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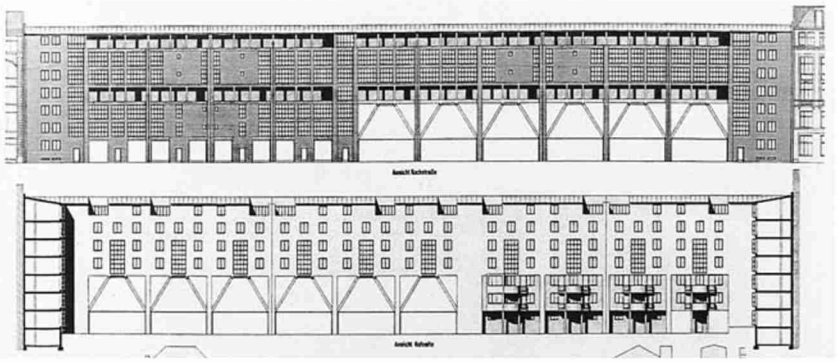
MISZELLEN

DIE DICHTER UND IHR ARCHITEKT: GÜNTER PLESSOW REKONSTRUIERT ELISABETHANISCHE SONETTZYKLEN

VON

INA SCHABERT

Nach einem Berufsleben als Architekt hat sich Günter Plessow (geb. 1934) seit den späten 1990er Jahren mit den Konstruktionsweisen von Literatur beschäftigt. Als Mitglied des Berliner Architektenteams 'Grötzebach, Plessow, Ehlers' wirkte er zuvor daran mit, Fassadengliederungen zu ergänzen und Straßenzüge zu restaurieren, die durch Krieg und Verfall geschädigt waren. Prinzip des Teams war es – ein Ausstellungskatalog von 1986 formuliert das aus – das Neue dem vorgegebenen Stadtraumgefüge anzupassen und dessen vertrautes Bild durch unauffällige 'Reparatur' wieder zu vervollständigen. Angestrebt wurde, bei zurückhaltender Modernisierung, das Einfache, Gewöhnliche in seinen traditionellen, ebenmäßigen Proportionen. Ein Entwurf für die Rekonstruktion des Straßenbilds der Kochstraße in Berlin-Kreuzberg ist kennzeichnend für das Vorgehen:



"Grötzebach, Plessow, Ehlers. Projekte 1975 – 1985", Katalog zur Ausstellung vom 10. April bis 2. Mai 1986.

Das Programm findet sich ex negativo auch bestätigt in einem Bändchen witziger und satirischer Gedichte von Plessow, in denen er sich distanziert von schicker

Architekturtheorie und von spektakulären, alltagsfremden Berliner Bauprojekten der Nachkriegszeit.[1]

Plessow sieht in Architektur und Poesie analoge Bauprozesse. Hier wie dort wird im Idealfall nach alten, dauerhaft gültigen Ordnungsvorstellungen ein Ganzes gestaltet, dessen Proportionen bei der Restauration bzw. beim lesenden und übersetzenden Nachvollzug freizulegen sind.[2] Als erstes Objekt für sein Studium literarischer Architektur wählte Plessow frühneuzeitliche englische Sonettsequenzen aus. Seine Darstellungen von Shakespeares *Sonnets*, Samuel Daniels *Delia* und Michael Draytons *Ideas Mirrour* liegen inzwischen gedruckt vor.[3] Stets beginnt er die Arbeit zu den 'Bauplänen' bei den einzelnen Elementen. Jedes Sonett eignet er sich an in einem mehrstufigen Verstehens- und Übersetzungsprozess, den er sorgfältig dokumentiert. Er beginnt mit ungereimter, holpriger, gewissenhafter Wörtlichkeit und endet mit einer formgerechten freien Version im Sonettmetrum der Vorlage. Petrarkistische Quellenforschung ist ihm dabei Nebensache; die Intertextualität von Literatur findet er ebenso selbstverständlich wie die Traditionalität vernünftiger architektonischer Formgebung. Und wie die Häuser, die er mitentworfen hat, zum normalen Wohnen da sind, so betrachtet er die "pretty roomes" (Donne) der Sonette als Räume für die dichterische Gestaltung allgemein nachvollziehbarer Gefühle und Gedanken. Dass in Shakespeares Sonetten der Dichter beteuert, er habe nichts wirklich Neues zu sagen ("all my best is dressing old words new") bestätigt ihn in seiner Auffassung.[4] Die Zugänglichkeit der Texte verstärkt Plessow durch den betont unpathetischen Duktus seiner deutschen Neufassungen. In beigefügten Kommentaren versucht er ebenfalls, die elisabethanische emotionale und poetische Sensibilität zu vermitteln, indem er die alte Rhetorik in heutige Diskurse der Liebe und des Liebesstreits überträgt.

