragedy printed and in 1726 it appeared in a handsome quarto at Faenza<sup>1</sup>. It is in a letter to Jacopo Martelli that Conti explains the reasons which induced him to write the drama and also expresses his views on Shakespeare. The most characteristic passage is the following (p. 54 f.):

Sasper è il Cornelio degl' Inglesi, ma molto più irregolare del Cornelio, sebbene al pari di lui pregno di grandi idee, e di nobili sentimenti. Restringendomi qui a parlare del suo Cesare, il Sasper lo fa morire al terzo atto; il rimanente della Tragedia è occupato dall' aringa di Marc-antonio al Popolo indi dalle guerre e dalla morte di Cassio e di Bruto. Può maggiormente violarsi l' unità del tempo, dell' azione, e del luogo? Ma gl' Inglesi disprezzarono sino al Catone le regole d' Aristotile per la ragione, che la Tragedia è fatta per piacere, e chi ottima ella è allora che piace; contenesse alla cento azioni diverse, e trasportasse personaggi dall' Europa nell' Asia, e finissero vecchi, ove cominciarono fanciulli. Così pensava cred' io la maggior parte degl' Italiani del 1600 guasti dalle Commedie Spagnuole; e mi maraviglio, come in quel secolo niuno si sia avvisato di tradurre in Italiano le Commedie e Tragedie Inglesi, colme d' accidenti come le Spagnuole, ma certamente con caratteri più naturali e leggiadri. L' Italia avrebbe se non imparata tutta la storia de i Re d' Inghilterra, che da' loro poeti è stata posta sul teatro, ogni vita di Re dando materia ad una tragedia.

The importance of this statement is that here, for the first time, we find a critic outside of England not merely regarding Shakespeare with respect, but hinting at the possibility of a continental nation learning from him<sup>2</sup>. That Conti's own *Cesare*, excellent though it is, has nothing Shakespearian about it, does not impair his argument, and his words fell on fruitful ground both in France and Germany. In all probability, this tragedy indicated to Voltaire how the 'drunken savage' might be trimmed and docked; and even if *Il Cesare* was not the immediate model of *La Mort de César*, it at least corroborated Voltaire's

<sup>1</sup> A biography of Conti is prefaced to the second volume of his *Prose e Poesie*, Venice 1756. See also the admirable series of articles on Conti by G. Brognoligo in the *Ateneo Veneto*, 1893-94.

<sup>2</sup> The explanation of this attitude is partly to be sought in the strained relations existing at the time between Italian critics and the representatives of French pseudo-classicism. See Ch. Dejob, *Études sur la tragédie*, Paris 1897, p. 107 ff. and A. Galletti, *Le teorie drammatiche e la tragedia nel secolo XVIII*, I. Cremona, 1901. To Conti and the influence of his critical views, I propose to return in a subsequent article. Meanwhile, it is perhaps worth while correcting an error in Prof. Saintsbury's *History of Criticism*, where (vol. III, p. 23) to Conti is ascribed the *Paragone della Poesia tragica* published by Bodmer in 1732. The author of that book was not, however, Conti, but Calepio—Pietro de' Conti di Calepio—whom even the British Museum authorities have erroneously catalogued under 'Conti.'

choice of *Julius Caesar* as the drama best adapted for the purposes of introducing Shakespeare to his countrymen<sup>1</sup>. Further, the words just quoted from Conti's introductory letter have also, it seems to me, left their mark on the first edition of the *Lettres philosophiques*, where Voltaire, in introducing the English poet, wrote (Letter xviii): 'Shakespear, qui passoit pour le Corneille des Anglois, fleurissoit à peu près dans le tems de Lopez de Véga.' To mention Corneille in the same line with Shakespeare was obviously not in accordance with Voltaire's maturer views<sup>2</sup>, and in the later editions of the *Lettres philosophiques*, he substituted for the objectionable comparison, the words: 'Shakespear que les Anglois prennent pour un Sophocle, fleurissoit etc.'

