

The Making of the Romantic Shakespeare
Elizabeth Montagu and Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Research Master Thesis
Comparative Literary Studies
Joke Brasser
jokebrasser@gmail.com
3217477
Utrecht University
June 2012

Supervisor: Dr Birgit Kaiser
Second reader: Dr Barnita Bagchi

Table of Contents

Introduction: Constellations of Criticisms: Reading Shakespeare in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century	3
Introducing the Bluestockings	6
Elizabeth Montagu: “The Romantic Bluestocking”	8
Works Cited	12
Chapter One: English Shakespeare Criticism in the Eighteenth Century	14
Ancients and Moderns	15
Eighteenth-Century Editions of Shakespeare	17
Shakespearean Criticism	21
Shakespeare’s Language	23
Character Criticism	24
Bluestocking Criticism	26
Conclusion	29
Works Cited	30
Chapter Two: Montagu and Coleridge: The Making of the Romantic Shakespeare	33
I. Introduction	33
<i>The Reception History of Montagu’s Essay</i>	34
<i>Shakespeare in Germany</i>	37
<i>The Sturm und Drang Reception of Shakespeare</i>	40
<i>Coleridge’s Shakespeare Lectures</i>	42
II. Montagu and Coleridge: A Comparative Analysis	43
<i>Aim and Method</i>	43
<i>The English Historical Drama</i>	46
<i>The Emergence of the Historical Method: Montagu and Herder</i>	48
<i>Coleridge on the English Historical Drama</i>	54
<i>Dramatic Illusion</i>	57
<i>Shakespeare’s Supernatural Imagination</i>	59
<i>Poetic Judgment and Taste</i>	63
III. Conclusion	66
Works Cited	68
Chapter Three: Reading Elizabeth Montagu	72
Women Critics	73
Elizabeth Montagu in Romantic Criticism	77
Concluding Remarks	79
Works Cited	81
Conclusion	83

Introduction

Constellations of Criticisms: Reading Shakespeare in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century

“Shakespeare [...] was not guilty of much more than often falls to women’s share”
 Aphra Behn, Preface to *The Dutch Lover* (224).¹

“Shakespeares Universalität ist wie der Mittelpunkt der romantischen Kunst”
 Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenäum* fragment 247 (KSFA online).

Our Western canon of literary criticism is still primarily a masculine affair, especially if we focus on its early inception. As is well known, the birth of our modern conception of criticism not only coincided with the making of Shakespeare’s reputation, but Shakespeare moreover became a vehicle for a different kind of criticism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. His plays enabled German and English critics to break away from French neoclassical doctrine, which had dominated literary criticism for more than one hundred years.² Whereas according to the rules of neoclassicism, Shakespeare was held to be an irregular poet, “without knowledge of the best models, the Ancients, to inspire him with an emulation of them,” as Alexander Pope phrased it in 1725 (47), for the Romantics, Shakespeare would become the architect of a unified dramatic form, that was taken as an example for contemporary poetic practice. The German romantics championed Shakespeare as the core of the romantic imagination, in for example, the 247th fragment of the *Athenäum* journal, that moreover presents Dante, Goethe and Shakespeare as “der große Dreiklang der modernen Poesie” (Schlegel, F. KSFA online). “Das Centrum meiner Liebe und Erkenntniß ist Shakspeare’s Geist,” Ludwig Tieck wrote in 1800 (qtd. in Stockinger 379), and for Coleridge, Shakespeare is like “the Spinozistic Deity, an omnipresent creativeness” (*Table Talk* 80). In the context of English literary criticism, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) is the romantic poet and critic whose reputation is bound up with his early nineteenth-century lectures on the national bard. Even modern and contemporary critics argue that “it is impossible to understand Shakespeare criticism to this day, without a familiar acquaintance

¹ This passage from Aphra Behn’s preface to *The Dutch Lover* is also quoted in Eger 2003.

² The English and German emancipation from French neoclassical doctrine, as well as the coming into being of a British national canon “in contrast and opposition to everything French,” should be regarded in the context of the eighteenth-century anti-French sentiment (Ritchie 73).

with Coleridge's lectures and notes" (Eliot, qtd. in Badawi 194). However, changes do not happen overnight, and the romantic defence of Shakespeare stands in relation to the eighteenth century.

In the eighteenth century, other ways of reading Shakespeare came into being and some of these readings have not yet been fully explored. The growing number of both critics and critical interests, starting from the late seventeenth century, is of course, related to the developments in printing that enabled a greater number of people to partake in literary debates (Engell 47). One of those almost forgotten histories is that women were very well represented among the earliest defenders of Shakespeare. In fact, the first critical essay ever to be published on Shakespeare was written by a woman: Margaret Cavendish in 1664, as the editors of *Women Reading Shakespeare* point out (3). Shakespeare was a figure women could identify with, especially in the eighteenth century as Terry Castle argues, since he had the reputation of being a wild, creative genius who lacked knowledge of the classical rules of the drama and was untutored in Latin and Greek (13). Women were likewise excluded from a classical education, but they nevertheless could assume critical authority over literature written in their mother tongue, like Shakespeare's plays (Eger 143). In addition, Terry Castle identifies a "nascent feminism" in many eighteenth-century female defences of the national bard; women's emphasis on the greatness of the productions of Shakespeare's untutored mind implicitly affirms their own creative and critical authority (13-15). Shakespeare thus acquired an important place in the history of women's writing. Even in Virginia Woolf's 20th century feminist essay *A Room of One's Own*, Shakespeare becomes a vehicle to discuss the emancipation of women in the realm of literature. Woolf comes up with the figure of Judith Shakespeare, William's "wonderfully gifted sister" (54), who would never have had the chance to develop her talents like her brother could, because of the conditions of a woman's life in Elizabethan times.

Even if Judith Shakespeare would have been able to become a playwright, the chances are small that her work would have been included into our canon. For a female critic, the prospect of future canonisation is even worse. It is relatively easier for a female artist to gain access to the canon, as certain qualities that are central to our notion of what it means to be an artist, such as sensitivity and expressiveness, tie in with our conception of femininity, whereas those qualities necessary for a critic, such as logic, judgment and the ability to abstract are held to be masculine qualities (Sniader and Beck 79). The Folger Collective of Women Writers points to the fact that

women practiced literary criticism virtually from its establishment as a separate discourse in modern Europe. Yet nearly all anthologies and histories of criticism exclude early women, and nearly all anthologies of early women's writing exclude criticism. (xiii)

They further argue that we therefore need to "revise the genealogy of criticism" (xiii). This is also necessary in the context of Shakespeare criticism. Despite the great number of women writing on Shakespeare in the eighteenth century, historiographies of literary criticism still refuse to credit women's contributions to this genre. Nichol Smith's collection of eighteenth century essays on Shakespeare, for example, does not contain one single essay written by a woman.

In "[Why] Are There No Great Women Critics?" (1979), Sniader and Beck point to the "androcentric bias" of the established literary-critical tradition (79). The authors take as an example Wellek's four-volume *History of Literary Criticism* that is one of the modern standard works in this genre. In the bibliography appended to his *History*, Wellek lists several hundreds of important literary essays. Madame de Staël and Margaret Fuller alone represent women's contribution to one hundred and fifty years of scholarship (81). Sniader and Beck append a list of women critics to their essay that are worthy of further critical investigation. One of the female critics on this list is Elizabeth Montagu, a critic of Shakespeare of whom Beattie wrote in 1785 that she had written "one of the best, most original and most elegant pieces of criticism in our language, or any other" (qtd. in Huchon 154).

Elizabeth Montagu-Robinson (1718-1800), author and literary hostess, was known in her own time as a famous Shakespeare critic, writer of letters and patron of the arts. She and her sister Sarah (who would later become a novelist)³ received an education in classical and English history and they learned Latin, French and Italian, which made an exceptionally good education for girls at that time, Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg writes in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. In 1742, she married the fifty-year-old Edward Montagu, owner of coalmines and estates in Northumberland, Yorkshire, and Berkshire. This wealthy marriage gave Elizabeth Montagu the opportunity to host literary salons at her London home from the 1760s onwards.

³ Sarah Robinson, later Scott, published several novels of which *Millenium Hall*, a utopian novel that raises feminist issues (1762), is most well known today.

Although the name “Elizabeth Montagu” will not sound familiar to many literary scholars today, Beattie’s praise of her *Essay on the writings and genius of Shakespear*,⁴ *compared with the Greek and French dramatic poets. With some remarks upon the misrepresentations of Mons. de Voltaire* (published in 1769), is indicative of Montagu’s reputation as a woman of letters in her own time. Although she initially published the *Essay* anonymously, her authorship was soon found out and subsequent editions were published under her own name. The *Essay* went through further editions in 1770, 1772, 1777, 1778, 1785, and 1810; and translations of Montagu’s *Essay* appeared in German (1771), French (1777), and Italian (1828). The contrast between the contemporary neglect of Montagu’s literary criticism, and its favorable reception in her own time caught my attention. Montagu’s history is exemplary for the reception history of the social circle to which she belonged: the bluestockings.

Introducing the Bluestockings

The term “bluestocking,” derived from the blue worsted stockings worn by members of this society,⁵ is nowadays used to describe a literary or learned woman, sometimes in a pejorative sense.⁶ However, others have claimed the term as a positive one, “arguing that it has a counter-cultural edge that is connected to a tradition of feminist pioneers” (Eger and Peltz 16). These contradictory connotations of the term bluestocking, Eger and Peltz argue, reflect society’s ambivalent attitude towards intelligent women (16). Interestingly, the original eighteenth-century society that was known by this name consisted of both men and women, Sylvia Harcstark Myers points out in *The Bluestocking Circle* (1990). In her poem “Bas Bleu, or Conversation” (1786), Hannah More refers to both the men and women of the social circle, in which Elizabeth Montagu, ‘Queen of the Blues,’ was one of the prominent hostesses.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, a group of men and women with an interest in literature and other intellectual matters gathered in the London homes of Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Vesey and Frances Boscawen. This group included famous men, like

⁴ I have retained all variant spellings of Shakespeare’s name, in order to preserve the style of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts that will be discussed here.

⁵ See the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) entry “bluestocking”: “1. attrib. Wearing blue worsted (instead of black silk) stockings; hence, not in full dress, in homely dress. (*contemptuous.*)”

⁶ The OED gives the following definition of a “Blue Stocking Lady”:

orig. one who frequented Mrs. Montague’s ‘Blue Stocking’ assemblies; thence transferred sneeringly to any woman showing a taste for learning, a literary lady. (Much used by reviewers of the first quarter of the 19th c.; but now, from the general change of opinion on the education of women, nearly abandoned.)

Edmund Burke, Samuel Johnson and David Garrick (Eger and Peltz 16), and women of letters like Elizabeth Carter, poet and translator of Epictetus, and Catherine Talbot, who published on religious and moral topics. In the 1760s, Harcstark Myers points out, Carter and Montagu used the term “bluestocking” in their private correspondence “to refer to men with intellectual interests with whom they had friendships” (9). Montagu furthermore referred to the “bluestocking circle” without restricting the term to men. The term bluestocking changed gender in the late 1760s and 1770s, Harcstark Myers furthermore indicates, when it began to be used to refer to the intellectual women from Montagu’s social circle, “who were called bluestockings by those who ridiculed them” (10). Whereas the term ‘bluestocking’ was previously used to refer to intellectual society in general, it became associated with female intellectuality and was often used in a pejorative sense.

The early reception history of the bluestocking circle reflects a similar prejudice against learned women. Although all the women of the bluestocking circle published on various subjects, and were known for these accomplishments in their time, the bluestocking women are remembered as “*salonières* rather than aspiring intellectuals” (Harcstark Myers 288), and for their role as patrons of the arts, rather than for their own scholarly and creative accomplishments. The early nineteenth-century interest in the private correspondence of, for example, Montagu and Carter coincided with an utter neglect of Montagu’s critical writings. Montagu’s earliest biography,⁷ written by Dr Doran in 1873, is an example of this particular tendency. Doran is mostly interested in Montagu as a lady representative of her age, and hardly goes into her intellectual aspirations or the place of her *Essay* in eighteenth-century Shakespeare criticism. Because of this selective appropriation of the bluestocking legacy, the bluestockings have been seen as a discontinuous group with no real influence (Harcstark Myers 288). Fortunately, Harcstark Myers’s groundbreaking study of the bluestockings has instigated new investigations of the critical writings of the female bluestockings, and today, there is a growing number of publications on Montagu’s critical work alone. I will address the reception history and critical studies of Montagu’s *Essay* in more detail in chapter two.

⁷ Dr Elizabeth Eger (King’s College London) is currently working on a new critical biography of Elizabeth Montagu.

Elizabeth Montagu: “The Romantic Bluestocking”⁸

In the critical work of Elizabeth Montagu, the two traditions that we have touched upon; the coming into being of a romantic aesthetic largely based on Shakespeare’s plays, and the tradition of women writing on Shakespeare, come together. Several critics have pointed to the connection between bluestocking criticism and the aesthetic of Romanticism that is especially apparent in Montagu’s *Essay*. Elizabeth Fay has constructed an online “Bluestocking Archive” that aims to “make clearer the connections between the phenomenon of the original bluestocking circle, the development of sensibility, and the achievements of High Romanticism.” Elizabeth Eger and Fiona Ritchie have explicitly linked Montagu’s *Essay* with the development of certain themes in romantic Shakespeare criticism. Eger argues that “the critical elaboration of Shakespeare’s powers of sympathy, characterization and moral philosophy in the work of Coleridge, Keats, and Hazlitt” is indebted to the bluestocking criticism of Montagu and Griffith, both of whom published essays on Shakespeare in the eighteenth century (151). Ritchie places Montagu’s *Essay* “at the forefront of [a] movement away from neoclassical rules and toward an increasing acceptance and appreciation of subjectivity in criticism,” and she furthermore relates the increased interest in individual responses to literature to the development of Romantic aesthetics (82). Although in both Eger and Ritchie’s case, the passages quoted here serve as concluding remarks to their essays on Montagu’s critical work, and the possible links with romantic criticism they point to are not further investigated. In addition, Augustus Ralli, editor of the *History of Shakespearian Criticism* (1932), writes that Montagu’s “account of popular superstitions and Macbeth’s mind sounds a romantic note” (65). However, a comparative analysis across both traditions has not yet been made. Shakespeare criticism would be a fruitful angle from which to explore this relationship since the bluestockings practiced new modes of reading Shakespeare who was also a favorite subject of criticism for the Romantics.

Here, I will explore how eighteenth-century bluestocking readings of Shakespeare may have predated the Romantic practice of literary criticism, focusing especially on Elizabeth Montagu’s *Essay on the Writing and Genius of Shakespeare* and Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s Shakespeare lectures. I have chosen to focus on Montagu and Coleridge since both are leading figures in the bluestocking circle and Romanticism respectively. Moreover, the great popularity of Montagu’s *Essay* resulted in a German translation in 1771, published

⁸ I have adopted this term from Powell Jones’s article “The Romantic Bluestocking, Elizabeth Montagu” (1948). Powell Jones uses this term to label certain aspects of Montagu’s character that can be inferred from her unpublished letters, such as her love for nature and interest in Gothic architecture.

at a time when the *Sturm und Drang* critics formulated new ideas regarding Shakespeare that would become foundational for the German Romantic movement. Whether Montagu's *Essay* contributed to these developments is so far unexplored, and as is well known, the connection with German Romanticism is an important one for Coleridge's development as a Shakespeare critic. The choice for Montagu and Coleridge will enable me to take this German context into account.

By bringing the work of these two Shakespeare critics in dialogue with each other, a woman and a man, one canonized, the other almost forgotten, I will furthermore aim to show the richness of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century network of Shakespeare criticism that is not represented in our inherited canon. The results of this case study, I will also relate to larger issues regarding canonisation, such as the problem of re-introducing women's writing into our gender-biased canon.

The leading male romantics have played a major role in the gender-bias of our canon. The concepts of masculinity and genius, Jerome McGann argues in *The Romantic Ideology*, are problematically entwined in both the literary texts and the scholarship of that period (1). Moreover, the early nineteenth century saw a significant change in the evaluation of the critical legacy of the bluestockings. Romantic poets and critics like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Hazlitt and Keats fiercely attacked the "intellectualisation and professionalisation of female subjectivity" the bluestockings represented (Kelly 176). Coleridge, for example, wrote in 1813 in a letter to Charlotte Brent: "the longer I live, the more do I loathe in stomach, and deprecate in judgment, all, *all* Bluestockingism" (qtd. in Eger and Peltz 130). John Keats's attacks on the bluestockings are remarkable as he explicitly mentions Elizabeth Montagu and the popularity of women's Shakespeare criticism:

The world, and especially our England, has, within the last thirty years been vexed and teased by a set of Devils, whom I detest so much that I almost hunger after an acherontic promotion to a Torturer, purposely for their accommodation. These devils are a set of Women, who, having taken a snack or Luncheon of Literary scraps, set themselves up for towers of Babel in Languages, Sapphos in Poetry – Euclids in Geometry – and everything in nothing. Among such the name of Montague has been preeminent (qtd. in Runge 180).

In 1818, he wrote that it would be impossible for "a superior being" to look upon Shakespeare in the same light, expressing his amazement at the great popularity of female Shakespeare criticism (qtd. in Runge 181). Laura Runge analyses these quotes from Keats's letters as expressions of his "ambivalent attitude to gender" (179); he was writing in a genre that he

himself identified as feminine, and in which he acknowledged his female precursors, but nevertheless displayed a misogynist attitude towards bluestocking intellectualism at the same time. However, Keats's opinion on bluestocking intellectualism was not incidental. Eger and Peltz argue that the Romantics “wished to protect the masculine strongholds of literary institutions” (130) that were threatened by this group of eighteenth-century women, especially since one of them, Elizabeth Montagu, was included into the ‘masculine’ canon of Shakespeare criticism.

The negative evaluation of the bluestocking circle in the early nineteenth century ensured that its contributions to the canon of literary criticism were forgotten.

Notwithstanding the initial enthusiastic reception of Montagu’s *Essay*, nineteenth-century critics dismissed it for reasons that explicitly show gender prejudices. Johnsonian scholar George Birbeck Hill, editor of Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*, for example, wrote in 1891 “that this dull essay, which would not do credit to a clever school-girl of seventeen should have a fame, of which the echoes have not yet quite died out, can only be fully explained by Mrs. Montagu’s great wealth and position in society” (qtd. in Harcstark Myers 201).

Fortunately, feminist scholarship has brought bluestocking criticism back into view,⁹ and Montagu’s *Essay* has been re-evaluated. In 1906, Huchon wrote the first study that touches upon the contribution Montagu made with her *Essay*, titled *Mrs. Montagu and Her Friends*. A number of other studies of Montagu’s critical work have followed Huchon’s dissertation thesis. Since Elizabeth Montagu has been re-introduced into our canon (and other bluestocking critics with her), scholars have primarily focused on her work as a minority criticism, and placed it in a female tradition of writing. This approach can be found in for example Franklin (1991), Eger (2003) and Ritchie (2005), whose articles on Montagu’s *Essay* will be discussed in more detail in chapter two. The shortcomings of this approach lie in the fact that it emphasises those aspects of Montagu’s work that are attenuated in a tradition of women’s writing, at the cost of other aspects of her essay that tie in with dominant scholarly debates on Shakespeare. I have chosen to examine the *Essay*’s influence upon the dominant force field of Shakespeare criticism of that time, which is represented in our canon as a masculine tradition. Reading the *Essay* as a kindle to later romantic thought enables me to reread the masculine-oriented canon and reveal the contribution women critics have made to the critical tradition as we know it.

⁹ Pickering and Chatto have recently published a six-volume collection of writings of the bluestocking circle, between 1738 and 1790, under the general editorship of Gary Kelly. The first volume is dedicated to Elizabeth Montagu’s critical writing and was published in 1999.

In chapter one, I will give a literary-historical overview of the dominant trends in Shakespeare criticism in eighteenth-century England. I have drawn from authoritative sources on this topic, such as the aforementioned anthologies of Ralli and Nichol Smith, but I will pay due attention to women writing on Shakespeare in that period in order to point to the richness of the network of critical texts on Shakespeare. In addition, I will explore other modes of engaging with Shakespeare's texts, such as the eighteenth-century editorial practice. Furthermore, I will discuss the category of bluestocking criticism in this literary-historical context.

However, adopting such a literary-historical perspective is not without risks. In "Rewriting Modernity" (1986), the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard warns against historical periodization, or the division of history into distinct moments such as "classicism" and "romanticism". This mode of engaging with history, Lyotard argues, only causes the 'now' to slip through our fingers. I am aware of the artificiality of my own literary-historical approach. I will nevertheless adopt this approach because I have to set the scene, in order to situate my own interpretation of Montagu and Coleridge within the dominant accounts of literary history.

In the second chapter, I will discuss the reception history of Montagu's *Essay*, and the developments in German Shakespeare criticism, after which I will give a detailed comparative analysis of Montagu and Coleridge's Shakespeare criticism in relation to English and German criticism of that day. I will discuss both Shakespeare criticisms from thematic angles. I have chosen a number of themes, for example the English historical drama, Shakespeare's supernatural imagination and poetic judgment and taste, which are key concerns that show the different emphases in neoclassical and romantic aesthetics.

In chapter three, I will reflect upon my own reading of Elizabeth Montagu's *Essay*, and discuss the way it differs from other readings of that same work. Thereby I will further address the merits and shortcomings of the readings of Montagu's *Essay* as a bluestocking or female criticism, which will lead us into larger debates regarding the problem of how to retrieve and evaluate women's forgotten voices in contemporary revisions of the male-oriented canon, especially in the context of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary criticism.

Works Cited

- Badawi, M.M. *Coleridge: Critic of Shakespeare*. Cambridge UP, 1973.
- Behn, Aphra. "An Epistle to the Reader," prefixed to *The Dutch Lover*. in: *The Collected Works of Aphra Behn*. Volume I. Ed. Montague Summers. London: William Heineman, 1915.
- "bluestocking." *Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd edition, 1989. Web. 15 June 2012, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/20617>>.
- "Blue Stocking Lady." *Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd edition, 1989. Web. 15 June 2012, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/20617>>.
- Castle, Terry. *Boss Ladies, Watch Out!: Essays on Women, Sex and Writing*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Coleridge, S.T. *Table talk: and the rime of the ancient mariner, Christabel, &c.* London: Routledge and sons, 1884.
- Doran, Dr F.S.A. *A Lady of the Last Century*. London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1873.
- Eger, Elizabeth. "'Out rushed a female to protect the bard:' The Bluestocking Defense of Shakespeare." *Reconsidering the Bluestockings*. Eds. Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg. California: Huntington Library, 2003. 127-52.
- Eger, Elizabeth and Lucy Peltz. *Brilliant Women: 18th-Century Bluestockings*. Yale: UP, 2008.
- Engell, James. *Forming the Critical Mind: Dryden to Coleridge*. London: Harvard UP, 1989.
- Fay, Elizabeth. *A Feminist Introduction to Romantic Studies*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1998.
- . (ed). *The Bluestocking Archive*. Web. 1 June 2012, <http://www.faculty.umb.edu/elizabeth_fay/toc2.htm>.
- Folger Collective of Women Writers, eds. *Women Critics 1660-1820*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995.
- Franklin, Colin. "Fable and Moral." *Shakespeare Domesticated: The Eighteenth-Century Editions*. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1991.
- Harcstark Myers, Sylvia. *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1990.
- Huchon, R. *Mrs. Montagu and her Friends*. London: John Murray, 1906.
- Kelly, Gary. "Bluestocking Feminism." *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*. Eds. Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Clíona ó Gallchoir and Penny Warburton. Cambridge: UP, 2001.

