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SHAKESPEARE ON THE GERMAN STAGE

VOLUME I: 1586–1914

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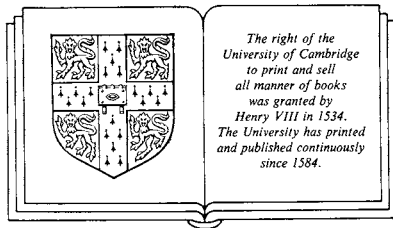
SHAKESPEARE
ON THE
GERMAN STAGE

Volume I: 1586–1914

SIMON WILLIAMS

Professor of Dramatic Art

University of California at Santa Barbara



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For
Euzetta,
with love

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Preface

There is good reason for regarding Shakespeare as having exercised the most retrograde of influences on the development of English theatre. His monumental presence has for centuries crippled the imagination of playwrights, who have either imitated him inadequately or have been driven to feats of arcane originality in attempts to escape his influence. In Germany, however, Shakespeare has released rather than disabled the imagination of creative writers. Indeed there can be few writers who have had as benign an influence upon a culture not their own as Shakespeare has had upon German-speaking Europe. From the early plays of *Sturm und Drang* through to the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht and contemporary German playwrights, Shakespeare has constantly served German playwrights as a model that has encouraged them to produce not slavish imitations of his work but a drama that has its own identity and life. His presence in the German repertoire has grown over the years. Perhaps it is greater today than it has been at any time over the last two centuries. A brief glance at the yearly performance statistics of German theatres issued by periodicals such as *Theater Heute* will show that, despite changes in taste, Shakespeare, rather than Goethe, Schiller or Brecht, is usually the most frequently performed playwright in any given season.

So substantial is the contribution made to German culture by Shakespeare's plays, it would be impossible to do it justice within the limits of a relatively short book. Hence the focus of this study is the adaptation and performance of Shakespeare's plays on the German stage before the modern period. Nevertheless, it would be incomplete without some attention being paid to the crucial impact of Shakespeare on German critical thinking and on Germany's great contribution to Shakespeare criticism, not only because such material is of consequence in itself, but because it can also lead us to an appreciation of both the achievement and the shortcomings of the German theatre in rising to the challenge of Shakespeare's plays. The point of gravity of this study is, therefore, the remarkable rise of interest in Shakespeare that occurred at the end of the

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eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. This was the period during which Shakespeare's works were first absorbed by German critics, first imitated by Germany's playwrights, first translated into German by writers of great accomplishment, and first staged by Germany's major theatre companies. As this was the classical period of German literature, Shakespeare has acquired symbolic status as a nurturing presence during the most fruitful and crucial stage of the country's cultural growth.

Centring this historical study of theatrical performance around a critical and literary debate that occurred over a period of approximately sixty years, from 1750 to 1810, accounts for the seemingly odd, unchronological organisation of the material. Only two chapters, chapters 2 and 10, do not draw significantly from material from this period. All other chapters either explore Shakespeare during the German classical period or discuss how the vision of Shakespeare during this period influenced later performances and productions of his work. Even chapter 10 discusses performances that, as I have argued, represent a culmination of a theatrical process begun back in the late eighteenth century. So that the reader may acquire some idea of the order of the events through which Shakespeare was assimilated into the German theatre, I have appended a brief timeline at the end of the book.

Some chapters have been adapted, often considerably, from previously published articles. Parts of chapters 1 and 5 are based on 'Shakespeare and Weimar Classicism: A Study in Cross-Purposes', *Essays in Theatre*, 5, 1 (November 1986), 27–46; some of the material for chapter 4 was drawn from 'The "Great Guest" Arrives: Early German *Hamlets*', *Theatre Journal*, 38, 3 (October, 1986), 290–308; chapter 6 was taken in part from 'Shakespeare at the Burgtheater: From Heinrich Anschütz to Josef Kainz', *Shakespeare Survey* 35 (1982), 21–9; and chapter 9 is an extended version of 'The "Shakespeare-Stage" in Germany', which first appeared in *Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage*, ed. Richard Foulkes (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 210–22. I would like to thank both the editors and publishers of the journals and the book for their permission to use this material. Some of the material was also delivered, in 1985 and 1987, in lectures at the Universities of East Anglia, Glasgow, Kent, Manchester, Sheffield, and Warwick, at Portsmouth Polytechnic, and at the Goethe Institut in Glasgow.

I have many to thank for the completion of this book. First, my studies were greatly aided by the Regents of the University of California, who awarded me three consecutive Humanities Fellowships, enabling me to devote three complete summers to this project. I travelled to libraries and archives in Austria and Germany through an award from the University of California Senate Research Committee. I would like to acknowledge the help I have received from Roswitha Flatz, Micaela Giesing, Wolfgang

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Greisenegger, Heinrich Huesmann and Eckehart Nölle, all of whom did everything they could to provide me both with relevant material and the most stimulating comments on my project. I also benefited from the indefatigable help of the staffs of Theater Museum of the University of Cologne, the German Theatre Museum in Munich, the Theatre Collection at the University of Hamburg and the Theatre Collection at the National Library in Vienna. Closer to home, my work was facilitated by Cheryl La Guardia and Kitty Uthe of the Interlibrary Loan Department and Connie Dowell of the Reference Department of UCSB library; they responded readily to some requests, made at the most outrageous short notice. My manuscript was read, in extracts or complete, by Robert Egan, William Grange, Gerhart Hoffmeister, Robert Potter and Mark Rose. Their comments have been more helpful than perhaps they might guess. I would particularly like to acknowledge Bert States, for his companionship, for conversations on Shakespeare, and his acute appreciation of the work of Dingelstedt. I am especially indebted to Sandy Hortmann of the University of Duisburg, first for his marvellous hospitality, secondly for his reading of the final manuscript, and finally for his authorship – he will be completing the companion volume to this one, taking the story of Shakespeare in the German theatre up to the present day. One could not ask for a better co-author.

The dedication indicates to whom I owe everything else.