In der Abfolge der in ihrer Sinnstruktur erschlossenen Gedichte zeichnen sich Muster von thematischen Ähnlichkeiten und Kontrasten ab, die sodann minutiös in

[1] Günter Plessow, *BERLINER VERsBAU* (Berlin: Aedes, 1986).

[2] Siehe das Interview von Plessow mit Jan Kuhlbrodt 1997 in *Signaturen: Forum für autonome Poesie*, http://signaturen-magazin.de/gespraech-mit-guenter-plessow-1.html (letzter Zugriff: 18.1.2016).

[3] Nach einem graphisch sehr ansprechenden Privatdruck als *Kritik der Liebe: Shakespeares Sonnets & A Lover's Complaint*, hg. und übers. von Günter Plessow (Berlin, 2001), erschien der Band 2003 beim Verlag Karl Stutz, Passau. Ebenfalls nach einer privaten Veröffentlichung (*"Doch die getäuschte Hoffnung treibt mich um": Samuel Daniel, Delia, with the Complaint of Rosamond, 1592*, hg. und übers. von Günter Plessow [Berlin, 2005]) veröffentlichte der LIT Verlag (Berlin, 2008) diese Arbeit (ohne den Zitat-Titel). Draytons *Ideas Mirrour*, schon 2002 fertiggestellt, erschien 2014 als *Ideas Spiegel*, hg. und übers. von Günter Plessow, mit dem programmatischen Nachwort "Sonettseptette" in der Schweizer Edition SIGNAThUR (Dozwil, 2014).

[4] Drayton (2014), 169, mit Bezug auf Shakespeares Sonette 76 und 125.

Arbeitsblättern kartographiert werden. Diese Blätter sind in der Ausgabe von *Ideas Mirrour* der Sequenz beigefügt worden. Auf ihnen werden die thematischen Bezugsmuster durch verschiedenfarbige Markierungen herausgestellt.[5] Innerhalb der Sequenz setzt Plessow hinzugefügte Titel und Erläuterungen ein, um auf übergreifende Sinnlinien aufmerksam zu machen. Auf die so erkannte Kohärenz kommt es ihm vor allem an. Wie er als Architekt ein Haus nicht isoliert, sondern innerhalb der Häuserzeile sieht, so begreift er ein Sonett als Teil der gesamten Sequenz. Deren Bedeutung erschließt sich nur dem ganz, der "die Folge als Folge liest".[6] Dies geschieht für ihn viel zu selten. Dass der Herausgeber der Scolar Press Facsimile-Ausgabe von 1969 Daniels *Delia* als 'Kollektion', und nicht als 'Komposition' von Sonetten anbietet, irritiert ihn.[7] Im Nachwort zu *Ideas Mirrour* holt er zu einer Gesamtkritik aus der Außenseiterperspektive aus:

> Die Philologie, eine ungemein flexible und zu Ausschweifungen geneigte Wissenschaft, die jederzeit bereit ist, 'das' Sonett ins Auge zu fassen und es in jeden, auch den entlegensten Kontext hineinzuprojizieren, zeigt mir viel zu wenig Neigung, die Sequenz, die dem einzelnen Sonett den Stellenwert zuweist, mit gleicher Wißbegier und Lust zu untersuchen.[8]

In der Tat hat die literaturwissenschaftliche Sonettforschung die Frage nach den Kompositionsregeln der elisabethanischen Sonettzyklen bislang nicht befriedigend beantworten können. T. P. Roche wendet sich in seiner monumentalen Studie zu *Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequences* (1989) gegen die vor allem für Shakespeare gern angesetzte narrative Gesamtstrukturierung (*the narrative fallacy*), gegen die vorzugsweise bei Sidney und Spenser erprobte biographische Zusammenhangsstiftung (*the biographical fallacy*) sowie grundsätzlich gegen das Verständnis der unter einem Titel geeinten Sonette als Gestaltung aufeinanderfolgender Stimmungen oder Gefühlsmomente (*the sequential fallacy*). Er sieht in ihnen jeweils selbständige rhetorische und moralische Statements. Ähnlich wendet sich auch Christopher Warley noch 2005 gegen die Ambition, Sonettfolgen als wie immer geartete Ganzheiten aufzufassen.[9] Die Form der losen Häufung, so befindet er, bot den Dichtern der Frühen Neuzeit die Chance, auf verschiedene und unverbindliche Weisen neue gesellschaftliche Ortsbestimmungen zu erproben. Carol Thomas Neely hingegen optiert in einem Aufsatz von 1978 entschieden für das Programm

[5] Drayton (2014), 152–167. Ein Beispiel der feinfarbigen "Arbeitsblätter" lässt sich hier leider nicht reproduzieren.