- Lyotard, Jean-François. "Rewriting Modernity." 1986. *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington. Stanford: UP, 1991. 24-35.
- McGann, Jerome. *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation*. U of Chicago P, 1983.
- Montagu, Elizabeth. "An essay on the writings and genius of Shakespear, compared with the Greek and French dramatic poets. With some remarks upon the misrepresentations of Mons. de Voltaire." *Writings of the Bluestocking Circle, 1738-1785: Volume 1: Elizabeth Montagu*. Ed. Elizabeth Eger. London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999.
- More, Hannah. "Bas Blue, or Conversation." Web. 24 May 2012. <<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~curran/250-96/Sensibility/morebas.html>>.
- Nichol Smith, D. ed. *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1963.
- Pope, Alexander. "Preface to 'The Works of Shakespear' 1725." *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare*. Ed. D. Nichol Smith. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1963. 44-58.
- Ralli, Augustus. ed. *A History of Shakespeare Criticism: Volume I*. London: Oxford UP, 1932.
- Ritchie, Fiona. "Elizabeth Montagu: 'Shakespeare's poor little critic?'" *Shakespeare Survey 58: Writing about Shakespeare*. Ed. Peter Holland. Cambridge: up, 2005. 72-82.
- Schlegel, F von. *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe. Erste Abteilung: Kritische Neuausgabe, Band 2*. Ed. Ernst Behler, Jean Jacques Anstett und Hans Eichner. München: 1967. Web. 10 May 2012. <<http://www.zeno.org/nid/20005618908>>.
- Schnorrenberg, Barbara Brandon. "Montagu, Elizabeth (1718–1800)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: UP, 2004. Web. 5 November 2012, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/article/19014>>.
- Stockinger, Claudia and Stefan Scherer (ed). *Ludwig Tieck: Leben-Werk-Wirkung*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011.
- Sniader, Lanser, S. and E. Torton Beck. "[Why] Are There No Great Women Critics? And What Difference Does it Make?" *The Prism of Sex: Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Ed. J.A. Sherman and E. Torton Beck. Madison, Wisconsin, UP, 1979. 79-91.
- Thompson, Ann and Sasha Roberts, eds. *Women Reading Shakespeare 1660-1900: An Anthology of Criticism*. Manchester: University Press, 1997.
- Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. London: Penguin Books, 2004.

Chapter One

English Shakespeare Criticism in the Eighteenth Century

The eighteenth century consolidated Shakespeare's central position in British literary culture, a position that he holds to this day. At a first glance, the eighteenth-century canonisation of Shakespeare might seem hard to reconcile with the age's editorial practice. As is well known, editors took great liberties in improving and correcting Shakespeare's plays according to their own standards. In *The Making of a National Poet*, Michael Dobson argues that these two trends in the eighteenth century reception of Shakespeare should not be seen as a paradox, but as mutually reinforcing processes that both point to the active investment in the construction of Shakespeare's identity as the national poet (5). Dobson's account of the making of Shakespeare's reputation culminates with the *Shakespeare Jubilee*, a series of festivities in Shakespeare's hometown Stratford-upon-Avon to celebrate the jubilee of his birth (1564). The Jubilee took place in September 1769, the same year in which Elizabeth Montagu published her *Essay*. So we may argue that it was published at a moment when the English bardolatry had reached a fever pitch.

Besides the promotion of Stratford-upon-Avon as "a site of secular pilgrimage," to use Dobson's phrase (3), many of our modern practices of reading and performing Shakespeare were initiated in the eighteenth century: the performance of his female roles by women instead of men; the reproduction of his works in critical editions; the publication of monographs of Shakespeare and the promulgation of the plays in secondary and in higher education (Dobson 3). However in other respects, eighteenth-century Shakespearean criticism seems very different from our modern practice. The romantics are still credited with initiating our modern critical attitude to Shakespeare's plays. Norman Fruman compares the so-called "romantic doctrine of organic form" to the discovery of the Rosetta stone, as this critical discovery enabled them to decipher "the seeming hieroglyph of Shakespeare's dramatic constitution" (qtd. in Beer 2). In addition, the romantic critics themselves were eager to proclaim the novelty of their approach to Shakespeare. Coleridge, for example, writes "I own I am proud that I was the first in time, who publicly demonstrated to the full extent of that position [...] that the judgment of Shakespeare is commensurate with his genius" (44). However, Jerome McGann warns against an "uncritical absorption in Romanticism's own self-representations," a "Romantic Ideology" that, he argues, dominates scholarship and criticism of this period (1). Many critics do not trust Coleridge's own opinion regarding the

originality of his approach, especially since the extent of his plagiarisms became known.¹⁰ Babcock and Wellek, for example, are of the opinion that Coleridge and the other romantic critics did not produce a criticism that was entirely new and different from the eighteenth century, and I will likewise investigate the connection between romantic Shakespeare criticism and its eighteenth-century precursors. James Engell furthermore points to the fact that until the middle of the romantic period, the editions and accounts of Shakespeare that were in use, came from earlier generations (“Coleridge” 32), which legitimizes the assumption of a strong relationship between the approaches to Shakespeare in both periods.

In this chapter I will examine the critical developments of the eighteenth century with a view to the discussion of Montagu and Coleridge’s Shakespeare criticism in the next chapter. I will first give an introductory outline of debates in eighteenth-century literary criticism, after which I will go into the editorial practice of that age. From there, I will go into a discussion of Shakespearean criticism, paying special attention to the contribution of women critics.

Ancients and Moderns

The Shakespearean criticism of the eighteenth century should be regarded in the context of the on-going quarrel between the Ancients and Moderns that resulted in the gradual decline of the authority of ancient models giving way to a “relativistic notion of taste” which is more attentive to the individuality and originality of a work of art (Caplan 2005). One of the main issues in this debate was the question of historical progress, and the related issue of progress in the arts. In the late seventeenth century, there was a growing historical awareness of literature as “a barometer of the age that produced it” (Engell *Forming* 49). This awareness brought about an interest in literary history and meant an impulse for literary criticism. As Engell points out in *Forming the Critical Mind*, there was “an exponential growth of critical interests and literary critics” (47). The dominant narrative in the histories of literature that were published in the late seventeenth century was a narrative of progress; earlier ages and literatures were seen as “barbarous” whereas the present day was held to be more “refined” (Engell *Forming* 50).

The barbarian can be characterised as a figure of lost simplicity, as Manfred Schneider argues in *Der Barbar*. He is held to be part of a linguistic order in which things still bear names, and are not yet obscured by abstract concepts (Schneider 19). Schneider holds that this

¹⁰ See Norman Fruman, *Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel* (1972).

qualifies the barbarian as a missionary for a world free from sophistry or refinement (19), which explains the attraction of this concept for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers and critics. The concept of the barbarian is ambiguously bound up with notions of authenticity, naturalness and simplicity, qualities that can both be valued positively and negatively. In later sections, we will elaborate upon the career of this concept in Shakespeare criticism. Here, it suffices to point out that Shakespeare was held to be a primitive or barbarous artist in the early eighteenth century, and that later critics were very much concerned with the problem of how to save Shakespeare from negative associations with barbarism. Coleridge, for example, would criticize the eighteenth-century perspective according to which Shakespeare had “a sort of African nature” (46), and as Coleridge’s phrase shows, the predicate of barbarism was not only used for people from previous ages, but also to people from supposedly primitive cultures.

In a more positive vein, critics celebrated the expressiveness and originality of primitive poetry. Because of their presumed advancement in learning, the Moderns might excel the Ancients in technical refinements, but the profundity of genius of the Ancients could not be threatened by the artistry of the Moderns (Krieger 450). Underlying this distinction between the “original, barbaric Ancients” and the “imitative, elegant Moderns” is the distinction between nature and art (Krieger 451). It was assumed that the progress of the arts would come at the cost of original genius. This is what Engell terms “the paradox of refinement” or “the paradox of progress as decadence” (*Forming* 55). Thus the authority of the Ancients was not necessarily threatened by the growing literary historical awareness of the late seventeenth century, and the Ancient models would remain the standard for taste for a large part of the eighteenth century. The neoclassical *rules of art* were held to be part of a universal order, and therefore valued as rules of nature.

A number of issues clustering around this debate are relevant to the Shakespearean criticism of the eighteenth century, especially the ideas of imitation and translation, the polarisation of natural and artificial values, the issue of primitivism or barbarism, and the coming into being of a national canon. In the next section we will examine these topics in relation to Shakespeare criticism. In structuring the discussion, I will follow the four main trends in Shakespeare criticism distinguished by Nichol Smith: the debates about Shakespeare’s negligence of the dramatic unities and about the extent of his learning, the interest in Shakespeare’s language and the development of character criticism (xiv). I will, however, pay due attention to women writing on Shakespeare in this period. Nichol-Smith’s collection of eighteenth-century essays on Shakespeare does not contain one single essay

written by a woman, as we saw in the introduction, and he only disparagingly mentions the work of Charlotte Lennox and Elizabeth Montagu.¹¹ Before going into a discussion of Shakespearean criticism, I will elaborate upon the eighteenth-century editions of Shakespeare's plays, as editorial convention is intricately related to critical practice. This also explains why the prefaces to these editions are nowadays valued as important documents of Shakespeare criticism.

Eighteenth-Century Editions of Shakespeare

"Nobody risks his experience of Shakespeare by reading him in an eighteenth-century edition," Colin Franklin writes in the preface to his study of that age's editorial practice, *Domesticating Shakespeare* (3). His statement is indicative of the great differences between the eighteenth-century attitude towards the editing of Shakespeare's texts and our own. The eighteenth century showed no monolithic attitude towards the subject of editing, and it was not yet established as a scholarly discipline. As Franklin shows, the eighteenth-century editions of Shakespeare mark the coming into being of textual scholarship in the realm of English literature, since before, only Greek and Latin texts had been prepared and examined in that way (2).

The eighteenth-century editors took great liberties in "improving" Shakespeare's texts, as they shared the assumption that the texts had been corrupted; either by the printer's faults, interpolations from editors, or additions from the Elizabethan actors, although passages for which Shakespeare's authorship *was* accepted could nonetheless be corrected and improved according to eighteenth-century standards. The editors inherited different accounts of Shakespeare's text from the previous century, and they sought to provide a version that was as close to Shakespeare's own words as possible. Ironically, as the century progressed, and more and more editions claimed to provide a definitive rendition of Shakespeare, the controversy only grew, and discussions between critics resulted in increasingly long footnotes. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, when the first modern editions appeared, Shakespeare had been dead for a hundred years. By the end of the century, the Shakespeare scholar was not only more distant from Shakespeare in time but also had a whole history of Shakespeare

¹¹ He writes of Montagu's *Essay* that it was a "well-meaning" but "unnecessary" reply to Voltaire, because Johnson had already defended Shakespeare against Voltaire's criticisms (xxi). Moreover, Nichol-Smith's negligence of female critics is most striking given the fact that women were very well represented in the English tradition of Shakespeare criticism. Augustus Ralli's *A History of Shakespearean Criticism* gives a more accurate representation of the development of Shakespeare criticism and the involvement of female critics.

mediations in between him and his object of study. In order to give insight into the status quo of Shakespeare criticism when Montagu and Coleridge gave their interpretations of the national bard, we will explore the developments in publishing Shakespeare in this section.

In 1709, the first modern edition of Shakespeare's plays was published, edited by the poet and playwright Nicolas Rowe. His six-volume edition would remain the standard until 1725. Interestingly, this edition included an autobiographical account of Shakespeare's life that would be reprinted in Shakespeare editions throughout the century. The poet and translator of Homer, Alexander Pope, published a new edition of Shakespeare in 1725. Like Rowe's, his edition only contained the plays, and not the poems of Shakespeare. However, to both editions, a "semi-pirated" poetry volume was added, by a different editor and publisher (Franklin 11). These added volumes would eventually be included in the "official" edition. In 1726, one of the first critical controversies arose when Lewis Theobald, an author who had previously published translations of Greek classics, published his *Shakespeare Restored*, a text that sought to expose Pope's errors. Five years later, he published his own edition of Shakespeare in seven volumes. The subsequent 1744 edition of Sir Thomas Hamner initiated the custom to reprint the prefaces from previous editors. Hamner reprinted Rowe's biography of Shakespeare and Pope's preface, but not Theobald's (Franklin 19). In 1747, William Warburton, a reverend who would become the bishop of Gloucester, published a new edition of Shakespeare based on Pope's. The title page displays the names of both editors. Warburton attacks Theobald's edition, and reprints only Pope's preface and Rowe's life of Shakespeare. With Warburton's edition, "notes grew higher up the page, with three editions to quote and question," Franklin writes (24). Although Warburton's edition claimed that "the Genuine Text [...] is here settled" (qtd. in Franklin 26), Samuel Johnson attempted his own critical version of a correct text, which was published in 1765.

When Johnson's *The Plays of William Shakespeare, in Eight Volumes, with the corrections and Illustrations of Various Commentators; to which are added Notes by Samuel Johnson*, appeared in 1765, various reviewers expressed their disappointment, Brian Vickers claims in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* (Volume 4, 566). They complained about inconsistent editing and hasty binding. Moreover, Johnson's edition did not live up to his proposal from 1756, in which he promised to correct the text by "a careful collation of the oldest copies," and an edition that would "exhibit *all* the observable varieties of all copies that can be found" (Johnson, qtd. in Vickers Volume 5, 20). Instead of making a fresh collation, Johnson reprinted Warburton and Theobald's texts, as Vickers points out (Volume 4, 20). Johnson's edition was announced as early as 1745, and in 1756, it was advertised to be

published by subscription (Franklin 62). The subscribers had to wait nearly ten years for the edition promised to them in 1756. Charles Churchill wrote a satirical poem upon this occasion, which Boswell reprints in his *Life of Johnson*: “He for subscribers baits his hook / And takes their cash – but where’s the Book?” (319-20).

When the book was finally there in 1765, reviewers furthermore complained about the preface, which they deemed too general and undefined (Vickers *Volume 4*, 566).

Contemporary readings of the preface to some extent agree with Johnson’s early reviewers. Vickers, for example, argues that the preface is largely dependent on commonplaces in eighteenth-century criticism, “although it is unique and idiosyncratic in expression” (*Volume 5*, 23). R.D. Stock, author of *Johnson and Neoclassical Dramatic Theory* (1956), furthermore argues that the preface “does not erect new ramparts” or “open new veins,” but rather “defines for neoclassical criticism its final estimation of Shakespeare” (192). I will elaborate upon Johnson’s preface in the following section on Shakespeare criticism, because it is often held to be a great influence upon Elizabeth Montagu’s *Essay* which was published four years later.

In 1768, Edward Capell published an edition that did live up to the expectations Johnson had raised: Capell was the first editor who incorporated exact collations of all available old texts. Moreover, he demonstrated that whereas Rowe’s edition from 1709 was based on a seventeenth-century Folio, all the subsequent eighteenth-century editions based themselves on each other’s texts: Pope’s was based on Rowe’s, Theobald on Pope, Warburton on Theobald, and Johnson on Warburton (Vickers *Volume 5*, 33; Franklin 3). Thus, all modern editions that declared to give authentic renditions of the original text, in fact all descended from Rowe’s edition, and therefore, on Rowe’s rendition of a seventeenth-century Folio which was only one of the old accounts of Shakespeare’s works. Capell broke with this trend by starting afresh from the earliest printed accounts of Shakespeare. Vickers argues that Capell thereby revolutionized both the theory and practice of editing (*Volume 5*, 33). Capell furthermore published a commentary on his edition with notes and various readings in 1783.

George Steevens initiated another revolution in editing Shakespeare. Steevens argued in 1766 that many of the lost meanings of expressions in Shakespeare might be retrieved by comparing them to other Elizabethan texts. He thereby made an important step towards a historical explanation of Shakespeare’s language, as Vickers argues (*Volume 5*, 37). Steevens also published his own edition of Shakespeare, based on Johnson’s commentary. This edition was published in 1778, and derived the account of the text from Capell, without proper acknowledgements (Vickers *Volume 5*, 37). In 1790, Edmond Malone appended his own

edition of Shakespeare with a glossary of all the words and phrases that had so far been explained (Franklin 44).

Whereas the eighteenth century saw interesting advances in editorial practice, especially Capell's variorum edition and the steps taken towards a historical explanation of Shakespeare's language, it was also a widely accepted custom to selectively appropriate beautiful passages from Shakespeare's texts, and to purge the plays from indecorous passages. The tradition to collect isolated beautiful passages from Shakespeare's plays was practiced by many of his editors. Pope's edition, for example, indicated "some of the most shining passages" (Pope 57) with commas in the margin. Beautiful scenes were awarded a star, but as Franklin points out, this occurred far less frequent than the award of a comma (78). This tradition culminated with William Dodd's publication of *The Beauties of Shakespeare* in 1752, a volume that collects beautiful passages and sets them apart from their original context. This book was reprinted until 1935, and it may well have been "the piece of Shakespeareana in publication for the longest time" (Willoughby 351-2). The tremendous popularity of Dodd's book indicates how widespread this approach to Shakespeare was.

The other side of this editorial practice was the selection of errors in Shakespeare. These errors were not only found on word level, but whole scenes could be deemed erroneous or immoral, and were therefore relegated to the footnotes. The porter scene from *Macbeth*, for example, suffered from this approach. In this scene, a porter informs Macduff about the three effects of drinking: "nose painting, sleep, and urine," after which he goes on to assert that drinking may also provoke lechery: "Lechery, sir, it provokes, and unprovokes; it provokes the desire but kills the performance" (*Macbeth* scene III, 923). Pope and Hamner relegated this scene to the footnotes of their editions, both because of its indecencies, but also because it was deemed irrelevant to the unfolding of the dramatic plot. Pope blamed the Elizabethan actors for adding vulgar passages like this one, which legitimised his own delegation of these passages to the footnotes. In the preface to his edition, Pope argues that "Players are just such judges of what is right, as Taylors are of what is graceful" (48). The persistence of this view is exemplified by Coleridge's early nineteenth-century lecture notes on *Macbeth*, in which he writes that the porter scene in *Macbeth* is "disgusting," and argues, following Pope, that it is an interpolation of the actors (156). Interestingly, Capell insisted on the dramatic function of this scene. In a footnote, he argued that it fills a time interval between the murder of the king and its discovery, as Muir indicates in his modern edition of *Macbeth* (58). The purging of indecent scenes reached a peak with Henrietta Bowdler's *Family Shakespeare; in which nothing is added to the original text; but those words and expressions are omitted which*

cannot with propriety be read aloud in a family (1808). As the title indicates, the *Family Shakespeare* was intended also for women and children. Bowdler dedicated it to Elizabeth Montagu.¹²

Shakespearean Criticism

When Voltaire's Letter xviii 'on Tragedy' (published in England in 1733) claimed that Shakespeare "had a vigorous and teeming genius, natural sometimes and sometimes sublime, but without the smallest spark of taste and without the least knowledge of the rules" (qtd. in Huchon 110), the French Enlightenment writer and philosopher was not very far from the early eighteenth-century consensus on Shakespeare in England. Two of the main discussions in Shakespeare criticism at that time regarded Shakespeare's negligence of the dramatic unities as well as the extent of his learning (Nichol-Smith xiv), or, in other words, whether he wilfully neglected the rules or was simply ignorant of them. Alexander Pope, for example, writes in the preface to his edition of Shakespeare from 1725 that Shakespeare was "without assistance or advice from the learned, as without the advantage of education or acquaintance among them, without that knowledge of the best models, the Ancients, to inspire him with an emulation of them" (47). Many critics, from Dryden to Montagu, pardoned Shakespeare's ignorance of the rules by reference to the barbarous times in which he wrote. Thus, if we judge Shakespeare by Aristotle's rules, we can easily find fault, because "he lived under a kind of mere Light of Nature, in a state of almost universal License and Ignorance," Nicholas Rowe argued in 1709 (15). This "apologetic manner" in which Shakespeare's lack of a (classical) education was treated could also be transformed into praise in which Shakespeare was championed as an artless, natural genius (Ralli 20), which indicates the ambiguity of Shakespeare's association with barbarism. The dramatist and critic John Dennis writes in 1711 that "[t]o say Shakespeare knew the classics [...] destroys the most glorious part of his merit. For how can he be esteemed equal or superior to the Ancients when he falls short of them in art, though he knew all that they did before him?" (qtd. in Ralli 15).

However close to the early eighteenth-century consensus on Shakespeare, Voltaire's attack of the English drama sparked fierce responses from Johnson and Montagu which focused the debate on the question of national literatures. Huchon argues that "owing to

¹² The *Family Shakespeare* is often mistakenly attributed to her brother Thomas Bowdler, as the editors of *Women Reading Shakespeare* have pointed out (2). This misattribution even occurs in modern studies such as Franklin's *Shakespeare Domesticated* from 1991, and an edition of the text from 1949 that I have used here.

Voltaire's attacks on the English drama, Shakespearean criticism had taken a larger scope: the merits or demerits of the poet could no longer be enquired into without reference to wider questions" (101). These questions regarded the applicability of foreign rules to the native English drama. Pope wrote in his aforementioned preface to Shakespeare's plays that Shakespeare should not be judged by Aristotle's rules, a practice which he compares to "trying a man by the Laws of one Country, who acted under those of another" (47). It was furthermore implied that a literary critic should be concerned with literature in his or her own native tongue. As we will see later on in this chapter, women critics based their critical authority on their readings of literature in the mother tongue. In addition, Montagu's *Essay* questioned Voltaire's authority as a Shakespeare critic by emphasising his inadequate knowledge of the English language.¹³ Thus the debate no longer only entailed a possibility to emancipate from ancient models, but also the coming into being of a national canon with its own criticism.

The promotion of Shakespeare was coeval with a rise of interest in literature in the English language and the creation of a national canon. Female critics played an important role in these developments. The 1730s, which marked a decisive turning point in the history of Shakespeare's popularity according to Jonathan Bate (25), saw the establishment of a "Shakespeare Ladies Club" that aimed to persuade theatre managers to put on Shakespeare's plays (Folger Collective of Women Writers 2). According to Terry Castle, women's efforts in promoting Shakespeare were due to their unconscious identification with the "unlettered genius" because women were "themselves untutored in the rules and prescriptions of classical rhetoric" (13).¹⁴ Their lack of learning in the classical languages made them enthusiastic defenders of literature in the vernacular, as Elizabeth Eger points out. Language plays an important role in one of the earliest apologies for the female critic: Catherine Elstob's preface to her *Rudiments of Grammar for the English Saxon Tongue* (1715): "Our earthly possessions are truly enough called a *Patrimony*, as derived to us by the Industry of our fathers, but the Language that we speak is our *Mother-tongue*; and who so proper as play the criticks in this as the females" (qtd. in Eger 143).