Conti's interest in Shakespeare had also a sequel in German literature. It offers an explanation to a puzzle which has long been the subject of conjecture and controversy. The Swiss critic Bodmer, in the prefatory *Nachrichten* to the first edition of his translation of *Paradise Lost* (1732), had mentioned 'Shakespear der Engelländische Sophocles,' and a few years earlier, had had the opportunity of making the acquaintance of Shakespeare in the original<sup>3</sup>; but it is more than doubtful if he took advantage—or knew enough English to take advantage—of that opportunity. In 1740, however, in his *Critische Abhandlung von dem Wunderbaren in der Poesie* (1740) and in his *Critische Betrachtungen der poetischen Gemähde der Dichter* (1741), he adopted Conti's Italianised orthography, and called the English poet 'Sasper' and 'Saspar.' Now that the origin of Bodmer's freak is clear, it seems to me that the only inference to be drawn is that Shakespeare was, at the best, a very shadowy personage to Bodmer, a poet for whom he had little use except as a means with which to clench an argument; and for such purposes it was immaterial to him whether he called him 'Sasper' or 'Shakespear<sup>4</sup>.' Indeed, keeping Bodmer's very mediocre literary

<sup>1</sup> See Voltaire's preface to the drama, and his letter to Desfontaines of Nov. 14, 1735 (*Oeuvres compl.*, 33, p. 551).

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Letter to M. de Cideville, Nov. 3, 1735: 'C'est Shakespeare, le Corneille de Londres, grand fou d'ailleurs, et ressemblant plus souvent à Gilles qu'à Corneille' (*Oeuvres complètes*, 33, p. 545).

<sup>3</sup> In a letter of January 28, 1724, to his friend L. Zellweger: 'Was ihr mit von Congreve, Cibber, Addison, Shakspear, und Dryden gefant, darvon werde ich Euch betreffend wie ich diese schrifften ansehe, ein ander Mahl Rechenschaft geben' (H. Bodmer, *Die Anfänge des zürcherischen Milton*, in *Studien zur Literaturgeschichte, M. Bernays gewidmet*, Leipzig, 1893, p. 193).

<sup>4</sup> For the various solutions that have been suggested in explanation of Bodmer's 'Sasper' see Th. Vetter, *Zürich als Vermittlerin englischer Literatur*, Zürich, 1891, pp. 15 ff., and the same writer's contribution to the *Bodmer-Denkschrift*, p. 330. It is interesting to note that, just as Conti made 'Sasper' out of 'Shakespeare,' so he wrote 'Sasfburis' for 'Shaftesbury' and 'Uctsonio' for 'Hutcheson' (*Prose e Poesie*, I. (1739), Preface).

attainments in view, it is perhaps not too much to say that in 1740-41, he had no definite conviction as to how the poet's name was spelled, and was as ready to accept Conti's authority as that of the French *Spectateur*. One thing, at least, is clear, and it is a point which some German critics have been inclined to overlook: there is no evidence in these critical writings to prove that Bodmer at this time knew anything more of Shakespeare than was to be learned from these two sources. The only references which seem to imply a knowledge of individual plays (*Von dem Wunderbaren*, p. 246, and *Poetische Gemählde*, p. 170 f.) are direct translations from the *Spectator*.

While Bodmer was still writing blindly about 'Sasper' another German, Kaspar Wilhelm von Borck, who from 1735 to 1738 was Prussian ambassador in London, had completed the first literal translation of a Shakespearian drama, and again the choice fell on *Julius Caesar*. Borck's *Der Tod des Julius Cäsar* in Alexandrines appeared at Berlin in 1741. Possibly indeed, this translation may be regarded as a direct challenge to Voltaire, whose *Mort de César* was translated into German by J. F. Scharffenstein in 1737. Both Borck's translation, however, and Bodmer's knowledge of Shakespeare fall outside the limits I have set myself, and must be reserved for later consideration. Meanwhile, the fact is worth chronicling that, within a few years—between 1726 and 1741—three versions, in three of the chief languages of Europe, based on one and the same play of Shakespeare's, carried not merely the English poet's name, but something—and in the German case, a very great deal—of his art, to the nations of the continent.

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