

## Werk

**Titel:** Shakespeare's Sprache bei seinen Lebzeiten

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'Daily News' vom 28. November 1890 bringen folgende Notiz, welche interessant genug ist, um einen Platz im Jahrbuche zu finden. Der Inhalt bedingt, und rechtfertigt also, den Abdruck in der Originalsprache:

If Shakespeare could now revisit the city in which the busy years of his life were spent, what would he think of a modern performance of one of his plays? The question is a wide one; it reopens at once the much controverted problem of the propriety of extravagant mountings; but that is not the point of view from which Mr. W. J. Churchill invited the members of the Archæological Section of the Birmingham and Midland Institute to look at the matter. Mr. Churchill's inquiry had to do simply with the language of the text. He is of opinion that the poet's enjoyment of the evening's entertainment would be in great degree marred from his inability to make out what the actors were saying. In other words, there have been great changes since Shakespeare's time in our mode of pronouncing syllables. This is most noticeable in the vowels. For example, 'ea' was probably then scarcely distinguishable from 'ai'—or where would be the point of Falstaff's punning question 'if reasons' (rasins) 'were as plenty as blackberries'? 'Rome,' again, was pronounced 'Room,' as appears by the play of words in 'Julius Cæsar.' The tradition of 'Room' for 'Rome' indeed even lingered on the lips of the late Earl Russel. Rosalind's play upon the words 'suitor' and 'shooter' again implies that an 'h' had crept into the spoken word 'suitor' as we

have it now in the word sugar. John Kemble, as Mr. Churchill reminded his audience, seriously endeavoured to restore the supposed Shakespearian pronunciation in the case of the word 'beard,' which he pronounced 'bird.' Leigh Hunt's amusing note to his contemporary criticisms on the actors of his early days reminds us that Kemble even went farther, and pronounced 'merchant' as 'marchant,' 'virtue' as 'vartue,' and 'hideous' and 'odious' as 'hidjus' and 'ojus.' He was ridiculed for his pains by a caricaturist of the period, who represented this 'lofty grave tragedian' in a barber's shop exclaiming, 'Cut off my bird, it is ojusly long.' 'Aitchies and pains,' for 'aches and pains' even caused, as stage histories record, a riot at Covent Garden, and this, we regret to say, not because the changes were sometimes fantastic and of little authority, but simply because they were strange in the early portion of this century. Mr. Churchill, who ventured upon a recital of 'Jacques's soliloquy' as one 'might have expected to hear it spoken in Shakespeare's days,' seems to have been more respectfully listened to; but the experiment is clearly not one for mixed audiences.

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