¹³ See Huchon, *Mrs. Montagu and her Friends* (1906), for a detailed discussion of Montagu's attack of Voltaire and its influence on Voltaire's reputation in France.

¹⁴ In one of her letters, Elizabeth Montagu compares Shakespeare with an "unfortunate maid" because she is of the opinion that none of his critics have treated him rightly: "I think poor Shakespeare is like an unfortunate maid, whom many lovers have betrothed & none had married" (Montagu 171).

Shakespeare's Language

Shakespeare's supposedly *unlettered* or *natural* genius had consequences for the valuation of his style of writing. The concept of natural genius problematizes the neoclassical view of the craftsmanship of the poet as well as the idea of purposeful creation, and thus licensed the critics to 'improve' Shakespeare's plays where necessary. As we have seen, the concept of genius was defined in opposition to craftsmanship and artistry. The natural genius was a man of little learning and primitive, imaginative powers: a "genius shooting wild, without taste, knowledge or art" (Blair qtd. in Ralli 33). Theobald accounts for Shakespeare's genius in a similar way: "his education was at best begun," and Shakespeare owed his diversity in style, and other parts of composition to the force of genius: "to Fire, Spirit, and Exuberance of Imagination" (68).

The Scottish Enlightenment critic and rhetorician Hugh Blair characterizes Shakespeare's language as "the language of nature" (Blair qtd. in Ralli 33), and some of his all too exuberant metaphors were deemed improper. In his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, Blair is quite critical about Shakespeare's use of metaphor. "To take arms against a sea of troubles" from the famous to be or not to be monologue, for example, Blair uses as an example of mixed metaphor, since it brings two metaphors (to take arms and a sea of troubles) together. For Blair, mixed metaphor is "one of the grossest abuses of this figure," and Shakespeare's expression "confounds the imagination entirely" (365). Pope coined a new definition for mixed metaphor in his preface to Shakespeare: "superfoetations," which is defined in Johnson's *Dictionary of The English Language* (1775), as "one conception following another, so that both are in the womb together but come not to the full time for delivery together" (qtd. in Franklin 69). Blair, Pope and Johnson thus seem to agree that mixed metaphor is too complicated for the human imagination to grasp, and should therefore be avoided.

The neoclassical linguistic ideal of clarity set the standard from which Shakespeare's plays were judged. This tied in with the idea of the historical development of languages. As with literatures, languages could be judged either primitive or more advanced. Barbarous, or primitive languages were bound up with the ideas of a wild, irregular imagination and original genius; all of which are clustered around the concept of the sublime. Thus Shakespeare's poetry could be sublime but incorrect at the same time. However, this habit of correcting Shakespeare's language fell into disfavour in the last quarter of the eighteenth century (Nichol-Smith xxxii). Under the influence of the aesthetics of the sublime, critics formed the opinion that "primitive language" was actually more poetic than the more refined modern

languages (Engell *Forming* 69). In his aesthetic treatise on the sublime and beautiful, Burke argues that words influence the passions, and that “very polished languages, and such as are praised for their superior clearness and perspicuity, are generally deficient in strength” (qtd. in Engell 73). For many eighteenth-century critics, the “sublime irregularities” of Shakespeare’s plays were actually preferred to “the more finished and regular” neoclassical dramas, as Pope phrased it in his preface (58).

Character Criticism

The late eighteenth-century preference for the aesthetics of the sublime over the regularities of the beautiful was inspired by Burke’s aforementioned *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1752). Burke’s aesthetic treatise also marked an interest in the psychology of the aesthetic experience that inspired the psychological analysis of Shakespeare’s characters (Badawi 20). Jonathan Bate, on the other hand, connects the growing interest in character criticism to the “rise in interest in the novel” (145). The growing interest in the genre of the novel can be seen as a resistance against French classicism *avant la lettre*. Character criticism gradually became one of the most important trends in Shakespeare criticism of the late eighteenth-century. It enabled the critic to point to the artistry of Shakespeare’s dramas on a topic different from the classical unities of time, space and action. The diametrical opposition between natural, unlettered genius and conscious artistry was thus evaded by the praise of Shakespeare’s judgment in his delineation of characters. The poet and critic Joseph Warton, for example, wrote in 1748 that the irregularities in the structure of Shakespeare’s dramas “may be excused by the representation of the persons of the drama” (qtd. in Nichol-Smith xxxii). The “unity of character” became a new standard replacing the older unities (Badawi 20). Thus the analysis of Shakespeare’s characters that flourished in the third quarter of the eighteenth century coincided with the disposal of the classical dramatic unities and with the falling into disfavour of the corrected plays, as Nichol-Smith points out (xxxii).

Shakespeare’s delineation of character was praised first and foremost by female critics. As early as 1664, Margaret Cavendish wrote that Shakespeare “expresses to the life all sorts of persons, humours, natures, passions – as if he had been transformed into each person he describes. You would even think he had been metamorphosed from man to woman, so well does he describe Cleopatra and other women” (qtd. in Ralli 4). This idea would also find expression in both Montagu and Coleridge, as we will see in the next chapter. Shakespeare’s characters were praised for their truth to nature, by critics like Theobald, Whally, Lennox,

Kames and Montagu. At the same time, Shakespeare was praised for the moral instruction that was propagated by his character drawings. Montagu was one of the first critics to point to the situational moral lessons in the interactions between Shakespeare's characters and in their individual development, which can be characterised as a very "novelistic" approach to Shakespeare. This idea was taken up by many critics after her. Edward Taylor, for example, wrote in 1774 that by drama, "mankind should be persuasively allured towards good actions" (qtd. in Ralli 67). Elizabeth Griffith devoted a whole study to this subject, her immensely popular *Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated*, which appeared in 1775 and was inspired by Montagu's *Essay*. She writes that Shakespeare was not only "the greatest English poet, and equal to any Greek or Roman" but he was also "one of the greatest philosophers, because example is better than precept, and the dramatic philosopher is superior to the doctrinal" (qtd. in Ralli 72). In 1777, Maurice Morgann wrote an essay titled *The Dramatic Character of Sr. John Falstaff*, in which he praises the "roundness and integrity" of Shakespeare's characters (qtd. in Ralli 75). He moreover holds that the characters "are only capable of being unfolded and understood in the whole drama" (qtd. in Ralli 75). According to Ralli, Morgann was the first critic to reveal Shakespeare's fare-reaching artistry (79), although this insight was clearly indebted to his predecessors. Moreover, Both Kames and Montagu propose to regard Shakespeare's plays as "a living body" (240), implying thereby to consider the whole design of Shakespeare's plays as an object of criticism. In his early nineteenth-century Shakespeare lectures, Coleridge would build upon these insights and declare the opposition between genius and rules to be a false one, as we will see in the next chapter.

Throughout the eighteenth century, Shakespeare gradually became a model for other poets, replacing the ancient models. The English playwright George Farquhar most explicitly addresses this development: "If you say it must be so because Aristotle said it, I say it must be otherwise, because Shakespeare said it" (qtd. in Huchon 96). Interestingly, his statement dates from the beginning of the century. This development encompassed a change in the standard of judgment for the criticism of Shakespeare's plays. Whereas in the early eighteenth century, Shakespeare's negligence of the dramatic rules was treated apologetically, the veneration for Shakespeare's plays would eventually entail the coming into being of a new and different standard of judgment. Dr Johnson wrote in his 1765 preface to Shakespeare's plays that they are "not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies" but "compositions of a distinct kind; exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature. [...] That this is a practice contrary to the rules of criticism will be readily allowed; but there is always an appeal open from

criticism to nature” (109-10). That the rules of criticism may be superseded by an appeal to nature is only possible because the rules themselves are held to be part of a natural order. And as Bate argues, in the quarrel between the Ancients and Moderns, the Moderns did not accuse the Ancients of “being too bound up with rules,” but “for being not correct enough in their observance of them” (32). Thus, a respect for the authority of the rules as part of a natural order enabled them to break away from these rules.

Bluestocking Criticism

As we have seen, women writers were very well represented in the Shakespearean criticism of the eighteenth century and they played an important role in establishing Shakespeare’s reputation, with for example, the Shakespeare Ladies Club of the 1730s. Two female critics from the bluestocking circle, Elizabeth Montagu and Elizabeth Griffith, were especially concerned with the national bard. The publications of the bluestockings do not form a homogenous body of work, which makes it hard to define *bluestocking criticism* as a category. Lawrence Stone described a “middle class intellectual blue-stocking [as someone] who challenged and threatened men on their own ground of the classics” (qtd in Harcstark Myers ix), but not all the bluestockings were trained in the classical languages. As we have seen in the introduction, the term “bluestocking” initially referred to both the men and women of their intellectual community, but after the 1770s it was used (often disparagingly) for women with an intellectual interest. The bluestockings “were not consistently productive,” as Harcstark Myers points out (10), but the years between 1758 and 1775 saw a great number of publications, which tells of the variety in the bluestocking writings. Harcstark Myers lists Elizabeth Carter’s translation of Epictetus (1758) and her *Poems* (1762), Elizabeth Montagu’s *Essay* (1769), Catherine Talbot’s posthumous *Reflections on the Seven Days of the Week* (1770) and her *Essays on Various Subjects* (1772), and Hester Chapone’s *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773) and her *Miscellanies* (1775) (11). Moreover, Lord Lyttelton’s *Dialogues of the Dead* (including three dialogues written by Montagu) were published in 1760, and Elizabeth Griffith’s *Morality of Shakespeare’s Drama Illustrated* was published in 1775.

For Harcstark Myers, the most pressing question regarding bluestocking critical authority would be why and how it happened “at this point in the history of women that a group of women was able to gain some general acceptance for the idea of women as intellectuals” (2), since a woman’s intellectual aspirations were often seen as a sign of immorality. In her answer to this question, she points to the various supportive relationships

between men and women in the bluestocking circle. The support from their male peers enabled the women critics to enter into the masculine genre of Shakespeare criticism. Although women were involved in creating Shakespeare's reputation, the scholarly discourse was very much dominated by men.

As an example of such a supportive relationship, Harcstark Myers point to Dr Johnson and Elizabeth Carter. Carter's essays were among the very few pieces of writing not by himself that Johnson printed in his journal the *Rambler* (158). Although Johnson was willing to provide a platform for a woman's publications, the relationship between him and Montagu was of a different kind. In *Dr Johnson's Women*, Norma Clarke characterises their relationship as essentially competitive. She argues that Montagu's *Essay* "brought the two most powerful figures in literary London into direct competition with each other over intellectual possession of the national bard" (144). Montagu successfully entered the public sphere with an essay on Shakespeare, only four years after Johnson published his Shakespeare edition, and Johnson was one of the very few critics who did not receive Montagu's *Essay* with praise. Unfortunately, it was Johnson's negative attitude that would be adopted in later reviews of Montagu's *Essay*, and it would be dismissed as an unoriginal piece of literary criticism, which was furthermore too dependent on Pope and Johnson. In the next chapters I will demonstrate the absurdity of this point of view.

Montagu's ideas on Shakespeare were expressed in her letters to Lord Lyttelton and Gilbert West, and some of the leading ideas of the *Essay* appeared in letters from 1755, which makes the claim that the *Essay* is largely indebted to Johnson's 1765 preface quite impossible. Her letters provided Montagu with a platform to express her ideas about Shakespeare, and both Lyttelton and West praised her insightful remarks. Harcstark Myers argues that Lyttelton was a mentor to Montagu and urged her to publish her ideas about Shakespeare (186). To support this claim, she quotes from a letter from Lyttelton to Montagu:

We will not be satisfied with a fine Letter to Ld. Bath or Sr. J Macdonald, which you can write while Mrs. Jenny is combing your hair: we will have something to be printed, something to be published, something to shew the whole World what a Woman we have among us! (Letter from 1764, qtd. in Myers 186)

Without wanting to take this too far, it seems as if Lyttelton explicitly invites Montagu to cross boundaries of gendered space; he urges her to make her ideas known to the world and to enter into the masculine domain of publication, leaving the private domestic space that is described as a feminine space, by sketching a situation of a dressing room in which "Mrs. Jenny" is combing Montagu's hair. Montagu herself was also very well aware of the gender

boundary that was to be crossed if she would publish her ideas on Shakespeare in a scholarly essay. In a letter to her father, she explains her motives for publishing the *Essay* anonymously at the time when her authorship became known (her father was unaware of his daughter's publication before):

In the first place, there is in general a prejudice against female Authors especially if they invade those regions of literature which men are desirous to reserve for themselves. While I was young, I should not have liked to be class'd among authors, but at my age it is less becoming. [...] some circumstances in this particular case advise secrecy. Mr. Pope our great Poet, the Bishop of Gloucester [i.e. William Warburton] our Great Critick & Dr. Johnson our great Scholar having already given their criticism upon Shakespear, there was a degree of presumption in pretending to meddle with a subject they had already treated tolerably well, sure to incur envy if I succeeded, their contempt if I did not. (Letter from September 1769, qtd. in Eger 2003: 131-2)

Apart from her consciousness of crossing a gender boundary with the publication of her *Essay*, this passage is telling of Montagu's knowledge of the debates in literary criticism of her time, as will also become clear from the discussion of the *Essay* in the next chapter. As Huchon points out, "for an eighteenth century woman, her reading is of a most extensive range" (35). She could understand Latin and was well read in English, French and Italian (Huchon 35-36). She moreover conversed with many leading critics of her time, such as Kames, Burke and Dr Johnson, to name a few. Her *Essay* is firmly rooted in the debates of the eighteenth century and was received favourably in England, France, Germany and Italy. Cowper praised "the learning, good sense, sound judgment and wit" it displayed (qtd. in Huchon), and Maurice Morgann, after commenting upon Montagu's flawed judgment of the character of Falstaff, wrote "for the rest I bow to your genius and your virtues; you have given the world a very elegant composition" (qtd. in Huchon 155). Edward Taylor wrote in his 1774 *Cursory Remarks on Tragedy* that "it would be fruitless to say anymore" on the topic of Shakespeare's preternatural beings, since "it had already been treated in such a masterly manner by the very ingenious author of the remarks on the writings and genius of Shakespeare" (45). Whereas these passages bear testimony to the successful entry of Montagu's *Essay* into the canon of Shakespeare criticism, we have seen in the introduction how Montagu's contribution disappeared from the canon in the early nineteenth century.

Conclusion

Walter Jackson Bate characterizes Romanticism as “a turning away, in whatever direction, from the classical standard of ideal nature and from the accompanying reflection that the full exercise of ethical reason may grasp that objective ideal” (94). But as we have seen, this movement has already begun in the late eighteenth century. The validity of the universal dramatic rules and the standard for taste they implied were superseded by a re-evaluation of the hierarchy of these rules and an appeal to nature. As we have seen, the idea of Shakespeare’s wild original genius that was unaware of the dramatic rules gradually gave way to a praise of his artistic judgment in areas other than the classical dramatic unities, such as his delineation of characters. The praise for Shakespeare’s artistry in these areas tackles some commonly held ideas about eighteenth-century criticism. Badawi, for example, argues that Coleridge was the first English critic to place Shakespeare’s poetic judgment on one line with his genius. But this opposition between natural genius and artistry was already superseded in the eighteenth century. Elizabeth Montagu proclaims that one of the aims of her *Essay* is to show “the extensive talents of Shakespeare” (50), and other critics such as Kames and Morgann shared this awareness of the artistry of Shakespeare’s plays.

By the end of the eighteenth century, new approaches to Shakespeare’s plays had come into being. W.J. Bate characterizes the criticism of this period as “increasingly particularized” with attention to “stylistic and psychological analysis” (93). The early eighteenth-century habit of “correcting” Shakespeare’s plays in order to make them live up to the contemporary linguistic ideal of clarity had fallen into disfavour, and the last quarter of the century saw a growing interest in prose diction, metaphor and specifically English versification. Moreover, new approaches towards the plays, such as psychological aesthetic criticism, came into being under the influence of the interest in the psychology of the aesthetic experience and the rise of the novel.

Female critics were actively involved in the establishment of Shakespeare’s reputation, although some accounts of eighteenth century criticism persist in the habit of ignoring this contribution. Bluestocking criticism, as we have seen, is a too heterogeneous body of work to be grouped under a single category. Also, it is misleading to class it as a feminine body of work, since the term bluestockings also referred to the men that were part of the circle. Montagu’s *Essay* should not be seen as an essay from a marginal group within Shakespeare criticism, but rather as a work that partakes in the dominant critical force field of the eighteenth century. With the background just outlined, we can compare Montagu and Coleridge’s criticism of Shakespeare in detail from this larger perspective in the next chapter.

Works Cited

- Babcock, R. W. "The Direct Influence of Late Eighteenth Century Shakespeare Criticism on Hazlitt and Coleridge." *Modern Language Notes* 45.6 (1930): 377-87.
- Badawi, M.M. *Coleridge: Critic of Shakespeare*. Cambridge UP, 1973.
- Bate, Jonathan. *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730-1830*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989.
- Bate, Walter Jackson. *From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth Century England*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961.
- Beer, John. "Coleridge's Originality as a Critic of Shakespeare." *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 19.2 (1986): 51-71.
- Boswell, James. *Life of Johnson*. London: Oxford UP, 1957.
- Bowdler, Thomas. *The Family Shakespeare, in one volume, in which nothing is added to the original text; but those words and expressions are omitted which cannot with propriety be read aloud in a family*. J.W. Moore, 1949.
- Caplan, Jay L. "French Theory and Criticism: 2. Eighteenth Century Criticism." in: *Johns Hopkins Guide To Literary Theory And Criticism*. 2nd ed. Johns Hopkins UP.
- Castle, Terry. *Boss Ladies, Watch Out!: Essays on Women, Sex and Writing*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Clarke, Norma. *Dr Johnson's Women*. London: Hambledon and London, 2000.
- Coleridge, S.T. *Coleridge's Essays and Lectures on Shakespeare and Some Other Old Poets and Dramatists*. Ed. Ernest Rhys. London: Everyman's Library, 1909.
- Dobson, Michael. *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.
- Eger, Elizabeth. "'Out rushed a female to protect the bard:' The Bluestocking Defense of Shakespeare." *Reconsidering the Bluestockings*. Eds. Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg. California: Huntington Library, 2003. 127-52.
- Engell, James. *Forming the Critical Mind: Dryden to Coleridge*. London: Harvard UP, 1989.
- . "Coleridge, Johnson, and Shakespeare: A critical drama in five acts." *Romanticism* 4.1 (1998): 22-39.
- Folger Collective of Women Writers, eds. *Women Critics 1660-1820*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995.
- Harcstark Myers, Sylvia. *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1990.
- Huchon, R. *Mrs. Montagu and her Friends*. London: John Murray, 1906.

- Franklin, Colin. *Shakespeare Domesticated: The Eighteenth-Century Editions*. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1991.
- Fruman, Norman. *Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel*. London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1972.
- Johnson, Samuel. "Preface to 'The Plays of William Shakespeare' 1765." *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare*. Ed. D. Nichol Smith. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1963. 104-50.
- Krieger, Murray. "The Arts and the Idea of Progress." *Progress and its Discontents*. Ed. G.A. Almond, M. Chodorow and R.H. Pearce. Berkeley, UCLA Press, 1982.
- McGann, Jerome. *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation*. U of Chicago P, 1983.
- Montagu, Elizabeth. "An essay on the writings and genius of Shakespear, compared with the Greek and French dramatic poets. With some remarks upon the misrepresentations of Mons. de Voltaire." *Writings of the Bluestocking Circle, 1738-1785: Volume 1: Elizabeth Montagu*. Ed. Elizabeth Eger. London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999.
- Nichol Smith, D. ed. *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1963.
- Pope, Alexander. "Preface to 'The Works of Shakespear' 1725." *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare*. Ed. D. Nichol Smith. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1963. 44-58.
- Ralli, Augustus. ed. *A History of Shakespeare Criticism: Volume I*. London: Oxford UP, 1932.
- Rowe, Nicolas. "Some Account of the Life, etc., of Mr. William Shakespear 1712" *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare*. Ed. D. Nichol Smith. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1963. 1-22.
- Schneider, Manfred. *Der Barbar. Endzeitstimmung und Kulturrecycling*. München: Hanser, 1997.
- Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Ed. K. Muir. London: Methuen, 1954.
- . *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*. Ed. W.J. Craig. London: Henry Pordes, 1990.
- Stock, R.D. *Johnson and Neoclassical Dramatic Theory: The Intellectual Context of the Preface to Shakespeare*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1973.
- Taylor, Edward. *Cursory Remarks on Tragedy, on Shakespear, and on certain French and Italian Poets, principally Tragedians*. London: Printed for W. Owen, 1774.
- Theobald, Lewis. "Preface to edition of Shakespeare 1744." *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare*. Ed. D. Nichol Smith. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1963. 59-84.

Thompson, Ann and Sasha Roberts, eds. *Women Reading Shakespeare 1660-1900: An Anthology of Criticism*. Manchester: UP, 1997.

Willoughby, Edwin Elliott. "A Deadly Edition of Shakespeare." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 5.4 (1954): 351-357.

Chapter Two

Montagu and Coleridge: The Making of the Romantic Shakespeare

“And she who SHAKSPEARE’s wrongs redrest
Prov’d that the brightest are the best.”
Hannah More on Elizabeth Montagu, “Bas Bleu” (lines 64-5).

“No man can understand Shakespeare’s superiority fully”
Coleridge, *Table Talk* (80).

I. Introduction

Lady Bluebottle, a caricature of Elizabeth Montagu, says in Byron’s *The Blues: A Literary Eclogue* (1821):

Come, a truce with all tartness; joy of my heart
Is to see Nature triumph o’er all that is art.

Wild Nature! Great Shakespeare! ... (The Bluestocking Archive Online)¹⁵

Byron thereby confounds Elizabeth Montagu’s defence of Shakespeare with the early eighteenth-century view of Shakespeare’s ‘natural’ genius. It was this view of the irregularities of Shakespeare’s natural, unlettered genius that the Romantics sought to remedy. However, we must bear in mind that this is also a caricature insofar as it is used as representative for eighteenth-century Shakespearean criticism as a whole. When Coleridge, in his defence of Shakespeare’s judgment, argues against the characterisation of Shakespeare as a “sort of beautiful *lusus naturae*, a delightful monster – wild [...] without taste or judgment” (42), he is in fact opposing an opinion that had already been superseded in later eighteenth-century Shakespearean criticism, as we have seen in the previous chapter. Moreover, as I hope to demonstrate in this chapter, it is a gross caricature to characterise Montagu as a critic who upheld the notion of a natural, wild Shakespeare without judgment or taste.

The romantic elevation of Shakespeare declares no element of his work to be superfluous or inappropriate. Every aspect of his dramas partakes in a larger order that is imposed upon them by Shakespeare’s artistic mind. His dramas are free from rules but yet

¹⁵ Sylvia Harcstark Myers writes that “[t]he text indicates that Lady Bluebottle seems to have been drawn with Elizabeth Montagu in mind” (291). I agree, because the text describes an event hosted in Lady Bluebottle’s house, and Montagu was not only one of the prominent hostesses in the bluestocking circle, but also with Elizabeth Griffith the only female bluestocking to publish an essay on Shakespeare.

obey an inner law of creation that makes Shakespeare the architect of an organic, unified dramatic form. The romantic view of Shakespeare broadly sketched here is an English-German accomplishment, in which the Schlegel-Coleridge connection is not the only example of cross-fertilisation. I will argue here that Elizabeth Montagu's *Essay*, which was translated into German in 1771, played an important role in the shifts in emphasis that helped create the romantic Shakespeare.

Here, I will first address the critical reception of Montagu's *Essay*, in order to give background to my own focus on her contribution to (German) romantic thought. Then, I will shortly address the reception of Shakespeare in Germany, as a context to the translation of Montagu's *Essay* in 1771. I will proceed to introduce Coleridge's Shakespeare lectures, which I will furthermore compare to Montagu's ideas on Shakespeare through a series of themes that mark important developments in the creation of the romantic Shakespeare.

The Reception History of Montagu's Essay

Interestingly, the little attention that has been paid to Montagu's significance as a critic overlooks those elements of her work which she was praised for by her contemporaries; her exploration of the meaning of Shakespeare's historical dramas as a new genre, and her long chapter on Shakespeare's supernatural imagination "On The Praeturnatural Beings" (111).¹⁶ As we have seen in the previous chapter, Edward Taylor wrote in his 1774 *Cursory Remarks on Tragedy* that Montagu treated this topic in such a masterly manner that there was no need for him to address it. Moreover, Hugh Blair wrote in a private letter to Elizabeth Montagu that he never knew what to make of Shakespeare's historical plays, and that her *Essay* had offered him a whole new perspective. Eger quotes from this letter in her introduction to the critical edition of Montagu's *Essay*:

I am particularly pleased with what you have said, on the Historical Drama. I was always at a loss before what to think of these pieces of Shakespear. You have placed them in a light that is New and Just; and have defended them, entirely to my Satisfaction, on the most rational principles of criticism. (Blair qtd. in Eger lxxii)

Hugh Blair was "a founding figure in the history of literary studies," Eger writes (lxxii), and he was, with Lord Kames and Adam Smith, one of the main contributors to the university study of "English Literature." Eger furthermore notes that Montagu corresponded with all

¹⁶ I am limiting my discussion of the reception of Montagu's *Essay* to those texts that are substantially engaged with the *Essay*, leaving out those studies in which Montagu is mentioned in passing or only referred to in footnotes, of which Abrams, Wellek and Badawi are examples.

these men that are also important representatives of the Scottish Enlightenment (lxxiii-iii), and literary subjects were often discussed in those letters.

As we have seen in the introduction, the early reception history of the bluestockings shows an interest in their role as *salonières* rather than as aspiring female intellectuals. The early interest in Elizabeth Montagu partakes in this trend. Montagu's letters (published in 1810, 1813 and 1817) reached a great readership, and led to the publication of a biography based on her letters by Dr Doran in 1873. The title of the biography, *A Lady of the Last Century*, tells about the nature of Doran's interest in Montagu. She is characterized throughout the work as a lady representative of her age, and whereas Doran mentions the publication of the *Essay* and its international fame, he still characterises the bluestockings as "a ladies club that aimed to reform social manners" (267). Of the *Essay* he writes that "this work, once widely famous, may still be read with pleasure" (149), but the reader of the biography remains unaware of its contents and its position within English Shakespearean criticism. Doran only informs his readers that it was a defence of Shakespeare against Voltaire (151). Montagu's critical aspirations remain somewhat of an abnormality to her biographer. On another occasion he describes her critical writing in a way that strikes a contemporary reader as both paternalistic and silly; "Dressed for a ball, she sat down, read through the 'Ajax' and 'Philoctetes' of Sophocles, wrote a long critical letter on the two dramas, and, losing her ball, earned her bed and the deep sleep she enjoyed in it" (72). Again there is no mention of the nature and content of the literary criticism in her letters.

René Huchon's 1906 dissertation thesis *Mrs. Montagu and her Friends* focuses more particularly on Montagu's critical work. Apart from paying attention to Montagu's biography and her social and literary circle, it focuses on the *Essay* and its reception and place within both English and French criticism of the eighteenth century. Huchon argues that Montagu's *Essay* opened the eyes of French critics to the shortcomings of Voltaire as an English scholar, and that Voltaire's reputation in France was affected by her sustained and detailed critique of the flaws in his translation of Shakespeare. However, even though he praises the "good sense" displayed in the *Essay*, he judges it "deficient in originality" and claims that the leading ideas are borrowed from Pope and Johnson (160-161). Huchon also holds that the "natural coldness of [Montagu's] temper made her insensible to the incomparable poetic charm of many passages in the plays" (163). This supposed "coldness of temper" can be inferred from Huchon's biographical sketch, especially his discussion of Montagu's unhappy marriage and her advice to young women not to marry for love, but to consider reasonably how a marriage would impact their lives.

Sylvia Harcstark Myers devotes a long chapter of her brilliant study of the bluestockings, published in 1990, to Elizabeth Montagu's literary criticism: "Elizabeth Montagu: The Making of a Female Critic." She focuses on the genesis of Montagu's *Essay* and her coming of age as a literary critic, pointing to the people who mentored and supported her in her critical ambitions, like Gilbert West and Lord Lyttelton. She characterizes Montagu's interest in the drama as "something akin to a religious institution, which conveyed to audiences an understanding of themselves, their actions and their gods" (203). Shakespeare's dramas supported a sense of national identity that is also apparent in Montagu's emphasis of the native source of the superstitions that are found in Shakespeare. Harcstark Myers thus points to the same elements of Montagu's work that I will highlight here, but only in two short sections as it is not the main focus of her chapter. Fiona Ritchie is the only critic that pays sustained attention to Montagu's ideas on the historical drama. In her article "Elizabeth Montagu: 'Shakespeare's poor little critic?'" (2005), she argues that there is more to the *Essay* than simply being a nationalistic defence of Shakespeare. She touches upon the novelty of Montagu's treatment of the history plays as a distinct genre, but does not relate it to developments in German Shakespeare criticism, as I will do in the following sections.

In her article "Out rushed a female to protect the Bard": The Bluestocking Defense of Shakespeare," Elizabeth Eger discusses Montagu's *Essay* and Elizabeth Griffith's *The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated* (1775), placing them in a tradition of a female defence of Shakespeare starting with the Shakespeare ladies club of the 1730s. She concludes that both Griffith and Montagu successfully "laid claim to the previously masculine arena of critical judgment" (151), but that ultimately, their work did not threaten masculine authority. Eger holds that their reverential attitude towards the national bard may have contributed to their own disappearance from the canon; while Shakespeare's genius was taken for granted more and more, the writings of these women slipped out of view, although their defence of Shakespeare became part of subsequent critical orthodoxy.¹⁷

It is precisely this latent presence of aspects from Montagu's *Essay* in critical orthodoxy that I would like to address in this chapter, focusing especially on those aspects for which Montagu was praised by her contemporaries; her ideas on the historical drama and her exploration of Shakespeare's supernatural imagination. Eger points out that Montagu's *Essay*

¹⁷ Another article on Elizabeth Montagu that is worth mentioning here is Powell Jones's "The Romantic Bluestocking, Elizabeth Montagu" (1948) which illustrates Mrs Montagu's "romantic side" (87) that, according to Powell Jones, can be inferred from her unpublished letters. He focuses especially on Montagu's "love of the wilder aspects of nature, interest in Gothic architecture and medieval literature, and the contemplation of divine wisdom as revealed in physical nature" (87).

is “particularly original in her focus on [Shakespeare’s] supernatural beings” (134), but she does not analyse this specific ‘romantic’ contribution of the *Essay* to the critical canon.

Interestingly, Eger, Fay and Ritchie assume a relationship between Montagu’s *Essay* and the aesthetic of high romanticism, but a comparative analysis that places Montagu in the context of the emerging romantic defence of Shakespeare has not yet been made. In this chapter I will compare Montagu’s *Essay* with Coleridge’s Shakespeare lectures, the most canonical example of a romantic defence of Shakespeare in England. Moreover, I will discuss the reception of her *Essay* in Germany, where it influenced the course of Shakespearean criticism, especially the *Sturm und Drang* critics like Herder. Montagu’s *Essay* was translated into German in 1771 by the German Shakespeare scholar Johann Joachim Eschenburg. The young Herder read this translation and wrote a laudatory review in 1772, after which he rewrote his own essay on Shakespeare, incorporating many of Montagu’s ideas. Apart from Herder, Tieck and Goethe’s critical writings on Shakespeare also show an engagement with the leading ideas from Montagu’s *Essay*. Most of these German critics would later contribute to Coleridge’s views on Shakespeare, as we will see.

The German reception of Montagu’s *Essay* has not yet been addressed by Anglophone scholars working on the bluestockings. Some of them even seem to be unaware of Eschenburg’s 1771 translation. The German translation of the *Essay* is not mentioned in Doran and Huchon. In addition, both Vickers, author of *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage*, and Harcstark Myers (who quotes Vickers on the publication history of the *Essay*) do not mention the German translation: “[The *Essay*] went through further editions in 1770, 1773, 1778, 1785, and 1810, with a French translation in 1777 and an Italian in 1828” (Vickers, qtd in Harcstark Myers 203). Eger is the only critic who mentions Eschenburg’s translation, but she does not explore the *Essay*’s reception in Germany (Eger 148). I will pay attention to the German reception here, because this is one of the clearest examples of the contribution of Montagu’s critical doctrine to the romantic defence of Shakespeare. In the next section I will shortly address the reception history of Shakespeare in Germany, basing myself on Stellmacher and Paulin’s thorough studies of this topic, before proceeding with a comparative analysis of Montagu’s *Essay* and Coleridge’s Shakespeare lectures.

Shakespeare in Germany

Germany’s earliest interest in Shakespeare was not derived from the plays themselves, but from remarks made by British and French critics. Among the French critics, Voltaire had a major influence on Germany’s first acquaintance with Shakespeare. Ironically, Voltaire would

later become the focus of criticism for the *Stürmer und Dränger*, to whom he was the main representative of French Classicism who treated Shakespeare unjustly. The translation of Addison and Steele's *Spectator* into German between 1739-41 would be another major influence on the German reception of Shakespeare, Stellmacher writes in *Herders Shakespeare-Bild* (1-8). It was not until 1741 that a Shakespearean drama was translated into German in its entirety, although there were partial translations embedded in literary criticism and in compendiums of "the beauties of Shakespeare." In that year Caspar Wilhelm von Borck, a Prussian minister-counsellor in London between 1735 and 1738, translated *Julius Caesar*. This translation inspired the first theoretically grounded Shakespeare debate in Germany. Johann Christoph Gottsched, a critic who aimed to reform German literature according to the rules of French classicism, was highly critical of Borck's introduction of Shakespeare into the German language. In the 27th part of his *Beyträge zur Critischen Historie der Deutschen Sprache, Poesie und Beredsamkeit*, he writes

Die Uebersetzungssucht ist so stark unter uns eingerissen, daß man ohne Unterscheid Gutes und Böses in unsre sprache bringt: gerade als ob alles was ausländisch ist, schön und vörtrefflich ware, und als ob wir nicht selbst schon bessere Sachen aus den eigenen Köpfen unsrer Landesleute aufzuweisen hätten. Die elendeste Haupt- und Staatsactionen unsrer gemeinen Comödianten ist kaum so voll Schnitzer und Fehler wider die Regeln der Schaubühne und gesunden Vernunft, als dieses Stück Shakespeares ist. (qtd. in Stellmacher 9)

Gottsched criticizes the popularity of translations of foreign texts, appealing to a sense of nationalism in his readers. He judges Shakespeare's play by neoclassical standards and finds too many faults according to the dramatic rules, but also according to his own common sense. All in all, he attempts to reduce Shakespeare's influence on German literature by appealing to the rules of French classicism.

Johann Elias Schlegel is more positive of the English bard in his "Vergleich Shakespears und Andreas Gryphs," an article published in Gottsched's *Beyträge* in 1741. According to Stellmacher, he is one of the critics who instigated the German bardolatry, or, "Bardenmode" (27). His defence of Shakespeare ties in very well with the English critics, some of whose works he would probably have been acquainted with. Schlegel praises Shakespeare's knowledge of human nature and his character depictions. Therein lies for him the aim of the drama, in "der genauen und feinen Abschilderung der Gemütter und Leidenschaften" (qtd. in Stellmacher 24). But as Stellmacher points out, he is not

wholeheartedly positive about Shakespeare's dramas. His emphasis on the beauties and faults of Shakespeare is again very close to the early eighteenth-century British defence of the bard. Interestingly, he also touches upon the question of the relationship between "Dichtung" and "Geschichte," this attention to the historical value of Shakespeare's dramas would become one of the cornerstones of the *Sturm und Drang* reception of Shakespeare, on which Montagu's *Essay* would be an important influence.

It was not until the 1750s that Shakespeare assumed a central position in the German debates on the modern drama. Shakespeare's dramas, *Julius Caesar* excepted, were still for the most part unknown in Germany. In 1756, *Richard III* and *Romeo and Juliet* were translated, but Shakespeare did not dominate the reception of English dramatists in Germany. Friedrich Nicolai's 1755 *Briefen über den itzigen Zustand der schönen Wissenschaften in Deutschland* focuses on the German theatre and the merits of the influence of British dramatists in the 11th letter. For Nicolai, Shakespeare is "ein Mann ohne kenntniß der Regeln, ohne Gelehrsamkeit, ohne Ordnung" (qtd. in Stellmacher 30), an emphasis reminiscent of English debates on Shakespeare's learning that we have encountered in the previous chapter. Nicolai judges Shakespeare's plays to be irregular according to neoclassical standards, but he deviates from Gottsched's views when he declares the English theatre to be more diverse and richer in characters than the French (*Ibidem* 29-30). In these respects it could set an example for the German theatre: "Die Grösse und Mannigfaltigkeit der Charaktere, ist eines des vornehmsten, worin die Deutschen von den Engländern lernen können" (qtd. in Stellmacher 29). This is the first statement that upholds Shakespeare as a model for the German theatre, Roger Paulin claims in his study of the German reception of Shakespeare (34), and Nicolai's statement would be repeated by many German critics after him.

Between 1762 and 1766, Christoph Martin Wieland translated twenty-two of Shakespeare's plays in eight volumes. From then on, two-thirds of Shakespeare's dramas were available in German. Interestingly, Wieland translates all these works in prose, except for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the play with which he opens his first volume. The literary historian Johann Joachim Eschenburg would edit and complete this first grand-scale Shakespeare translation in 1777, also offering a prose rendition of the plays. Eschenburg can be seen as the first German Shakespeare scholar, whose approach Paulin characterises as "encyclopedic" and "universalist" (115). Next to his Shakespeare translation, he translated Montagu's *Essay* into German in 1771, and published the study *Ueber W. Shakespeare* in 1787. This study focuses on Shakespeare's learning, his originality, his genius, his knowledge of humanity and his faults, and is largely dependant upon English criticism, according to

Paulin (119). Wieland and Eschenburg's translation would remain the standard until Schlegel and Voss's verse renditions were published. Therefore we may conclude that Wieland and Eschenburg contributed significantly to Germany's consciousness of Shakespeare.

The Sturm und Drang Reception of Shakespeare

Until 1765, German Shakespeare criticism followed the leading French and British critics both in style and emphasis, Paulin argues (96). The difference lies in the belatedness of the German reception. As we have seen, it was only in 1741 that an entire Shakespearean drama was translated into German. Another difference that is pointed out by Paulin, is the long engagement with a reconciliation of Ancient and Modern drama in Germany (96). In the early 1770s, the *Sturm und Drang* critics would approach Shakespeare through the notions of nature and genius, that showed, however indebted to English criticism, a "German consciousness and emphasis" (Paulin 133). In the *Sturm und Drang*, or, 'Storm and Stress' movement, creative spontaneity replaced dramatic rules, and creative genius and Shakespeare became near synonyms. Another new perspective on Shakespeare was the awareness of Shakespeare's position in a historical development that would be explored especially by Herder. With his publication *Von deutscher Art und Kunst* (On German Character and Art), he pioneers a "new-historicist, proto-Romantic approach to cultures and their products" (Moore vii). *Von deutscher Art und Kunst* (1774) has come to be seen as the manifesto of the *Sturm und Drang*, and as an important document for the German literary revival in the 1770s. Like Gottsched before him, Herder aimed to reform German literature, but with a different orientation. Whereas Gottsched sought the example of French neoclassicism, Herder upheld Ossian (the supposedly original Gaelic-Scottish bard) and Shakespeare as exemplary original poets who express the spirit and character of their times, and therefore could instigate the canonisation of German literature. Herder would, for example, relate Ossian to German "Volkslieder" (Stellmacher 173). The essays in *Von deutscher Art und Kunst* explore different aspects of German cultural identity, including a contribution by Goethe on Gothic architecture.

The *Sturm und Drang* critics were the first German critics who radically broke away from French neoclassicism by presenting Shakespeare as an alternative model. As in England, there were passionate defences of Shakespeare against Voltaire that were indebted to Montagu's *Essay* whose German translation was accompanied by Eschenburg's own attack on the French critic. Turning away from classicist poetics, the *Stürmer und Dränger* introduced new themes and debates in German Shakespeare criticism regarding nature and

genius, the historical development of the drama, the individuality of nations and cultures, and an interest in what Dryden called “the faery way of writing” (237). In his study *The Reception of English Literature in Germany*, Pierce points to two important influences on the German involvement with the notions of nature and genius; Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s doctrine of a return to nature and Edward Young’s *Conjectures On Original Composition* that became available in German translation in 1760. Young distinguishes between imitation and originality, and stresses that original composition draws on nature alone. This view of the natural genius of Shakespeare was a commonplace in English criticism, as we have seen in the previous chapter, but it had not been fully endorsed in Germany until the enthusiastic Shakespeare reception of the *Sturm und Drang*.

Another new perspective was offered by Lessing’s translation of “the Spanish ‘Urtekst’ of climate theory and the individuality of nations and cultures” (Paulin 72). In 1752, Lessing translated Juan Harte de San Juan’s 1575 *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias*. Climate theory emphasises the different circumstances under which literary works from different cultures come into being, an idea that would be called upon to discredit the universality of French classicist doctrine. Following Montagu, Herder would argue, for example, that the Greek dramatic rules were rooted in Greek soil, which made them unfit as timeless canons. Although the individuality of nations and cultures was stressed in this argument, and great authors like Shakespeare came into being in their own specific historical and national circumstances, their work also expresses universal qualities which makes them interesting to readers from different times and places. This transition from “timeless classics” to “modern masterpieces,” as David Damroch phrases it in *What is World Literature?* (15), of which Shakespeare was the paradigmatic example, underlies Goethe’s concept of *Weltliteratur* as a conversation between texts across national and epochal boundaries.

In the emphasis on the specific cultural climate that brought forth Shakespeare’s genius, the common Germanic or Nordic inheritance that the Germans share with Shakespeare was underlined (Paulin 254). The term “deutsch” in *Von deutscher Art und Kunst* not only refers to modern Germany, but should be interpreted in a wider sense, as “Germanic,” according to Gregory Moore, one of the English translators of Herder (xi). It thus encompassed Scandinavia and the British Isles also. In a similar vein, the English interest in Shakespeare’s supernatural imagination that we find in for example Addison, Warton, Hurd and Montagu, as we will see in a later section, was appropriated by the German critics who thought of themselves as inheritors of that same gothic tradition. In her *Essay*, Montagu points to the gothic tradition as a rich resource for Shakespeare’s poetic imagination. Ludwig

Tieck's 1796 essay "Über Shakspears Behandlung des Wunderbaren" that is held to be "central to the Romantic understanding of the work of art and the poetic process" (Paulin 283) contains echoes of Addison, Warton and Montagu.¹⁸ Even in his title, Paulin holds, Tieck refers to Montagu's *Essay*; the word "Behandlung" is a translation of Montagu's discussion of Shakespeare's "treatment" of the supernatural (284). I will discuss Tieck's essay and the new *Sturm und Drang* perspectives on Shakespeare broadly outlined here in more detail in relation to Montagu and Coleridge in the next sections, starting from the premise that Montagu's *Essay* was an important resource for the *Sturm und Drang* engagement with Shakespeare, that in its turn would provide the basis for the romantic understanding of Shakespeare.

Coleridge's Shakespeare Lectures

Coleridge is regarded as "the first and greatest of the Romantic critics" Augustus Ralli writes in *A History of Shakespeare Criticism* (142). Craig and Thomas call him "the revealer of undiscovered greatness in Shakespeare [...] and the father of modern criticism" (9). His stature as a romantic critic of Shakespeare is largely based on his concern with Shakespeare's dramatic form, and his introduction of a new method to Shakespeare criticism in England. Coleridge was engaged with Shakespeare all his life. He himself writes that he has been reading Shakespeare "almost daily" since he was ten years old, discovering new aspects of the bard at every new stage in his life: "O! When I think of the inexhaustible mine of virgin treasure in our Shakespeare [...] that upon every step I have made forward in taste [...] at every new accession of information [...] I have unfailingly discovered a proportionate increase of wisdom and intuition in Shakespeare" (37). The main source of his Shakespearean criticism are the remains of the lectures delivered between 1808 and 1819, but Coleridge also wrote on Shakespeare in the *Biographia Literaria*, in his letters and notebooks and in *Table Talk*. He even planned to publish his own edition of Shakespeare's works with critical notes, prefaces and analyses, but this project, like many of Coleridge's projects, was never finished.¹⁹

Here, I will concentrate on the Shakespeare lectures. Coleridge lectured frequently on Shakespeare between 1808 and 1819. The contents of these lectures have come down to us in a fragmentary state. There are no substantial notes kept from the 1808 lectures, but from the

¹⁸ Eschenburg's translation of Montagu's *Essay* was not only accompanied by his own critique of Shakespeare, but also by an essay of Joseph Warton on *The Tempest* that likewise deals with the supernatural imagination of Shakespeare.

¹⁹ See Badawi's study *Coleridge, critic of Shakespeare*, which has an appendix on Coleridge's notes and ideas for this projected edition of Shakespeare.

later lecture series we still have Coleridge's own lecture notes, as well as notes from people in his audience; the reports of John Payne Collier and Henry Crabb Robinson. The edition of the Shakespeare lectures that I have used is based on Coleridge's own lecture notes, prepared by Henry Nelson Coleridge and Sara Coleridge in 1836, and by Payne Collier in 1856. In dealing with these lectures, one has to address the problem of plagiarism. Coleridge's ninth lecture of the 1811-12 series on the ancient and modern drama and *The Tempest* is largely borrowed from A.W. Schlegel's Vienna lectures, delivered in 1808 and published in 1809-10 (Ashton 272-3). Even after these plagiarisms became known, however, "critics have been least disposed to deprive Coleridge of his laurels as a brilliant original thinker, even while admitting that he may have borrowed many important concepts from the German," (Fruman 142). I will not be concerned specifically with Coleridge's borrowings from Schlegel, but where appropriate I will address these. As is well known, Coleridge was very well read in German literary criticism in general. From his notes his biographer Rosemary Ashton concludes that he had read Lessing, Schiller's writings on classical and modern literature and Herder's essay on Shakespeare that was published in *Von deutscher Art und Kunst*. Like A.W. Schlegel, Coleridge was influenced by Kant's analysis of the imagination (Ashton 273-5). He was also aware of A.W. Schlegel's writings, as we learn from the many claims of priority over Schlegel in Coleridge's writing. In their turn, the German critics were influenced by eighteenth century British critics, like Addison, Johnson, Blair and Montagu, as we will see in the next sections.

II. Montagu and Coleridge: A Comparative Analysis

Aim and Method

Upon writing an essay or delivering a lecture, a critic is aware of the current debates in the field, in this case Shakespeare criticism, and envisages how his or her own views could contribute to that tradition. This contribution is usually formed in contrastively distinguishing oneself from the established tradition; one might feel the need to correct certain views, or feel that a specific point has not yet been made. This applies to both Shakespeare critics whose work we will discuss here. Montagu and Coleridge express the need for a principle of criticism independent of French classicist doctrine, one that is attuned to the specific historical circumstances in which Shakespeare's dramas were created. Montagu takes up arms against Voltaire and neoclassical doctrine in general: French poets may assume a superiority over Shakespeare "on account of their more constant adherence to Aristotle's unities of place and

time” (2), but “heaven-born genius” acts “from something superior to rules, and antecedent to rules, and has a right to appeal to nature herself” (3), a phrase reminiscent of Johnson’s preface. This makes the “pedantry of learning and its dogmatic rules” unfit to judge Shakespeare’s plays. Montagu rather appeals to her own “candid” and unprejudiced” judgment as a surer basis from which to establish Shakespeare’s merits (1).

Montagu therefore establishes a new criterion from which to judge the bard’s merits, starting from a definition of dramatic poetry in which she is attentive to the different conditions under which the English and Greek Stages came into being (I will elaborate on this point later on). For Montagu, the drama is a subspecies of poetry, whose common aim it is to instruct by pleasing. The specific aim of the drama is “the effecting of moral purposes by the representation of a fable” (5). From this definition of the aim of the drama follow the two leading questions in her discussion of Shakespeare; whether his dramas answer the noblest end of the drama, moral instruction, and whether his dramatic imitation has “its proper dramatic excellence,” a point that will be affirmatively established in a comparative analysis of Shakespeare and Corneille (5).

Montagu’s opinion that “the drama requires a specific criticism” (240) is based not only on her refutation of French classical doctrine, but came into being in the context of the English Shakespearean criticism of her time. Reviewing Johnson’s 1765 preface to his edition of Shakespeare, she wrote to Elizabeth Carter that she felt he had not really pointed out the

Peculiar excellencies of Shakespeare as a *Dramatick* poet, this point I shall labour as I think he therein excels everyone. I have been very busy in writing upon the tragedy of Macbeth, which opens a large field for criticism, as I have there taken notice of how he employs his supernatural Beings, who, by the by, other Poets have not made at all supernatural. (19 July 1766, qtd. in Harcstark Myers 197)

Although, as Eger has pointed out (133-4), Montagu was not openly critical of Johnson in her *Essay*, this extract shows that she was aware of the shortcomings of Shakespearean criticism of her time, and the specific contribution that she wanted to make with her own *Essay*. The general aim of the essay is to demonstrate “the genius of Shakespeare through the whole extent of the poet’s province” (50) and this includes an emphasis on Shakespeare’s supernatural imagination. The *Essay* opens with a general definition of the aim of dramatic poetry, after which she goes into the specific qualities of Shakespeare’s historical dramas, using the example of the first and second part of Henry IV that are each discussed in separate chapters. The following chapter is devoted to the “preternatural beings” that Shakespeare employs, followed in the next chapter by an analysis of *Macbeth* that pays attention to

Shakespeare's representation of the witches and their role in the play. The *Essay* ends with an analysis of Corneille's *Cinna*, and a comparison between Corneille's and Shakespeare's dramatic representation of the death of Julius Caesar.

Coleridge in his lectures likewise aimed to convey to his audience new "rules and principles of sound judgment" (213). He wanted to meet and refute popular objections to particular points in the works of Shakespeare. These popular opinions that he aimed to refute not only pertained to French classicism, which by the time of his lectures had been attacked by both English and German critics. Coleridge also aimed to correct opinions held by his countrymen and women, which he sometimes represented in a caricatured manner that did not do justice to the nature and content of eighteenth-century Shakespeare criticism (see Engell "Coleridge"). The focus of his criticism was the eighteenth-century doctrine of a wild, natural Shakespeare whose irregular compositions showed no judgment and taste. He moreover objected to a 'merits and faults' approach to Shakespeare, "in which the splendour of the parts compensates for the barbarous shapelessness and irregularity of the whole" (45). In objecting to this approach, he defined genius as inherently lawful, and declares Shakespeare's dramas to be carefully constructed wholes, whose principal of judgment needs to be inferred from the plays themselves.

Coleridge starts with defining poetry in opposition to science, and with reference to the poetic mind in the process of creation. From there he proceeds to the progress of the drama, in which he, like Montagu, pays attention to the differences between the Greek and English stages. This brings him to a comparison of Ancient and Modern literature, that, as was indicated before, is very much indebted to A.W. Schlegel. He extends the comparison to encompass the different morals and religion of the Greek and the English. Coleridge furthermore focuses on the new genre that Shakespeare's dramas created, as well as paying attention to the historical dramas. From the discussion of the specific qualities Shakespeare's dramas follows his important lecture "Shakespeare's Judgment equal to his Genius" (42). He moreover devotes several lectures to the analysis of specific Shakespearean dramas, for example to *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, and to the order of Shakespeare's plays.

In the next sections, I will explore Montagu and Coleridge's ideas on Shakespeare through a number of themes that are key concerns that show the different emphases in neoclassical and romantic aesthetics.

The English Historical Drama

Montagu's nationalistic defence of Shakespeare's "home-born dramas" (21) attacks the hegemony of French neoclassicism and its universal principles for taste. "French poets," she writes, "assume a superiority over Shakespeare, on account of their more constant adherence to Aristotle's unities" (2). She argues that the Aristotelian unities should not be interpreted as universal rules for the drama, but rather as Aristotle's description of the working principles of the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles. This idea was also expressed in Pope's preface of 1725, but Montagu is the first critic to explore its consequences. She concludes that Aristotle's rules do not apply to Shakespeare's plays, and that we therefore need a new principle of criticism. In order to account for the differences between Sophocles's tragedies and Shakespeare's dramas, she compares the different historical moments in which these plays came into being:

Shakespeare's plays were to be acted in a paltry tavern, to an unlettered audience, just emerging from barbarity; the Greek tragedies were to be exhibited at the public charge, under the care and auspices of the magistrates at Athens; where the very populace were critics in wit, and connoisseurs in public spectacles. (5)

The underlying idea regarding the barbarity of the Elizabethan era was somewhat of a commonplace in eighteenth-century criticism, and was usually referred to as a means of excusing Shakespeare's lack of taste, as we saw in the previous chapter. Montagu opposes the presumed barbarity of Shakespeare's times to ancient Greece and Rome, which she defines as "periods of noble and graceful simplicity" (3). In these periods "perfect" and "faultless" compositions were created (3). By paying attention to the different historical circumstances from which the ancient Greek and modern French and English stages emerged, Montagu appeals to an understanding of taste as diverse, individual and historically specific. "As there are poets of various talents, and readers of various tastes," Montagu argues, "one would rather wish all fields of Parnassus might be free and open to men of genius, than that a proud tyrannical spirit of criticism should controul us in the use of them" (23).

As we have seen, Montagu formulates a different criterion of judgment that is founded upon the didactic purpose of art. The universal aim of the drama is to educate its audience with the representation of a fable. Interestingly, Montagu establishes this aim with reference to Aristotle's poetics and his notion of *catharsis*; tragedy's capability of purging the audience of pity and terror. But this aim also applies to the "Northern bards," since their drama practice emerged from holy offices and had a similar character (9). Although the aim of the drama is universal, the dramatic poet is for Montagu truly a poet of the people, and he should address

himself to them. For Montagu, the drama is a national institution that aims to convey a lesson to a specific audience.

In comparison with the epic and other forms of poetry (poetry is for Montagu the main category that holds the different literary genres), the dramatic form is best capable of conveying a moral lesson. Her comparison of dramatic imitation and epic narration foreshadows modern narratological debates regarding the difference between “showing” and “telling;” the first technique that depicts events through someone’s point of view is held to be more effective than telling through narratorial observations, sometimes made from an *extradiegetic* viewpoint (i.e. a point of view that is not embedded in the narration, but external to it). Montagu, in a similar vein, finds a dramatic representation of the action that traces “the consequences of ill-governed passions, or erroneous principles” (10) better suited to the aim of moral instruction than the “cold narration” characteristic of the epic genre. In line with this argument, she points to the Grecian stage, in which it was the role of the chorus to give voice to the morality of the play. However, as the chorus is “no agent in the drama” (67), and thus speaks from an extradiegetic point of view, the spectator cannot sympathise with their moral commentary as much as he can sympathise with the persons in the drama. “It is by touching the passions, and exciting sympathetic emotions, not by sentences, that the tragedian must make his impression on the spectator,” Montagu argues (67).

Montagu’s emphasis on the situational moral lessons that the drama communicates to its audience gives new importance to that quality for which Shakespeare was most esteemed in the late eighteenth century: his talent for depicting characters. This is of course a highly important quality for a dramatic poet who conveys his moral lessons through the actions of his characters. Montagu writes that Shakespeare “opens us to the internal state of the persons” and never fails to “command our sympathy” for them (12). The poet himself should therefore be concealed in the action, a talent which Shakespeare exemplifies; “Shakespear seems to have had the art of the Dervise, in the Arabian tales, who could throw his soul into the body of another man, and be at once possessed of his sentiments, adopt his passions, and rise to all the functions and feelings of his situation” (13).

The French dramas that seek to imitate Ancient tragedies and follow Aristotle’s rules, only give “exterior representations” of the formal qualities of their examples. Montagu thus concludes that the French drama has founded its pretensions to superiority over the English, Shakespearean drama, on “some trivial beauties” (11). In addition to these harsh criticisms, Montagu characterises the French dramas as “undramatic” (12). “A French drama is a tissue of declamations, and some laboured recitals of the catastrophe, by which the spirit of the

drama is greatly weakened and enervated” (12). These mechanical “puppet-shows” cannot effect the chief purpose of the theatrical institution, since they give a false representation of the manners of their characters. In addition, according to Montagu, the subject matter of ancient tragedies is so much based on their mythology that it becomes unfit to be represented on a modern stage. A dramatic poet should rather appeal to the lives and experiences of his audience, the common people.

Montagu’s emphasis on the poet’s relation to his audience, the common people, leads to her concern with the genre in which Shakespeare, in her opinion, excelled: the historical drama. This genre unites “the force and lustre of poetic language” with “the authority of history” (20), and it is perfectly tailored to the needs of its audience: “[a]s the misfortunes of nations as well as of individuals often arise from their peculiar dispositions, customs, prejudices, and vices, these home-born dramas are excellently calculated to correct them” (21). The historical drama is a genre of mixture that combines history and poetry, tragedy and comedy, and is thus able to represent the manners of the people, and give the general temper of the times. It moreover gives ample opportunity for situational moral lessons, since it brings many incidents into view. The idea that a poet should take his subjects from the history and traditions of his own country, and address a national audience would find a favourable reception in the German *Sturm und Drang* period, as we will see in the next section.

The Emergence of the Historical Method: Montagu and Herder

Johann Gottfried Herder may be seen as one of Montagu’s most intent and conscientious readers, and he was very much indebted to her approach to Shakespeare. He read her essay in Eschenburg’s translation of 1771, and with Eschenburg, naturally assumed its anonymous author to be a man; Eschenburg refers to the author as “*der Verfasser*” (VIII), Herder as “*der Kunstrichter*” (“Versuch” 315). It can be demonstrated that Herder read Montagu’s *Essay* intently, not only from his laudatory review of Eschenburg’s translation that was published in 1771, but also from his own Shakespeare essay of which the final version would be published in *Von deutscher Art und Kunst* in 1773. Before Herder wrote the final version of this essay, he wrote two drafts that show pointed differences in emphasis and subject matter. His first draft does not mention Montagu’s essay. The second and final drafts of his essay, however, both mention the anonymous author of the Shakespeare *Essay*, and also take up many of her themes and emphases. The final version, which was published in the 1773 manifesto of the *Sturm und Drang*, *Von deutscher Art und Kunst*, shows a thorough reworking of Montagu’s leading ideas, but mentions the author of the most recent essay on Shakespeare only in

passing, with the question whether “he” did elaborate enough on Herder’s “*Lieblingsidee*” (“Shakespear” 545): the way in which Shakespeare was able to transform popular romances and tales into his dramas, answering it in the negative.

Anglophone critics that discuss Herder’s “Shakespear” fail to mention Montagu’s influence upon this work. Wellek mentions a whole list of English critics that influenced Herder “Blackwell, Harris, Shaftesbury, Brown, Young, Percy and Warton” (181), but Elizabeth Montagu does not appear on his list. Gregory Moore, who translated Herder’s “Shakespear” into English does not discuss the Montagu-Herder connection either, he only refers to Montagu’s *Essay* and to Herder’s review of it in a footnote (69). Price’s study of the reception of English literature in Germany does mention Montagu’s *Essay* in relation to Herder, but he mistakes her for her contemporary Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762), who is now famous for her letters, and he does not bother to make a thorough comparison between Montagu and Herder’s views (296-7). German critics dealing with Herder’s essay do pay attention to his thorough indebtedness to Montagu, both Paulin, Proß and Stellmacher mention the influence of Montagu’s *Essay* upon Herder, but a detailed enquiry into the different versions of his essay, or a comparative analysis of Montagu and Herder’s views on Shakespeare has not yet been made.

Here, I will go into Montagu’s influence upon Herder’s ideas for two reasons. Firstly, it would be interesting to see how a contemporary who read Montagu intently and was not prejudiced by an awareness of her gender and social circumstances, evaluated her ideas. Secondly, since I agree with Eger, Fay and Ritchie that Montagu’s *Essay* foreshadows the romantic defence of Shakespeare, the so far unexplored connection between Montagu and Herder could provide arguments that demonstrate the nature of Montagu’s influence upon the romantic valuation of Shakespeare. Herder’s importance for (German) romantic thought has been firmly established today. Wellek calls him “the great initiator” and the builder of a new romantic poetics, and it would now be interesting to see how Montagu’s *Essay* prefigures his praise of Herder’s conception of poetry based on “a natural poetry, sensuous, metaphorical, imaginative [...] with a standard of judgment based on historical relativism and an implicit distaste for the poetry of statement” (Wellek 200), and furthermore, to see how these ideas have become part of Coleridge’s defence of Shakespeare.

“Alle, die den Deutschen Shakespear haben, werden diese Schrift sehr gerne lesen,” Herder writes at the beginning of his review of Montagu’s *Essay*, characterising it as “eine gute hervorbringung der wahren, Englischen Kritik” (312). Many of the leading ideas in his own essay on Shakespeare are directly indebted to the *Essay* that he praises so

enthusiastically here. Herder's "Shakespear" is an exuberant defence of Shakespeare's genius characterised by its lyrical style of writing, and frequent use of rhetorical questions and exclamation marks. It opens with an image of Shakespeare sitting on a mountaintop, his head enveloped by rays of light and with a host of murmuring critics at the foot of his throne of rocks – critics that judge him, excuse him, comment on him – all of whom he cannot hear. With his essay, Herder aims to bring Shakespeare to live to a German audience, and defend him against neoclassicist doctrine, with arguments that a reader of Montagu's *Essay* will be familiar with.

After the image of Shakespeare sitting on a mountaintop, Herder continues his essay with an exploration of the different conditions under which the Greek and modern English stage came into being. Following Aristotle, Herder locates the origins of Greek tragedy in an introductory tale, improvised by the leader of the chorus. Aeschylus's tragedies are thus "nur noch *Chor*, dem einige Geschichte zwischengesetzt war" (528). This origin also explains the simplicity of the Greek plots that is described in Aristotle's unity of action. From this, Herder concludes that the unity of action, as well as the other unities, result from these stage conditions and are therefore not artificial rules, but natural consequences of the contemporary conditions of the Greek stage. Since the dramatic unities naturally follow from the stage conditions of the Greek, and since all these conditions, including world view, manners and religion have changed also, it would be fruitless to imitate these classical customs on a modern stage, as the French do. From this Herder concludes, following Montagu, that French drama entirely misses the essence of the example it seeks to imitate. It only recreates outward similarities and misses the Greek dramatic aim. Herder therefore characterises the French dramas as declamations and sententious speeches, and leaves it up to his reader to decide

ob eine Kopierung fremder Zeiten, Sitten, und Handlungen in Halbwahrheit, mit dem köstlichen Zwecke, sie der zweistündigen Vorstellung auf einem Brettergerüste fähig und ähnlich zu machen, wohl einer *Nachbildung* gleich- oder übergeschätzt werden könne, die in gewissem Betracht die höchste Nationalliteratur war? (533)

From this we may conclude that Herder, again following Montagu, sees drama as a national institution. Herder elaborates that Shakespeare's drama developed under different circumstances, and from a different soil, in which history, religion and manners differed remarkably from those in ancient Greece. The Greek and English drama do however, have the same dramatic aim, which is catharsis.

Herder goes on to represent Shakespeare as Sophocles's brother, or as the modern Sophocles. This modern Sophocles is in need of his own Aristotle, who would elucidate the

complexities of his dramatic constitution: “O Aristoteles! wenn du erschienest, wie würdest du den neuen Sophokles Homerisieren! würdest so eine eigne Theorie über ihn dichten, die jetzt seine Landsleute [...] noch nicht gedichtet haben!” (536). Wolfgang Proß, in his article on Herder’s interpretation of Shakespeare (1988), concludes from this that Herder envisions himself in that role, since his essay aims to explore the working principles of Shakespeare’s dramas (166). Herder furthermore provides a comparison between Sophocles and Shakespeare, between the Grecian and the Northern bard. In Sophocles, a single action prevails, whereas in Shakespeare the totality of the action “das Ganze des Ereignisse, einer Begebenheit” (536) is represented. Sophocles represents a single tone, Shakespeare a melody. And if Sophocles instructs the Greek, Shakespeare instructs northern men. For Herder, the dramatic poet is also the people’s poet, whose aim it is to instruct and cultivate them.

All of the points Herder makes about Shakespeare; portraying him as the northern bard, whose genius is rooted in English soil and determined by specific historical circumstances that differ from those that gave rise to the Greek drama; characterising him as the poet of the people who aims to instruct them; are all indebted to Montagu’s *Essay*. Even the manner in which Herder criticises the French dramas, calling them declamations and sententious speeches, is borrowed from Montagu. However, Herder differs from Montagu in the audience that he addresses, and also in his own agenda for holding up Shakespeare as an example. Whereas Montagu defends the national bard to an English audience, Herder specifically addresses a German audience that does not have a strong national identity or a national literature like England does, because of Germany’s different historical development. Herder’s essay expresses the need for an analysis of Shakespeare’s method that would enable Germany to create its own national literature rooted in their own traditions and folktales. In his review of Eschenburg’s translation, Herder notices “Jetzt entwickelt der Kunstrichter blos die Schönheiten Sh., wie sie da liegen, nicht wie sie geworden sind: seine Geschöpfe, nicht seine Schöpfung” (315). And it is specifically the question of *how* Shakespeare’s dramas developed that interests Herder. He concludes his Shakespeare essay with the statement that “the heart of his enquiry” would be to determine *how* Shakespeare transformed popular tales and ballads into the “living wholes” of his dramas:

Nun finge eben das Herz meiner Untersuchung an, “wie? auf welche Kunst und Schöpferweise *Shakespear* eine elende Romanze, Novelle, und Fabelhistorie zu solch einem lebendigen Ganzen haben dichten können? Was für Gesetze unsrer *Historischen, Philosophischen, Dramatischen Kunst* in Jedem seiner Schritte und Kunstgriffe liege?” Aber ich bin kein Mitglied alle unsrer Historischen,

Philosophischen un schenkünstlichen Akademien, in denen man freilich an jedes Andre eher, als an so etwas denkt! (Herder “Shakespear” 545)

Interestingly, even though Herder declares this to be the heart of his enquiry, he does not explore Shakespeare's method in his essay. However, Proß shows the central importance of Herder's Shakespeare essay for his later publications. He argues that this essay could be seen as a draft for Herder's *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (*Another Philosophy of History*) from 1774, in which he stresses the influence of historical circumstances upon human development, and that it also was the impulse for Herder's collection of German folksongs in *Volkslieder*, published in 1778. For Herder, Shakespeare is a popular writer who draws his materials from folksongs, romances, and historical chronicles, and this makes him an example for German writers who sought to establish their own national tradition.

Concluding, it is interesting to note that both Montagu and Herder assume that Shakespeare works according to a creative law that has not been fully understood, and can only be understood in its own historical context. They are thus arguing for a literary-historical understanding of art, and imply that when a reconstruction of a work in its own historical context has become impossible, the work will no longer be understood properly. Montagu compares Shakespeare's dramas to Stonehenge:

Will not an intelligent spectator admire the prodigious structures of Stone-Henge, because he does not know by what law of mechanics they were raised? Like them, our author's works will remain forever the greatest monuments of the amazing force of nature, which we ought to view as we do other prodigies, with an attention to, and admiration of their stupendous parts, and proud irregularity of greatness. (4-5)

Stonehenge and Shakespeare's dramas are both products from a distant historical moment that are, or should be, admired as “monuments of the amazing force of nature” as we no longer understand what rules they have been constructed on. Montagu likens the admiration of Stonehenge to the then contemporary way in which people esteemed Shakespeare's dramas, thereby implying that the admiration for Shakespeare's ‘irregular’ genius is based upon the ignorance regarding what the principles they were constructed on are.²⁰

²⁰ Interestingly, Fiona Ritchie quotes this same passage to support her claim that Montagu perpetuates the image of Shakespeare as a natural and irregular poet (73), a qualification that has problematic connotations to the idea of instinctive creation that necessarily precludes the possibility of Shakespeare's conscious artistry. Due to Montagu's style of writing, that can be characterised as both witty and at times ironical, passages like this one can be read in multiple ways. I propose to read it as

Herder, in a similar vein, foresees that there will be a moment when Shakespeare is so distant in time from his readers that he will no longer be understood, and that the great bard will be perceived as the ancient pyramids are perceived in his day:

Trauriger und wichtiger wird der Gedanke, daß auch dieser Große Schöpfer von Geschichte und Weltseele immer mehr veraltet! Daß da Worte und Sitten und Gattungen der Zeitalter, wie ein Herbst von Blättern welken und absinken [...] da sich alles so sehr verwischt und anders wohin neiget, auch sein Drama der lebendigen Vorstellung ganz unfähig werden, und eine Trümmer von Kolossus, von Pyramide sein wird, die Jeder anstaunt und keiner begreift. (546-7)

Montagu's *Essay* signals a move away from neoclassical aesthetics and towards a romantic understanding of the work of art. Neoclassical doctrine emphasised that a dramatist should transcend his own times and represent universal truths; or in Johnson's words: "[an artist] must divest himself of the prejudices of his age and country; he must consider right and wrong in their abstracted and invariable state; he must disregard present laws and opinions, and rise to general and transcendental truths, which will always be the same" (29). Montagu defends Shakespeare's genius from the opposite point of view; to her an artist should address his audience by appealing to their national history, their customs and, as we will see in the section on Shakespeare's supernatural imagination, to their national superstitions. The emphasis on the native soil of the artist, as Herder would phrase it, is central to the understanding of romanticism's interpretation of the nature and role of a work of art. In the next section, we will see how Coleridge characterises Shakespeare's dramas with an appeal to their historical and national context.

Of course, there is no direct relation between Montagu and Coleridge's text, as there is between her *Essay* and Herder's "Shakespear". The link between Montagu and Coleridge is more convoluted. It is not clear whether Coleridge has read Montagu's *Essay*, but we do know from his biographer that he read Herder's "Shakespear" in *Von deutscher Art und Kunst*. However, it is important not to forget the temporal distance between Coleridge and Montagu and Herder, and Coleridge furthermore could draw from a whole body of English and German Shakespeare interpretations that were influenced by Montagu and Herder.

Herder did: as a call for a literary-historical understanding of art. Moreover, I will demonstrate in this chapter that Montagu time and again points to Shakespeare's conscious artistry.

Coleridge on the English Historical Drama

Like Montagu and Herder, Coleridge sets out to define the differences between the ancient Greek and modern English stage by offering a developmental view of the drama that gives insight into the different historical circumstances from which the Greek and English drama originate. He also pays special attention to the function of the chorus. The chorus in the Greek tragic drama originates from the initial function of the drama, which was an altar-song in honour of the presiding deity. When the drama further developed as a popular form of entertainment from this specific origin, the people in the chorus functioned as “ideal representatives” in the drama, representing both the real audience and the poet himself. They assume the supposed impressions made by the drama, in order to direct and guide the audience (14-17). The chorus thus has a double character; they people in the chorus are constituent parts of the drama, but also its spectators. From this, Coleridge concludes, that the chorus naturally established the unity of place, which is thus not a pre-given law, but a consequence of the circumstances of the Greek drama.

In England, the drama also had its origin in religious practices. Coleridge points to the Mysteries and Moralities, religious plays that were both instructive and entertaining. “The necessity of at once instructing and gratifying the people,” Coleridge argues, “produced the great distinctions between the Greek and the English theatres” (24). In addition, Coleridge holds that the tragi-comedy originates from these religious plays, a genre that he defines as “a representation of human events more lively, nearer the truth, and permitting a larger field of moral instruction” (24), echoing Montagu’s defence of the mixed genre of Shakespeare’s dramas that we encountered before. Coleridge proceeds with an illuminating metaphor that seeks to establish his rejection of a universal (neoclassic) standard for artistic judgment; he argues that the dove and the swan are both beautiful birds, but not according to an abstract rule common to both, or “principles of ideal bird beauty” (25). He argues that it would be absurd to criticise the swan from the abstracted outlines of the dove, as if they were ideal principles. Likewise, it would be ridiculous to “pass judgment on the works of a poet on the mere ground that they have been called by the same class-name with the works of other poets in other times and circumstances” (25). Therefore, Coleridge argues that Shakespeare’s dramas are of a different kind, and deserve to be judged on their own terms. He coins the new generic term “romantic dramas,” to encompass the specific nature of Shakespeare’s dramas, “[f]or they are, in the ancient sense, neither tragedies nor comedies, nor both in one, – but a different *genus*, diverse in kind, and not merely different in degree,” arguing furthermore that “a deviation from the simple forms and unities of the ancient stage is an essential principle,

and an appropriate excellence, of the Romantic drama" (26). Like Montagu and Herder, Coleridge opts for a historically specific instead of a universalistic standard for artistic judgment. It is interesting to see how close he is to Montagu, who, with the "historical drama" also coined a new genre for Shakespeare's dramas that likewise encompassed their diversity and defined it as a quality.

This brings Coleridge to a comparison of ancient and modern literature that is very much indebted to A.W. Schlegel, according to Ashton, Fruman, and other critics:

Finally, I will note down those fundamental characteristics which contradistinguish the ancient literature from the modern generally, but which more especially appear in prominence in the tragic drama. The ancient was allied to statuary, the modern refers to painting. In the first there is a predominance of rhythm and melody, in the second of harmony and counterpoint. The Greeks idolize the finite, and therefore were the masters of all grace, elegance, proportion, fancy, dignity, majesty, – of whatever, in short, is capable of being definitely conveyed by definite forms or thoughts; the moderns revere the infinite, and affect the indefinite as a vehicle for the infinite; – hence their passions, their obscure hopes and fears, their wanderings through the unknown, their grander moral feelings, their more august conception of man as man, their future rather than their past – in a word, their sublimity. (19)

Coleridge's juxtaposition of the ancient and modern literatures is determined by the differences between the aesthetic of the beautiful and of the sublime. Ancient literature falls under the aesthetic of the beautiful, with its emphasis on the harmony and balance of definite forms. Modern literature fall under the axis of the sublime, that upholds the infinite, embodied by the indefinite, and is oriented towards the future. Painting, for example, that Coleridge allies with modern literature, is less defined in form than sculpture, painting suggests a shape, whereas (classical) sculpture gives shape. This binary opposition of the qualities of the ancient and modern literature gives way to a whole new conception of poetic taste based on those qualities that define the modern poets. In Montagu and Herder's essays, we find this distinction between ancient and modern literature in an embryonic stage; in Montagu's comparison of the barbarity of Shakespeare's times to the "noble and graceful simplicity" (3) of Ancient Greek and Rome, that produced perfect art works, and in Herder's juxtaposition of Sophocles's drama that is characterised by a single action and Shakespeare's representation of the totality of the action. Montagu also points to the greater diversity of Shakespeare's historical dramas that distinguishes them from the ancient drama.

After having explored the basic characteristics that discern the ancient from the modern drama, Coleridge pays attention to Shakespeare's English historical dramas. He locates this genre in the transition from epic to dramatic poetry (107). Both forms have a common basis; they are founded "on the relation of providence to the human will;" in the epic "fate overrides the will," whereas in the drama "the will is represented as struggling with fate" (107). For Coleridge, the historical drama is a distinct genre that should address itself to a national audience: "In order that a drama may be properly historical, it is necessary that it should be the history of the people to whom it is addressed" (108). Coleridge furthermore defines the historical drama as "a collection of events borrowed from history, but connected together in respect of cause and time, poetically and by dramatic fiction" (109). Coleridge emphasises the poetic reworking of historical material; a historical drama is not just a historical representation, but it has to be cast in a dramatic form that is unified by both cause and time.

We also find this emphasis on the dramatic character of the historical drama in Herder, especially in the second draft of his "Shakespear." In this second draft, he is highly critical of Montagu's definition of the historical drama. He calls it her "dunkeln Irrtum" to underestimate the dramatic reworking of historical facts that necessarily took place before the historical dramas could be presented as historical dramas. He thinks that Montagu focuses too much on the truthfulness of the historical account, and its instructive function, at the cost of their dramatic nature. Paraphrasing Montagu, Herder writes that "Shakespear habe diese Geschichten, als *bloße Geschichten* aufs Theater gebracht; als Begebenheiten, bei denen es der Nation um *Wahrheit* zu tun wäre, und denen also in der Vorstellung, diese Wahrheit und die lebende Tradition Hauptstütze gewesen" ("Shakespear" 561). Herder responds to this argument with:

das glaube ich nun gar nicht. Daß das Nationalgefühl, die Känntnis der Örter, wo etwas geschehen, ein Früher Eindruck dieser Geschichte von Jugend auf – daß diese zu solchen historischen Stücken mehr disponieren, [...] die Täuschung hie und da verstärken können, das will ich nicht leugnen. Allein daß die Theatralischen Täuschung nicht von dieser historischen Wahrheit *abhängt*, daß der Zweck und Bau des Dichters durchaus nicht *diese historische Wahrheit sei* [...] Also hat Shakespear *Geschichte*, aber nicht *als Geschichte* aufs Theater gebracht! Als was denn? [...] Dramatische Geschichte [! Da] ist schon die ganze Antwort! ("Shakespear" 561)

This great emphasis on the dramatic construction of Shakespeare's plays is characteristic of the romantic approach to Shakespeare, as we will furthermore see in the next sections.

Coleridge, in a similar vein, argues that in Shakespeare's dramas, the dramatic interest is independent of the plot, and he additionally argues for "the [i]ndependence of the interest on the story as the ground-work for the plot" (55), arguing that this was the reason Shakespeare "never took the trouble of inventing stories" (55). It was Charlotte Lennox's study of Shakespeare's sources, *Shakspeare Illustrated* (1753), that first explored Shakespeare's use of popular tales and romances in his dramas. What Lennox characterised as a weakness is wholeheartedly excused by the romantics, who argue that it does not define Shakespeare's dramatic genius.

Dramatic Illusion

In his juxtaposition of the ancient and romantic drama, Coleridge holds that the first appeals to the audience's reason, accommodated to the senses, whereas the romantic or Shakespearian drama appeals to "the imagination rather than to the senses, and to reason as contemplating our inward nature" (26). In a later section, I will explore Coleridge's conception of the imagination in more detail. The way in which the drama was, or should be experienced by the audience is one of the key concerns that show the different emphases in neoclassical and romantic aesthetics. The neoclassical aesthetic aimed to appeal to its audience's reason, Bate argues in *From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth Century England* (13). He quotes Thomas Rymer's remarks upon the aim of poetry in this context; "poetry infuses order and justness of comprehension into the mind, simply by its reflection of [...] that constant order, that harmony and beauty of Providence" (qtd. in Bate 13). The romantic aesthetic, on the other hand, rather seeks to elicit in its audience an imaginative and emotional response. The discussion of the audience's experience of the drama, or the nature and extent of the dramatic illusion created by the drama can indicate those different stances towards the ideal response of the audience.

Montagu's understanding of dramatic illusion is embedded in her general conception of the aim of the drama: the effecting of moral purposes by means of the representation of a fable. Dramatic illusion can assist in this aim. As we have seen, Montagu thought the dramatic institution capable of conveying moral instruction, as the moral is not explicit and external to the drama, but embedded in the dramatic action and therefore implicit. She writes that "[a] tragedy is a fable exhibited to the view, and rendered palpable to the senses; and every decoration of the stage is contrived to impose the delusion of the spectator, by conspiring with the imitation" (10). Thus the "delusion" in the spectator helps to convey the moral lesson. The drama "opens to itself a communication to the heart, where it is to excite

certain passions and affections [...] the attention of the audience is greatly captivated, and the imagination so far aids in the delusion, as to sympathise with the representation” (10-11). Montagu thus argues for an emotional involvement of the audience with the drama, and is therein closer to romantic than neoclassical ideas about the way the drama should ideally address its audience.

Coleridge’s conception of the audience’s interaction with the drama is different from Montagu’s. He stresses the active imaginative involvement of the spectator with the dramatic representation. In his lecture notes on *The Tempest*, Coleridge attacks Dr Johnson’s use of the word “delusion,” arguing that he ignored the possibility of an intermediary state between “perfect delusion” and an awareness in the audience that they are watching a performance (64-5). Coleridge juxtaposes the theatrical aim of the French dramatists, which according to him would be “perfect delusion,” with Johnson’s point of view:

[Dr Johnson] supposes the auditors throughout in the full reflective knowledge of the contrary [of perfect delusion]. In evincing the impossibility of delusion, he makes no sufficient allowance for an intermediate state, which I have before distinguished by the term, illusion, and have attempted to illustrate its quality and character by reference to our mental state, when dreaming. In both cases we simply do not judge the imagery to be unreal; there is a negative reality, and no more. (64-5)²¹

The chief end of the drama, for Coleridge, is to produce and support a “willing illusion” in which the spectators “carry their own justification with them, as long as they do not contravene or interrupt the total illusion” (65). The analogy with a dream is therefore a bit unclear, as Coleridge seeks to emphasise the active involvement of the spectator in creating the dramatic illusion. Coleridge’s emphasis on the active involvement of the spectator distinguishes him from other Romantic critics, for example William Hazlitt, who wrote *The Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays* in 1817, and who emphasised the cathartic aim of the drama: “[i]t excites our sensibility by exhibiting the passions wound up to the utmost pitch by the power of imagination or the temptation of circumstances; and corrects their fatal excesses in ourselves by pointing to the greater extent of sufferings and of crimes to which they have led others” (40). Like Montagu, Hazlitt was of the opinion that the drama should appeal to the audience’s emotions, rather than to their reason or understanding.

²¹ James Engell notes that Coleridge’s representation does not do justice to Johnson’s argument; “Johnson’s idea of delusion is not at all the same as Coleridge’s one of dramatic illusion; thus, his denial of delusion is not a denial of all illusion” (“Coleridge” 12). He furthermore argues that Coleridge’s notion of an intermediate state is very close to how Johnson envisioned the ideal participation of the audience.

Coleridge's concept of the spectator's "willing illusion" is closely related to the famous passage from the *Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of my literary life and opinions* (1817) in which he defines poetic faith as a "willing suspension of disbelief" (145). Interestingly, Coleridge's notion of poetic faith is defined in relation to the poetic representation of the supernatural, in a passage in which Coleridge elaborates upon his own contribution to the *Lyrical Ballads*:

In this idea originated the plan of the *Lyrical Ballads*; in which it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. (145)

In the next section we will explore how Montagu, Coleridge and some of their contemporaries thought about Shakespeare's representation of the supernatural. In both Coleridge and Ludwig Tieck's case, their writings on Shakespeare's supernatural imagination and their own poetic practice are closely related. In a sense, the praise bestowed upon Shakespeare's representation of the supernatural helped to create the taste by which their own works were to be enjoyed. A reviewer of Coleridge's poem "Kubla Kahn" wrote in 1829: "Coleridge equals Shakespeare as master of the magic art" (qtd. in Ashton 381). In the next section we will see how Shakespeare's mastery of the magic art, that is apparently a given to this reviewer, was established by literary critics.

Shakespeare's Supernatural Imagination

The representation of the supernatural is possibly one of the most demanding topics in terms of dramatic illusion. In his article "Coleridge on Dramatic Illusion and Spectacle in the Performance of Shakespeare's Plays," J.R. de Jackson draws attention to the problems concerning the representation of ghosts on an early nineteenth-century stage, especially when it stages Shakespeare's, or other Elizabethan plays (13). The latter were written for a simpler stage, which did not have elaborate mechanical devices or scenery, and Jackson holds that Coleridge's idea of the active participation of the audience in the dramatic illusion should be regarded in that context (13-5). Jackson points out that in Coleridge's times, the attempt to represent supernatural beings on stage was "an absolute failure" (14). He quotes W. C. Oulton in this context, who wrote in his *History of the Theatres of London* (1795) that

ghosts should be seen as seldom by the audience as possible, and even when they do speak, were it possible to convey the voice to their ears, without shewing them their

mealy forms, I doubt not but in many scenes it would have a better effect, particularly in that of *Richard III*, where the creaking of so many trap-doors generally turns a serious subject into ridicule. (qtd. in Jackson 14)

The practical problems posed by the stage representation of the supernatural are an interesting context to keep in mind while we will go into late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century ideas regarding Shakespeare's supernatural imagination.

The concern with Shakespeare's representation of the supernatural seems to be a particularly romantic theme in Shakespeare criticism, but a number of eighteenth-century critics, as early as 1712 were already discussing this topic. In that year, Addison devoted the 419th issue of *The Spectator* to "the faerie way of writing," adopting a term first coined by Dryden (570). This way of writing is, according to Addison, "more difficult than any other that depends on the poet's Fancy, because he has no pattern to follow in it, and must work entirely out of his own invention" (570). And as could be expected, Addison argues that Shakespeare excels all other English poets in this respect (573). Addison's praise for the creativity and inventiveness of the poet who represents the supernatural was echoed by a number of critics writing on this topic in the eighteenth century, like for example Warton, Hurd and Montagu. Joseph Warton characterises *The Tempest* as "the most striking instance of [Shakespeare's] creative power" in his essay on that play from 1753, because Shakespeare has there "given the reins to his boundless imagination, and has carried the romantic, the wonderful and the wild to the most pleasing extravagance" (61).

This new emphasis in Shakespeare criticism can be interpreted as a means of breaking free from neoclassical doctrine. Consider, for example, Richard Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* from 1762, in which he argues that the neoclassical doctrine of truth to nature is "a trite maxim in those species [of poetry] that address themselves to the heart and would obtain their end not thro' the imagination but thro' the passions" (93). In those species of poetry, the liberty of transgressing nature is "infinitely restrained" (94), but, Hurd argues, "the case is different with the more sublime and creative poetry," that "has no need to observe those cautious rules of credibility" (95).

Addison, Hurd, Warton and Montagu all present the gothic tradition as a rich forcing ground for poetic invention.²² Addison argues that the English excel all other poets in representing the supernatural, because "the English are naturally Fanciful, and very often disposed by that Gloominess and Melancholy of Temper which is so frequent in our nation, to

²² This is not an exhaustive list of all eighteenth-century critics writing on the supernatural in Shakespeare.

many wild Notions and Visions, to which others are not so liable" (572). Interestingly, the "solemnity of the gothic superstitions" (Hurd 45), is held to be superior to the Greek superstitions, and therefore classical antiquity lacked this kind of creative, imaginative poetry. Montagu argues in her chapter on the "Praeternal Beings" that "Shakespeare has an advantage over the Greek poets, in the more solemn, gloomy and mysterious air of his national superstitions" (59). Coleridge makes a similar claim regarding the superiority of the Gothic tradition in his lecture on the "General character of the Gothic literature and Art." After commenting upon the delight, harmony and perfection of Greek art, Coleridge comments "[b]ut if I want my feelings to be affected, if I wish my heart to be touched, if I wish to melt into sentiment and tenderness, I must turn to the heroic songs of the Goths, to the poetry of the middle ages" (219-20).

Terry Castle, in a chapter on the Gothic Novel, argues that the Goths "became the symbol of a supposedly indigenous 'bardic' tradition," and praise was bestowed on poets that revitalized that tradition, such as Shakespeare, according to Montagu, and Spenser, according to Hurd. Castle furthermore places this in the context of "a taste for non-classical aesthetic models" (83). Critics thus eagerly explored the creative possibilities of the representation of the supernatural, but it was not always seen as an appropriate topic for dramatic imitation. Hurd, for example, finds tales of faery an improper subject for dramatic representation, and argues that it is more suited to the epic genre (95). The contemporary stage conditions that we touched upon at the beginning of this section may have something to do with Hurd's opinion.

In many respects, Montagu elaborates on the ideas of Addison, Warton and Hurd, who are all quoted in her chapter on Shakespeare's preternatural beings. But she differs in opinion from them on an important subject: her emphasis on Shakespeare's poetic judgment in representing the supernatural on stage. She praises the "judiciousness" (52) with which Shakespeare avails himself of the superstitions of his times:

Shakespeare, in the dark shades of gothic barbarism, had no resources but in the very phantoms that walked the night of ignorance and superstition [...] sure to please best his fierce and barbarous audience, when he raised the bloody ghost, or reared the warlike standard. His choice of these subjects was judicious [...] his management of them so masterly, that he will be admired in all times. (56)

Whereas her predecessors, especially Addison and Warton, emphasize the wildness of Shakespeare's imagination and seem to imply that he was naturally having recourse to a popular tradition of superstitions, tales and romances, Montagu again and again underlines his poetic judgment in selecting and representing ghost and faeries from that popular tradition.

She, for example, holds that he was careful not to “carry his praeternatural beings beyond the limits of the popular tradition in which he wrote” (51-2), in order to not transgress the limits of credibility. Quoting Hurd on dramatic imitation, Montagu furthermore argues that “which passes in representation, and challenges, as it were, the scrutiny of the eye, must be truth in itself, or something nearly approaching it” (52).

Edward Taylor, whose praise of Montagu’s treatment of the topic of the supernatural has been quoted before, follows Montagu in her replacement of the neoclassical doctrine of truth to nature and verisimilitude for “probability” and dramatic credibility, when he writes: “It is the duty of the tragic poet to adhere strictly to verisimilitude [...] His characters must be such as exist in nature, or owe their supposed existence to superstition, or fear, or credulity” (2). Whether Montagu and Taylor’s praise of Shakespeare’s credibility in his representation of supernatural beings could also be bestowed on contemporary re-stagings of his plays, is a question that remains unaddressed. Montagu and Taylor’s emphasis on the judiciousness with which Shakespeare represents his supernatural beings are to some extent proto-romantic. The assumption of Shakespeare’s conscious artistry throughout the whole play would become one of the cornerstones of romantic criticism, as we will see in one of the sections to come.

Ironically, the English critics’ somewhat nationalistic preoccupation with the indigenous gothic tradition, lent itself to be appropriated by the German *Stürmer und Dränger*, who, as we have seen, envisioned themselves as inheritors of that same “Gothic” or “Nordic” tradition. In Germany we therefore also find a growing interest in the Gothic superstitions and in the way Shakespeare makes use of that tradition. In his review of Eschenburg’s translation of Montagu, Herder suggests that the publications she refers to, such as Hurd’s *Letters*, should also be translated into German (“Versuch” 315). Addison and Steele’s *Spectator* had already been translated into German by that time, and Eschenburg accompanied his translation of Montagu with a German translation of Warton’s essay on *The Tempest*.

The German interest in this aspect of Shakespeare’s creative imagination is reflected in translation practice. In “‘The Fairy way of writing:’ Von Shakespeare zu Wieland und Tieck,” Roger Bauer argues that Germany’s interest in Shakespeare’s ‘fairy way of writing’ started with Wieland, who placed *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* at the head of his two-volume Shakespeare translation. According to Bauer, this choice reflects his own preference for that play. The German poet, translator and critic Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853), who is now regarded as one of the founding fathers of the German romantic movement, showed a similar interest in those plays of Shakespeare that deal with the wondrous or supernatural; *A Midsummer*

Night's Dream and *The Tempest*. Tieck characterised these plays as “Zauberstücke,” and he believed that these plays were inspired by medieval poetry and romances (Tieck 154).

In 1793, Tieck wrote a long essay on Shakespeare’s treatment of the wondrous: “Shakspeare’s Behandlung des Wunderbaren.” This essay was published three years later as an introduction to his own translation of *The Tempest*. As the title indicates, Tieck’s essay is concerned with Shakespeare’s representation of the supernatural. The essay provides a detailed analysis of Shakespeare’s techniques that is based on the same premise as Montagu’s *Essay*, that is, Shakespeare’s conscious artistry:

Alle Begebenheiten des Sommernachtstraums erscheinen den handelnden Personen nachher al seine Traumgestalt, und der Dichter hat sehr künstlich dafür gesorgt, daß kein Vorfall zu isolirt stehen bliebe, an dem sie nachher ihre Erinnerungen knüpfen und ordnen könnten. (74)

Tieck praises Shakespeare’s artistry in creating a sustained dramatic illusion of a faery world in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In this play, Shakespeare represents a complete marvellous world that is in no way related to normal, everyday reality. Tieck compares dramatic illusion to a dream from which the spectator should not awake, in order to be fully immersed in the wonderful world that is represented on stage “Das Wunderbare wird uns jeßt gewöhnlich und natürlich; weil wir von der wirklichen Welt gänzlich abgeschlossen sind” (44). This is only one of his four analyses of Shakespeare’s techniques of representing the wondrous; other points that are foundational for Shakespeare’s dramatic illusion are the pluriformity of the representation, Shakespeare’s use of comic scenes, and music, especially songs.

Although she does not explore his technique, Montagu praises Shakespeare’s management of the supernatural in a very similar way; with an emphasis on his conscious artistry in his management of the supernatural. Paulin even argues that the word “Behandlung” in Tieck’s title refers to Montagu’s “management” (Paulin 284). However, Eschenburg translated “management” differently; he did not use the verb “behandeln,” but opted for “bedienen” (Eschenburg 157). Thus Tieck does not make use of the exact same term in Montagu’s *Versuch über Shakespeares Genie und Schriften*, as Paulin’s English use of the term “management” implies, but his emphasis on Shakespeare’s conscious artistry in representing the supernatural may very well be indebted to Montagu’s essay.

Poetic Judgment and Taste

In his lecture “Shakespeare, a Poet Generally,” Coleridge wholeheartedly attacks the followers of French neoclassical doctrine, or, as he would have it, the “pedants” who mistake

Aristotle for a “dictator” (42). Because of their too great emphasis on the rules, they failed to apprehend that Shakespeare worked under a different creative law, and rather saw him as a delightful monster, without taste or judgment. Coleridge furthermore claims that he “was the first in time, who publicly demonstrated to the full extent of that position [...] that the judgment of Shakespeare is commensurate with his genius” (44). Many critics to this day regard this as one of Coleridge’s most important contributions to Shakespearean criticism.

However, as noted before, Coleridge presents the idea of a wild, tasteless Shakespeare as a popularly held notion, but this does not do justice to the actual critical practice of his day. Especially in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, critics emphasised Shakespeare’s artistry in domains outside of neoclassical doctrine; such as his character drawings, and his supernatural imagination. Montagu was one of those critics who praised Shakespeare’s poetic judgment. In the introduction to her *Essay*, she writes:

Ridiculously has our poet, and ridiculously has our taste been represented, by a writer of universal fame [i.e. Voltaire]; and through the medium of an almost universal language [...] so that many of our countrymen have adopted this lively writer’s opinion of the extravagance and total want of design in Shakespeare’s dramas. (6)

It is one of her stated aims to counter Voltaire’s arguments and to defend the national bard, and her emphasis on Shakespeare’s conscious artistry is part of this defence. She never characterises Shakespeare as a rude and illiterate poet, except in one passage in which she is clearly being ironical.²³

In a letter that touches upon the progress of her *Essay*, Montagu writes that “[r]ules can no more make a poet than recipes a cook,” what makes a poet, is “taste” and “skill” (qtd. in Huchon 119). As we have seen, she praises Shakespeare’s judicious selection and representation of supernatural beings on stage, an emphasis that distinguishes her from her contemporaries who wrote on Shakespeare’s supernatural imagination. Montagu moreover focused on the historical dramas as a new genre that should be judged according to its own rules, instead of measured against Aristotle’s standard.

However, her defence of Shakespeare does not embrace every aspect of his poetic imagination. She sometimes excuses Shakespeare’s ‘faults,’ such as nonsense and indecorums with reference to the barbarous times in which he wrote, to Shakespeare’s poverty, or to the

²³ The passage reads “Let tragedy-writers, who make princes prate with pages and waiting-women of their murders and treasons, learn for once, from *rude and illiterate Shakespeare*, how averse pride is, coolly to confess, and prudence to betray, what the fever and deliriums of ambition had prompted to do” (43). Huchon also argues that this passage should be taken as ironical (162).

poor conditions of the Elizabethan stage. Moreover, her praise sometimes sounds quite uncertain. Consider for example her remarks upon *The first part of Henry IV*: “Our author is so little under the discipline of art, that we are apt to ascribe his happiest successes, as well as his most unfortunate failings, to chance. But I cannot help thinking that there is more of contrivance and care in his execution of this play” (38).

What distinguishes Coleridge from Montagu, is that Montagu’s idea that the drama should be regarded as a living body is developed in Coleridge’s writing into the doctrine of a unified dramatic form. This is not just an isolated idea, but connected with Coleridge’s ideas on poetic genius and the imagination. Coleridge defines the imagination as:

the power by which one image or feeling is made to modify many others, and by a sort of fusion, to force many into one [...] and which, combining many circumstances into one moment of consciousness, tends to produce that ultimate end of all human thought and human feeling, unity [...] (39).

In parallel to God’s creation of the earth out of primal chaos, a genius, like Shakespeare, is able to combine discordant qualities into one moment of consciousness. ‘Genius’ is not wild or free from laws, but rather imposes its own creative laws and order upon the chaos that is found. Shakespeare epitomises the romantic notion of genius. He is the architect of an interconnected, unified dramatic form, in which every detail, down to the level of words, has a place and meaning. In relation to eighteenth-century editorial practice, this claim is revolutionary. It undermines the tendency to collect isolated ‘beauties’ from various Shakespearean plays in one volume. Instead of beautiful fragments, it focuses on the play as a whole, in which those scenes are embedded and have meaning. This is still the way in which contemporary critics would read a Shakespearean play, or any other work of fiction, which tells about its importance for our critical practice.

However, Fruman argues that the “discovery” of Shakespeare’s unified dramatic form is a late eighteenth-century *German* achievement (148).²⁴ It was expressed in A.W. Schlegel’s series of essays on Shakespeare that began in 1769, and in the *Athenaüm* fragments of 1798. Fruman points out that at this time, Coleridge was studying at a German university and he might have been familiar with these writings that express the main idea that is usually held to

²⁴ Although the choice for the word “discovery” is an unfortunate one (in another instance Fruman even likens it to the discovery of the Rosetta Stone, as we saw in chapter one), since it implies that Shakespeare’s unified dramatic form was simply there, waiting to be discovered. And it furthermore implies that the eighteenth century was blind to this inherent quality of Shakespeare’s dramas. It would be preferable to argue that the neoclassical approach to Shakespeare emphasized other aspects of his dramas, whereas the romantic aesthetic started from the premise of organic wholeness and to some extent based their aesthetic on Shakespeare’s dramas.

be his contribution to Shakespeare criticism; that Shakespeare's genius is equal to his artistic judgment. This idea is also the basis for romantic Shakespearean criticism as a whole. In fragment 253 of the *Athenaium* journal we find the bold statement that no writer is more correct than Shakespeare:

In dem edleren und ursprünglichen Sinne des Worts Korrekt, da es absichtliche Durchbildung und Nebenausbildung des Innersten und Kleinsten im Werke nach dem Geist des Ganzen, praktische Reflexion des Künstlers, bedeutet, ist wohl kein moderner Dichter korrekter als Shakespeare. So ist er auch systematisch wie kein anderer: bald durch jene Antithesen, die Individuen, Massen, ja Welten in malerischen Gruppen kontrastieren lassen; bald durch musikalische Symmetrie desselben großen Maßstabes, durch gigantische Wiederholungen und Refrains; oft durch Parodie des Buchstabens und durch Ironie über den Geist des romantischen Drama und immer durch die höchste und vollständigste Individualität und die vielseitigste alle Stufen der Poesie von der sinnlichsten Nachahmung bis zur geistigsten Charakteristik vereinigende Darstellung derselben. (F. Schlegel, KSFA online)

The term “Korrekt” refers to the conscious artistry of Shakespeare's dramas, the construction of all parts in a whole. Upon this quality rest all the aspects for which Shakespeare was praised by the romantics; uniting antitheses, his use of irony and parody, and his employment of all registers of poetry, or in other words, the pluriformity of his creative imagination that is synthesized in the spirit of the romantic drama in a unified dramatic form. One may think of Coleridge concept of the poetic imagination discussed before, which he characterises as a unifying power that fuses many into one. And as beauty, for Coleridge, is “multeity in unity” the greater the number of varieties that is held together by the unifying power of the imagination, the more interesting and profound the imaginative work of art will be.

It is interesting to note that the romantics praise Shakespeare for exactly those aspects that were held to be his faults according to neoclassicist doctrine; his mixture of different genres and styles, “low” and “high” discourse, and his great number of persons and events that did not live up to the neoclassical ideals of uniformity, simplicity and generic purity.

III. Conclusion

I have discussed Montagu's *Essay* and Coleridge's Shakespeare lectures as two different points in the development of a romantic approach to Shakespeare. This new approach developed in contradistinction to French neoclassical doctrine. Already in the early eighteenth century, the genius of Shakespeare was presented as an alternative to the ancient models, for

example by George Farquhar. This would culminate in a formulation of a whole new aesthetic based on Shakespeare's plays, one that favours the multifariousness and indefiniteness of Shakespeare's dramas over the uniformity and perfection of classical art. The neoclassical universal standard for taste was replaced by a conception of taste as individualistic and historically determined. In my comparative analysis of Montagu and Coleridge's approaches to Shakespeare, I have focused on a number of topics that trace the differences between the neoclassical and romantic aesthetic; such as dramatic illusion, or poetic judgment and taste.

In bringing Montagu's *Essay* in relation to the development of a romantic aesthetic, I have tried to create a new frame from which to read her work, and to assess her influence as a critic. By establishing this connection between Montagu's *Essay* and the critical doctrine of romantic Shakespearean criticism, I do not wish to imply that Montagu's *Essay* is only interesting as a kindle to later romantic thought, and not worthwhile in its own right, but rather to newly assess her contribution to the critical canon. It is difficult for us today to realize the extent of Montagu's contribution because it has been incorporated into romantic Shakespearean criticism. Herder's engagement with several of Montagu's ideas luckily provides us with a concrete example of her influence, especially since we not only have his review of Eschenburg's translation, but also the three different versions of his own essay on Shakespeare. Whereas the first draft is written as a response to a contemporary German critic, and was probably written before Herder read Montagu's *Versuch über Shakespears Genie und Schriften*, the second and final drafts demonstrate a thorough appropriation and in some cases reworking of her ideas, as we have seen.

Herder's "Shakespear" has a prominent place within the romantic canon of criticism. According to Wellek, Herder is the builder of a new romantic poetics, and Paulin furthermore argues that the essay contains the scheme for A.W. Schlegel and later Hegel's distinction between the categories of the "Classical" and the "Romantic" (157) that we also encountered in Coleridge's Shakespeare lectures. What then, are the implications of these laudatory reviews of Herder's "Shakespear" for a contemporary re-evaluation of Montagu's *Essay*? As touched upon in the introduction to this chapter, Eger, Fay and Ritchie assume a deep relationship between the aesthetic of high romanticism and the critical writings of the Bluestockings. But this indebtedness of romantic thought to these eighteenth-century female critics is usually held to be their "elaboration of Shakespeare's powers of sympathy, characterisation and moral philosophy," as Eger phrases it in the conclusion of her article on the Bluestocking defence of Shakespeare (151). In my opinion, Elizabeth Montagu's influence on romantic criticism was more profound; she not only touched upon new themes

and emphases, such as Shakespeare's supernatural imagination, but she also contributed to the historical method in literary criticism that was foundational for the development of Romanticism's critical doctrine.

In the next chapter, I will further scrutinize the merits and shortcomings of these different contemporary re-assessments of Montagu's *Essay*, discussing both the approach that seeks to bring to light women's critical writing by emphasizing its difference from dominant (masculine) critical discourse, as well as my own characterisation of Montagu's *Essay* as proto-romantic.

Works Cited

- Abrams, M.H. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. Oxford: UP, 1953.
- Addison, Joseph. *The Spectator* 419 (1712). *The Spectator*. Ed. Donald F. Bond. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1965, vol. 3.
- Ashton, Rosemary. *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Critical Biography*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.
- Badawi, M.M. *Coleridge: Critic of Shakespeare*. Cambridge UP, 1973.
- Bauer, Roger. “‘The fairy way of writing’: Von Shakespeare zu Wieland und Tieck.” *Das Shakespeare-Bild in Europa zwischen Aufklärung und Romantik*. Ed. Roger Bauer, Michael de Graat and Jürgen Wertheimer (hrsg.). Bern: Peter Lang, 1988.
- “Vorwort” *Das Shakespeare-Bild in Europa zwischen Aufklärung und Romantik*. Ed. Roger Bauer, Michael de Graat and Jürgen Wertheimer (hrsg.). Bern: Peter Lang, 1988.
- Blair, Hugh. *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres: By Hugh Blair [...] in Three Volumes*. Dublin: Printed for Messrs. Whitestone, Colles, Burnet [...] and McKenzie, 1787.
- Byron, Lord George Gordon. *The Blues: A Literary Eclogue*. 1821. The Bluestocking Archive. Ed. Elizabeth Fay. http://www.faculty.umb.edu/elizabeth_fay/toc2.htm.
- Clarke, Norma. *Dr Johnson's Women*. London: Hambledon and London, 2000.
- Coleridge, S.T. *Coleridge's Essays and Lectures on Shakespeare and Some Other Old Poets and Dramatists*. Ed. Ernest Rhys. London: Everyman's Library, 1909.
- *Biographia Literaria; or, Biographical sketches of my literary life and opinions, and two lay sermons*. London: George Bell & Sons, 1905.
- *Table talk: and the rime of the ancient mariner, Christabel, &c.* London: Routledge and sons, 1884.

- Craig, Harding and J.M. Thomas. *English Prose of the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Appleton-century-crafts inc, 1929.
- Damrosch, David. *What is World Literature?* Princeton: UP, 2003.
- Doran, Dr F.S.A. *A Lady of the Last Century*. London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1873.
- Dryden, John. *John Dryden: The Critical Heritage*. Ed. James Kinsley and Helen Kinsley. London: Routledge, 1971.
- Eger, Elizabeth. “‘Out rushed a female to protect the bard:’ The Bluestocking Defense of Shakespeare.” *Reconsidering the Bluestockings*. Eds. Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg. California: Huntington Library, 2003. 127-52.
- Engell, James. *Forming the Critical Mind: Dryden to Coleridge*. London: Harvard UP, 1989.
- “Coleridge, Johnson, and Shakespeare: A Critical Drama in Five Acts.” *Romanticism* 4.1 (1998): 22-39.
- Eschenburg, J.J. (trans.). *Versuch über Shakespeares Genie und Schriften in Vergleichung mit den dramatischen Dichtern der Griechen und Franzosen*. Leipzig: Schwickert, 1771.
- Fruman, Norman. *Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel*. London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1972.
- Hazlitt, William. *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays*. Ed. J. H. Lobban. Cambridge: UP, 2009.
- Herder, Johann Gottfried. “Versuch über Shakespeares Genie und Schriften in Vergleichung mit den dramatischen Dichtern der Griechen und Franzosen. Aus dem Englischen übersetzt, und mit einen doppelten Anhange begleitet von J.J. Eschenburg. Leipz. 1771.” Review. *Sämtliche Werke* V. Ed. Bernhard Suphan. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1979. 312-17.
- “Shakespear.” *Werke I: Herder und der Sturm und Drang*. München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1984.
- Huchon, R. *Mrs. Montagu and her Friends*. London: John Murray, 1906.
- Hurd, Richard. *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*. London: Printed for A. Millar, W. Thurlbourn, and J. Woodyer, 1762.
- Jackson, J. R. de J. “Coleridge on Dramatic Illusion and Spectacle in the Performance of Shakespeare’s Plays.” *Modern Philology* 62.1 (1964): 13-21.
- Johnson, Samuel. *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*. 1759. Oxford: UP, 2009.
- Lennox, Charlotte. *Shakespear illustrated: or the novels and histories, on which the plays of Shakespear are founded, collected and translated from the original authors with critical remarks in two volumes*. By the author of the *Female Quixote*. London,

MDCCLIII. [1753].

- Montagu, Elizabeth. "An essay on the writings and genius of Shakespear, compared with the Greek and French dramatic poets. With some remarks upon the misrepresentations of Mons. de Voltaire." *Writings of the Bluestocking Circle, 1738-1785: Volume 1: Elizabeth Montagu*. Ed. Elizabeth Eger. London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999.
- Moore, Gregory. "Introduction." Herder, J.G. *Shakespeare*. Trans. Gregory Moore. Princeton: UP, 2008.
- More, Hannah. "Bas Blue, or Conversation." Web. 10 May 2012, <<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~curran/250-96/Sensibility/morebas.html>>.
- Orsini, G. N. G. "Coleridge and Schlegel Reconsidered." *Comparative Literature* 16.2 (1964): 97-118.
- Paulin, Roger. *The Critical Reception of Shakespeare in Germany 1682-1914: Native Literature and Foreign Genius*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2003.
- Powell Jones, W. "The Romantic Bluestocking, Elizabeth Montagu." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 12.1 (1948): 85-98.
- Price, Lawrence Marsden. *The Reception of English Literature in Germany*. Berkely, U of California P, 1932.
- Proß, Wolfgang. "Herders Shakespeare-Interpretation: Von der Dramaturgie zur Geschichtsphilosophie." *Das Shakespeare-Bild in Europa zwischen Aufklärung und Romantik*. Ed. Roger Bauer, Michael de Graat and Jürgen Wertheimer (ed.). Bern: Peter Lang, 1988.
- Ralli, Augustus. ed. *A History of Shakespeare Criticism: Volume I*. London: Oxford UP, 1932.
- Ritchie, Fiona. "Elizabeth Montagu: 'Shakespeare's poor little critic?'" *Shakespeare Survey 58: Writing about Shakespeare*. Ed. Peter Holland. Cambridge: up, 2005. 72-82.
- Schlegel, F von. *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe. Erste Abteilung: Kritische Neuausgabe, Band 2*. Ed. Ernst Behler, Jean Jacques Anstett und Hans Eichner. München: 1967. Web. 12 June 2012, <<http://www.zeno.org/nid/20005618908>>.
- Stellmacher, Wolfgang. *Herders Shakespeare-Bild: Shakespeare-Rezeption im Sturm und Drang: Dynamischen Weltbild und bürgerliches Nationaldrama*. Berlin: Rutten & Loening, 1978.
- Taylor, Edward. *Cursory Remarks on Tragedy, on Shakespear, and on certain French and Italian Poets, principally Tragedians*. London: Printed for W. Owen, 1774.
- Tieck, Ludwig. "Shakspeare's Behandlung des Wunderbaren" 1793. *Kritische Schriften von*

- Ludwig Tieck. Erster Band.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974.
- Warton, Joseph. "on *The Tempest*." 1753. *Shakespeare, the Critical Heritage Volume 4: 1753-1765*. Ed. Brian Vickers. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976. 60-83.
- Wellek, René. *A History of Modern Criticism 1750-1950: I. The Later Eighteenth Century*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1955.

Chapter Three

Reading Elizabeth Montagu

Montagu concludes her *Essay* with the remark “I hope this weak attempt to vindicate our great dramatic poet, will excite some critic able to do him more ample justice” (113). We have seen in the previous chapter that the *Essay* did indeed excite subsequent critics, especially the German romantics that later influenced Coleridge. However, nowadays, it is difficult for a reader to assess the extent of Montagu’s contribution because it has been incorporated into later Shakespearean criticism without being acknowledged as her contribution. The evaluation of Montagu and Coleridge as critics in literary-historical accounts could not be more different. Coleridge, who is called a poet and a plagiarist in one breath by, for example, his most recent biographer, Marjorie Ashton, is nevertheless held to be one of England’s major critics. Montagu, on the other hand, is no more than a “footnote critic” who is mentioned here and there in standard works of (romantic) literary criticism (Wellek’s *History*, Abrams’s *The Mirror and the Lamp*), but her *Essay* is not examined for its own merits, and mentioned only in comparison to work done by her male peers. This usually happens in not more than one or two sentences or a footnote. Moreover, her work often meets with a dismissive attitude. Editors of eighteenth-century essays on Shakespeare like D. Nichol Smith, discredit the originality and value of the *Essay*. Nichol Smith characterizes it as “a well-meaning, but shallow and unnecessary reply to Voltaire,” unnecessary because Johnson “has already vindicated the national pride in Shakespeare” (xx). The idea that the *Essay* is unoriginal and borrows its leading ideas from Pope and Johnson resurfaces even in modern studies like for example Jonathan Bate’s *Shakespearean Constitutions* from 1989. Bate argues that the *Essay* “is wholeheartedly Johnsonian, often uncritically dependent on the 1765 preface” (14). One wonders whether critics who so easily dismiss Montagu’s work as totally dependent on Pope or Johnson have actually read it, since most of the topics Montagu discusses, such as the historical drama and Shakespeare’s supernatural imagination, are present in neither Pope nor Johnson.

Feminist scholarship of the bluestocking circle has re-introduced Montagu’s work into the canon of literary criticism as a rare extended piece of literary criticism written by a woman, emphasizing its place within an emerging tradition of women’s writing. In this chapter, I will go into the merits and shortcomings of this approach, after which I will elaborate on my own choice to regard the canon in its totality, and focus on Montagu’s

influence on the dominant scholarly discourse that developed into the romantic aesthetic. The influence of Montagu's *Essay* on the critical canon that we explored in the previous chapter will cast a new light on the scholarly debates regarding the question of how to retrieve and evaluate women's forgotten voices in contemporary revisions of the male-oriented canon, especially in the context of eighteenth and nineteenth-century literary criticism.

Women Critics

Although women practiced literary criticism since its establishment as a separate discourse, as the Folger Collective of Women Writers has pointed out, they are underrepresented in our modern and contemporary critical anthologies (xiii). The bluestocking circle has been re-introduced into the canon by Harcstark Myers's groundbreaking study, and is now acknowledged as an important influence on women's intellectual activity in the romantic period. Elizabeth Fay, in *A Feminist introduction to Romantic Studies*, holds that "Any discussion of women's intellectuality during the Romantic period must be dominated by the two pillars of the Bluestocking circle's legacy and Mary Wollstonecraft's overwhelming radicalism" (160). Brown and Waters similarly focus on the influence of the bluestockings on the emerging tradition of women writing: Brown explores the reception of the bluestockings by eighteenth-century German women writers in an article from 2002, and Waters characterises the bluestockings as "the true forbearers of Romantic-era British women critics" (5).

This emphasis on the importance of the bluestockings for a distinctly feminine tradition of writing is based on the idea that women critics differ from their male peers in style, thematic concerns, and especially in their ideological positionings, as for example Waters and Mellor argue. In *Romanticism and Gender* (1993), Anne Mellor points to the fact that definitions of "Romanticism," both to denote an aesthetic and a historical period-term, are based on the writings and thought of six male poets (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, Byron, Shelley and Keats), and she therefore proposes to re-name these definitions "masculine Romanticism" (1-3). In order to retrieve the forgotten female voices, Mellor emphasises those aspects of women's writing in which it differs from the dominant (male) tradition. She argues that women writing in the Romantic period upheld an aesthetic different from their male peers, one that was grounded in an "ethics of care" which insists on the primacy of the family or the community (*Romanticism* 3).

The term "ethics of care" was coined by the developmental psychologist Carol Gilligan in *In a Different Voice* (1982). With this new term, Gilligan sought to describe

women's different moral development that results in a different outlook on morality. Gilligan bases herself on gender differences, and is careful to underline that there is nothing essentially "female" about an ethics of care. She develops the notion of an ethics of care in contradistinction to what she calls an "ethics of rights" (qtd. in Darwall 220). The latter conceives of self and other in universal or general terms, and recognizes the primacy of individual rights. As Darwall points out in *Philosophical Ethics*, the ethics of rights corresponds to a Kantian conception of morality (220). Importantly, it starts from the premise of the autonomous individual. Gilligan's conception of an ethics of care rather emphasises the interdependency of individuals, and her moral theory is concerned with responsibility within relationships. An ethics of care is "particularistic rather than universalistic", and it conceives of ethical issues as "tears in a fabric of a relationship" (Darwall 223). This undermines the notion of a transcendental impartial solution to moral problems, an approach characteristic of an ethics of rights.

Mellor bases her theory of women's critical writing in the romantic period on the distinction between the transcendental universalism of an ethics of rights, and the relational and communal focus of an ethics of care. She connects the aesthetic of the sublime with the ethics of rights-approach, and identifies this as an important concern in literature and criticism written by men. Mellor furthermore argues that women emphasised the didactic and pedagogical purposes of literature, and these are best attenuated in a mimetic aesthetic, as opposed to the "masculine" expressive aesthetic. She compares the female critic to "a mother, educating her children" ("Criticism" 35). In women's aesthetic "sensibility must be joined with correct perception, literature must record not [sublime] flights of fancy or escapist desire but empirical truth" ("Criticism" 41). Women championed the novel as the highest literary genre as probability and moral were their chief literary values and the novel embodied these values better than lyrical poetry, the highest romantic genre according to what Mellor terms "masculine Romantic" definitions. Mellor's study raises important gender issues regarding our definition of Romanticism, for example how the choice for poetry as the dominant romantic genre is already a gendered one. She moreover places a whole range of female authors and texts in a new perspective.

The fact that the bluestocking women writers are held to be the forbearers of romantic women critics should be regarded in this light. Critics who make this connection (Franklin and Eger) stress the differences between men and women's critical traditions, and furthermore underline those aspects of women's writing that may fall under the rubric of an ethics of care, such as morality and the instructive purpose of literary texts. Eger, for example, points out

that Montagu and Griffith, the author of *Shakespeare's Morality Illustrated*, share a concern for the morally instructive value of Shakespeare's work. Franklin groups together Montagu, Griffith and Lennox, who researched Shakespeare's sources, under the heading of "Moral and Fable" (1991). Eger additionally points to Montagu's role in promoting literature in the English language, a concern that she places in a tradition of women scholars and that we also find in Castle (2002).

When it comes to the evaluation of Montagu's *Essay*, the "ethics of care"-approach shows its limitations. It runs the risk of sidetracking women in their own tradition and thereby neglecting the interconnections between women and men's literary criticism. Both Franklin and Eger stress those aspects of Montagu's *Essay* that are attenuated in a female tradition at the cost of the other important issues her work touches upon, and that we have discussed in the previous chapter. Although the emphasis on the moral instructive value of the drama is one of Montagu's leading ideas, her *Essay* differs markedly from Griffith's, the latter is characterised by Eger as close in style to an educational anthology ("Defense" 137). Franklin and Eger are therefore not able to fully explore the impact of Montagu's work on the dominant tradition of romantic criticism of Shakespeare, although this may also be partly due to their nationalistic focus that leaves out the reception of Montagu's *Essay* in Germany.

To assess the influence of a late eighteenth-century essay on the development of the canon of Shakespeare criticism, one cannot neglect its increasingly transnational scope, especially with regard to the coming into being of a romantic aesthetic that was partly based on Shakespeare's artistic practice. No contemporary critic would write on the development of a romantic aesthetic and leave out German critics altogether; and maybe this should be the same for research of the development of Shakespeare criticism of this period, as romantic aesthetics and Shakespeare criticism are intricately related discourses. It would in addition be interesting to see what the Italian reception of Montagu's *Essay* would add to our evaluation of its originality and impact, as this is an angle that has not yet been explored.

Moreover, a number of characteristics of women's critical writing can be explained by looking at women's vulnerable position in the critical domain in the eighteenth century. Terry Castle looks into the ways in which women's vulnerable position as authors relates to the content of their literary criticism. Women critics were in a fragile position not only because of the dominance of men in the eighteenth-century criticism, but also due to the fact that "making oneself public" held problematic connotations for a female critic (Castle 14-16). Castle argues that the emphasis on morality in women's literary criticism should be read as a

counterbalance to their usurpation of the position of a literary critic in a public discourse that might be conceived of as immoral (16).

On the other hand, morality was not solely a standard feature in many texts written by women critics, but also prominently present in the dominant critical discourse of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Montagu shared her emphasis on Shakespeare's morality not only with Griffith, but also with Johnson and Coleridge. Whereas lines can be drawn from Montagu to Griffith and Joanna Baillie, the important romantic playwright who also characterised the theatre as a school for moral wisdom in her *Plays of the Passions* from 1798, the female playwright Aphra Behn denies that plays are written to amend morals in her preface to *The Dutch Lover* that was published only four years after the first edition of Montagu's *Essay* was printed²⁵. By focusing too strongly on the shared features of female literary criticism, the diversity within this vast body of material is obscured. In addition, this focus precludes the research into cross-fertilisations across male and female traditions.

However, there is more at stake when we characterise moral instruction as a distinctly feminine trait of literary criticism. In *Gender and Language in British Literary Criticism, 1660-1790*, Laura Runge explores the critical and gendered values through which eighteenth-century literature is produced. She pays special attention to those values that have been singled out as feminine, such as the beautiful and the moral realm. The understanding that aesthetic discourse has its place within the historical discourses of its production underpins her approach. Runge therefore connects the shift from ancient to modern aesthetics to the emergence of a model of gendered difference (173). One of her main achievements is the demonstration of the way in which eighteenth-century criticism relies on patriarchal language to define its values. The most poignant example of this is Burke's *Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) in which "the masculine emphasis on heightened imagination, bold expression, speed, and strength" that falls under the rubric of the sublime, is tempered by "the feminine qualities of softness, smoothness and sweetness" (212), that together makes up the set of qualities constitutive of the aesthetic of the beautiful. Thus, when we insist on women's distinct contribution to the critical canon and situate it in the

²⁵ In her own words from the preface: "I will have leave to say that in my judgment the increasing number of our latter Plays have not done much towards the amending of men's morals [...] nor can I imagine what temptation anyone can have to expect it from them; for sure I am no Play was ever writ with that design" (Behn 222-3).

beautiful and moral realm, we in fact take those historically determined gendered values of literary criticism at face value, and thereby perpetuate these ideas.²⁶

Elizabeth Montagu in Romantic Criticism

Gary Kelly and Sylvia Harcstark Myers point to the double appropriation of the writings of the first generation bluestockings (including Montagu) in Romanticism and Victorianism. On the one hand, their correspondence was published, and their legacy was appropriated in a “domestic ideology” (Kelly 177). “This ideology,” Kelly writes, “tried to both accommodate the counter-Revolutionary rejection of women who were active in the public sphere, and to sustain the claim for the professionalization of women as subjects and social agents in the domestic and local sphere” (177). Not only the (selective) publication of bluestocking correspondence, but also Dr Doran’s biography of Montagu can be placed in this context. On the other hand, the revolutionary aftermath saw the development of a relentless discrediting of bluestocking female intellectualism. Harcstark Myers was the first to draw attention to the large-scale pejoration of the Bluestockings, or rather, of the female intellectualism they represented, by male romantic poets and critics like Keats, Hazlitt, Coleridge, and Byron. Coleridge, as we have seen in the introduction, wrote in 1813 that he loathed and disapproved all bluestockingism. The pejoration of the bluestockings by the canonized, male romantic poets may be explained as a sign of envy of these women’s literary success, as Harcstark Myers interprets it (292-3).

Although she was ridiculed by the leading British romantics, Montagu’s *Essay* was an important influence upon the romantic defence of Shakespeare, especially through the impact of her work upon the *Sturm und Drang* critics. However, it is problematic to speak of a *female* influence upon the romantic doctrine of criticism since the German translation of the *Essay* was published anonymously and it was read as the contribution of a male critic. One might even argue that the whole concept of influence is problematic in itself, as it is already a gendered term that excludes women from making a contribution. Harold Bloom’s *Anxiety of Influence* from 1973 makes the gender bias of this concept apparent in his characterisation of poetic history as an Oedipal struggle between “strong poets” and their literary forefathers (5). “Poetic history,” Bloom argues, “is indistinguishable from poetic influence since strong poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves”

²⁶ Similar objections have been made to Gilligan’s ethics of care, see for example Sandra Lee Bartky’s *Femininity and Domination* (1990).

(5). If we examine Wellek's canon of literary criticism, we might also argue that for Wellek, the history of literary criticism is likewise indistinguishable from a patriarchal lineage of influence that per definition excludes women from making any significant contribution. As is well known, feminist scholars have contested Bloom's model. Annette Kolodny for example argues that

Bloom's paradigm of poetic history, when applied to women, proves useful only in a negative sense: for by omitting the possibility of poet/mothers from his psychodynamic of literary influence (allowing the feminine only the role of Muse – as composite whore and mother), Bloom effectively masks the fact of an other tradition entirely – that in which women taught one another how to read and write about and out of their own unique (and sometimes isolated) contexts. (465)

She thereby also turns to an alternative tradition of women's writing next to the dominant, masculine tradition. We have seen that this approach is to some extent limiting, as it does not account for possible interrelationships across both traditions that the influence of Montagu's *Essay* exemplifies. Moreover, as Montagu's *Essay* shows, even though a critic is not represented in the canon, he or she may nevertheless have contributed to the body of thought that *is* represented in the canon, and thereby, as it were, be latently present within it.

Rereading the male-dominated canon and retrieving the unacknowledged influence of women authors, as I have done for Elizabeth Montagu in the emergence of a romantic aesthetic, is a strategy that may possibly undermine the canon from within. Emphasizing women's own aesthetic tradition runs the risk of creating an alternative canon that will not achieve the same recognition as the dominant, masculine canon. If we, on the other hand, focus on the latent presence of women as theory-builders and judges within the given canon, we may be able to subvert the myth of exclusive masculine creativity and authorship that underlies the patrilineal canon, as Pollock and other feminists scholars have pointed out (Pollock 5).

Interestingly, we might also want to consider to what extent Montagu's defence of Shakespeare's genius and his status as the national poet, has contributed to the creation of a national canon of great works written by men. Eger points to the fact that whereas many feminist scholars have sought to include women into the male-oriented canon, few have considered women's role in first establishing that canon (129). As we now know, Shakespeare would become the paradigmatic model of masculine creativity and genius to such an extent that Harold Bloom presents Shakespeare and the Western canon as synonyms: "Shakespeare is the Canon. He sets the standard and the limits of literature," he argues in *The Western*

Canon (47). Bloom also holds that “nothing crucial in [Shakespeare’s] largeness is culture-bound or gender-confined” (50), a point that our previous examination of the intertwinement of notions of literary value and gender discourse has proven wrong.

Concluding Remarks

We have seen how the different contexts in which Montagu’s work has been framed have cast different aspects of her *Essay* into a new light. Obviously, we do not have to choose either approach, as it is significant in itself that her work is being read from different angles. But it is important not to forget what is at stake when we choose to read Montagu’s *Essay* as a female or bluestocking criticism: by characterizing sublime flights of the imagination as masculine, and the beautiful and moral realm as feminine, we perpetuate gendered ideas about literary value that are in fact historically situated and up for discussion. Following Runge, I am interested in historicizing literary criticism and challenging these gendered criteria of literary value as ideological constructs. In addition, if we strictly read Montagu’s *Essay* from the context of a feminine aesthetic, we preclude her work from having any real influence upon the dominant canon of criticism. However, a canon is never definitely decided upon but always under construction, and it is interesting to notice that in recent instances Montagu is included in the canon of criticism, right next to her male romantic peers. The Norton critical edition of *Macbeth* from 2003 (edited by Robert Miola) contains seventeen essays that represent four hundred years of critical and theatrical interpretations of the play, and it holds both Montagu and Coleridge’s criticism.

The canon of Shakespeare criticism as we know it today is dominated by men. In order to account for this fact, Ann Thompson and Sasha Roberts, the editors of *Women Reading Shakespeare*, argue that women’s absence from the critical canon is partly due to the different genres in which they wrote – not the scholarly edition, monograph, essay and article, but autobiography, letters, theatre criticism, books for a general readership, and periodicals – which have been “overlooked” in histories of Shakespeare criticism (7). Other critics, like Mary Waters and Anne Mellor, hold that women critics from the Romantic era upheld an aesthetic theory different from their male peers, such as Coleridge and William Wordsworth, whose aesthetic doctrine has become the dominant discourse in studies of Romanticism (Mellor “Criticism” 29). Mellor and Waters argue that there are significant differences in thematic concerns, formal practices and especially in ideological positionings between men and women critics.

Nonetheless, both of these explanations do not apply to a critic like Elizabeth Montagu who wrote in an acknowledged format, the critical essay, and who, as we have seen, made a significant contribution to the (masculine) romantic evaluation of Shakespeare. Obviously, the fundamental reason for women's absence from the canon – the fact of patriarchal society which "continues to resist, denigrate, and mistrust women as critics, theory-builders or judges" (Sniader and Beck 79) that we touched upon in the introduction – underlies the attempt to bring into focus women's critical writing by emphasizing those aspects in which it differs from the dominant, masculine tradition of criticism. Mellor's choice to emphasize the differences between women and men's literary criticism is a strategic one, aimed at both recovering and characterising a vast body of material: "In order to recover the erased and neglected voices of Romantic women writers, I have grouped their writings under the heading of what I have called 'feminine Romanticism'" (*Romanticism* 3). She furthermore argues that her own "introductory and necessarily crude generalizations will in the future be refined by taking into account the many subtle distinctions between the men and women writers of the Romantic period, but also – and more importantly – between one women writer and another" (*Romanticism* 3).

In Montagu's case, reading her strictly as partaking in a feminine critical tradition fails to take into account her profound influence on the dominant critical discourse of Romanticism, as we have seen. It begs the question whether a piece of literary criticism written by a woman necessarily has to be distinctly 'feminine' in order to be (retrospectively) included into our canon, or whether we need another model to take into account the latent presence of the ideas of a critic like Montagu in our inherited canon, whereas at the same time, her critical authorship had been almost forgotten. The acknowledgment of women's influence on the traditional canon subverts the ideology upon which it rests, an ideology in which excellence and masculinity are closely intertwined, and one that precludes female authorship and genius. An ideology that, interestingly, Montagu and other women critics in the eighteenth century have helped create in their veneration for Shakespeare's genius.

Works Cited

- Bartky, Sandra Lee. *Femininity and Domination*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Bate, Jonathan. *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730-1830*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989.
- Behn, Aphra. "An Epistle to the Reader," prefixed to *The Dutch Lover. The Collected Works of Aphra Behn*. Volume I. Ed. Montague Summers. London: William Heineman, 1915.
- Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. New York: Oxford UP, 1973.
- *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994.
- Brown, Hilary. "The Reception of the Bluestockings by Eighteenth-century German Women Writers." *Women in German Yearbook: Feminist Studies in German Literature & Culture* Volume 18. Eds. Patricia Herminghouse and Ruth-Ellen Joeres Boetcher London: 2002.
- Castle, Terry. *Boss Ladies, Watch Out!: Essays on Women, Sex and Writing*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Coleridge, S.T. *Table talk: and the rime of the ancient mariner, Christabel, &c.* London: Routledge and sons, 1884.
- Darwall, Stephen. *Philosophical Ethics*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview P, 1998.
- Eger, Elizabeth. "'Out rushed a female to protect the bard:' The Bluestocking Defense of Shakespeare." *Reconsidering the Bluestockings*. Eds. Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg. California: Huntington Library, 2003. 127-52.
- Fay, Elizabeth. *A Feminist Introduction to Romantic Studies*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1998.
- Folger Collective of Women Writers, eds. *Women Critics 1660-1820*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995.
- Franklin, Colin. "The Fable and the Moral." *Shakespeare Domesticated: The Eighteenth-Century Editions*. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1991.
- Gilligan, Carol. *In A Different Voice: Women's Conceptions of Self and Morality*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982.
- Guest, Hariat. "Bluestocking Feminism." *Reconsidering the Bluestockings*. Eds. Nicole Pohl and Betty A. Schellenberg. California: Huntington Library, 2003. 59-81.
- Harcstark Myers, Sylvia. *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1990.

- Kelly, Gary. "Bluestocking Feminism." *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*. Eds. Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Clíona ó Gallchoir and Penny Warburton. Cambridge: UP, 2001.
- Kolodny, Annette. "A Map for Rereading: Or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts." *New Literary History* 11.3 (1980): 451-467.
- Mellor, Anne K. *Romanticism & Gender*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- "A Criticism of Their Own: Romantic Women Literary Critics." *Questioning Romanticism*. Ed. J. Beer. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins UP, 1995.
- Miola, Robert S. (ed). *Macbeth: Authoritative Text, Sources and Contexts, Criticism*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003.
- Montagu, Elizabeth. "An essay on the writings and genius of Shakespear, compared with the Greek and French dramatic poets. With some remarks upon the misrepresentations of Mons. de Voltaire." In: *Writings of the Bluestocking Circle, 1738-1785: Volume 1: Elizabeth Montagu*. Ed. Elizabeth Eger. London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999.
- Nichol Smith, D. ed. *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1963.
- Pollock, Griselda. *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Runge, Laura. *Gender and Language in British Literary Criticism 1660-1790*. Cambridge: UP, 1997.
- Sniader, Lanser, S. and E. Torton Beck. "[Why] Are There No Great Women Critics? And What Difference Does it Make?" *The Prism of Sex: Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Ed. J.A. Sherman and E. Torton Beck. Madison, Wisconsin, UP, 1979. 79-91.
- Thompson, Ann and Sasha Roberts, eds. *Women Reading Shakespeare 1660-1900: An Anthology of Criticism*. Manchester: University Press, 1997.
- Waters, Mary. *British Women Writers and the Profession of Literary Criticism, 1789–1832*. Houndshead: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Conclusion

It has been demonstrated in this thesis that Elizabeth Montagu participated in debates in romantic Shakespeare criticism that have later become canonised. I have on the one hand shown her latent presence within our inherited canon of criticism, and on the other, discussed practices of remembrance that have resulted in the forgetting of that contribution.

The canon of criticism, like any canon, is necessarily selective and restricts itself to a limited number of texts that continue to be re-read, appropriated and commented upon. Feminist scholarship has made the androcentric bias of the canon of criticism apparent, and attempts have been made to bring women's critical writing back into view. Montagu's *Essay*, for example, was not seriously being read or discussed before feminist scholarship retrieved it from oblivion. I have identified a tendency in the contemporary revaluations of Montagu's *Essay* to read it as a minority criticism written by a woman. This approach, I have shown, is limiting because it fails to assess the profound contribution that Elizabeth Montagu made with her *Essay*. Even though the *Essay* was not being read for a long time, it never entirely disappeared out of view. Its twilight existence in the margins of the canon enables one to return to this specific text and reread it. It has been my approach to connect the *Essay* to the developments in romantic Shakespeare criticism, and thereby to cross two traditions that are separated through a gender divide: the masculine tradition of romantic Shakespeare criticism, and the female tradition of bluestocking criticism. It further connects a late eighteenth-century tradition with a nineteenth-century one, and moves across supposed temporal boundaries between Neoclassicism and Romanticism.

In my discussion of Montagu's *Essay*, I have followed the eighteenth-century praise of two specific aspects of her work: the ideas on the historical drama, and her approach to Shakespeare's supernatural imagination. Not only have these aspects received little attention in contemporary re-evaluations of the *Essay*, but they also tie in with new themes and emphases in romantic Shakespeare criticism. I have discussed these themes in Montagu's work in comparison to eighteenth and nineteenth-century English and German works of Shakespeare criticism. When I set out to plan this thesis, I did not expect the profound influence of her work on the development of certain themes in Shakespeare criticism in Germany, of which the relationship between Montagu and Herder's approaches to Shakespeare is the most poignant example. Many of the ideas that gave Herder the reputation of being the builder of a new romantic poetics were already present in Montagu's *Essay*, that as I have demonstrated, Herder read intently. The exploration of this important link between

Montagu's critical work on the development of a romantic aesthetic in which Herder is held to be a founding figure would not have been possible without the archival work of Roger Paulin. His incredibly detailed study of the reception of Shakespeare in Germany first signposted me to the Montagu-Herder connection that interestingly had not been explored in detail before.

I have further discussed Montagu's *Essay* and Coleridge's Shakespeare lectures as two different points in the development of a romantic approach to Shakespeare. One of the key elements of this approach is the insistence, for example in Coleridge's lectures, on Shakespeare's conscious artistry that is demonstrated in the whole design, as well as the details of his plays. Even though Byron's caricature of Elizabeth Montagu gives the impression that she was one of the critics who thought of Shakespeare as a wild, artless genius, she in fact defends the conscious artistry of Shakespeare throughout her *Essay*. As we have seen, there is a great discrepancy between the contents of her work and nineteenth-century caricatures, as well as modern evaluations of her *Essay* that argue for its indebtedness to Pope and Johnson. This discrepancy is the space where I locate my own reading of Montagu's *Essay* that sets out to claim a position for Montagu as one of the unacknowledged builders of a new romantic approach to Shakespeare.

Moreover, this case study points to the necessity to re-read historical texts, rather than rely on given qualifications. In Montagu's case, certain labels that the *Essay* received, have served as excuses for *not* reading it. As the various ways of reading Shakespeare in the periods discussed here testify, the afterlife of a text thrives on readers that re-appropriate it and create new frames for reading it. This is the only remedy to Herder's sad musings on the world historical development because of which, Herder feared, Shakespeare's texts would one day be too distant from us to be read or understood properly. As twenty-first-century readers, we have seen that Shakespeare's stature only grew with the increasing temporal distance between him and his readers. His texts have continued to find a new readership. I hope my reading of Elizabeth Montagu and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's approaches to Shakespeare will likewise provide a frame for reading these historical texts that will newly address them to twenty-first-century readers.