[6] Shakespeare (2003), 206.

[7] Daniel (2008), 219–220.

[8] Drayton (2014), 176.

[9] Christopher Warley, *Sonnet Sequences and Social Distinction in Renaissance England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

einer ganzheitlichen Lektüre. Dabei, so vermutet sie, würden jeweils die Entwicklungen, Veränderungen und Brüche innerhalb einer vom Dichter entworfenen Liebesbeziehung sichtbar.[10] Numerologische Studien, wie sie in den frühen 1970er Jahren Mode wurden, sehen statt eines ästhetisch oder psychologisch determinierten Zusammenhangs die Kohärenz in einer zahlensymbolischen Anordnung. Diese wird vor allem für Edmund Spensers *Amoretti* geltend gemacht; doch auch für *Astrophel and Stella* von Sir Philip Sidney und einige Sequenzen seines Kreises sind neben zahlensymbolischen Einzeleffekten übergreifende numerologische Ordnungslinien wahrgenommen worden.[11]

Vor dem Hintergrund der eher diffusen Forschungslage ist Plessows neuer, alternativer Ansatz durchaus zu begrüßen. Auch seine Strukturanalyse führt dazu, den 'Bauplan' einer Sonettsequenz in Zahlenrelationen zu erfassen. Doch diese Ordnung ist für ihn kein objektiv vorgegebenes Profil, keine Anspielung auf kosmologische Proportionen. Vielmehr ist es ein natürlich sich ergebender Rhythmus der dichterischen Artikulation, ein "modulare[r] Sprechduktus, eine Art Takt, der die ganze Sequenz erfaßt, so selbstverständlich und notwendig wie das Ein-und Ausatmen beim Sprechen".[12] Aufgrund dieser Poetik der Unmittelbarkeit legt er großen Wert darauf, die Sonettzyklen in der ursprünglichen Gestalt zu untersuchen. Er stellt Shakespeares *Sonnets* von 1609 nicht als Raubdruck infrage, sondern akzeptiert die Texte und ihre Anordnung, zusammen mit dem Gedicht *The Lover's Complaint*, als historisch gegebenes Ganzes. Abweichend von der gängigen Editionspraxis liest er die Sonett-Sequenzen von Daniel und Drayton jeweils in ihrer ersten Fassung; die Verklammerung von *Delia* mit *The Complaint of Rosamond* in der Erstveröffentlichung 1592 wird ebenfalls respektiert. Dass Drayton nach 1594 die Sonette umarrangiert und zwischen 1599 und 1619 weithin durch (zum Teil sehr schöne) neue Texte ersetzt hat, interessiert ihn kaum, auch wenn er eine Reihe der neuen Sonette mit eigenen deutschen Versionen in einen Anhang aufnimmt.

Der Band zu Shakespeares *Sonnets* dokumentiert einen frühen, später als eher spielerisch bezeichneten Versuch, die Ordnungsvorstellung der Sequenz herauszuarbeiten. Plessow gliedert die Folge von 154 Sonetten in sieben Gruppen von je 18 Sonetten und einer abschließenden Gruppe von 28 Texten auf. Jeder Gruppe stellt er ein Schlüsselwort, jeweils ein Zitat aus dem Text, voran. Die so sich ergebende Wortkette: "INCREASE – COMPARE – SHADE – AGAINST – TWILIGHT – MOTION

[10] Carol Thomas Neely, "The Structure of English Renaissance Sonnet Sequences", *English Literary History* 45:3 (1978), 359–389.

[11] Siehe Tom W. N. Parker, *Proportional Form in the Sonnets of the Sidney Circle: Loving in Truth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

[12] Drayton (2014), 148.

– ROSE – BLACK – VOICE", versteht er als "eine probeweise darüber gelegte Gliederung des komplexen Werkes".[13] Die ausgewählten Wörter bestätigen einerseits sein poetologisch orientiertes Leseinteresse, wie es sich bereits andeutet in dem Titel *Kritik der Liebe*, der das selbstreflexive Moment der *Sonnets* hervorhebt. Andererseits weisen die Wörter in der Modulation der Bedeutungen auf das Kriterium hin, nach dem Plessow die Sequenz aufgegliedert sieht, nämlich die Veränderungen in der 'Tonlage'. Das ist für ihn ein komplexer Begriff. Den "Grundton" umschreibt er als "das spezifische Amalgam aus Höhe und Schlichtheit, Gedanke und Gefühl, Bildung und *baudy*".[14] Zusätzlich zu den Schlüsselwörtern fügt er selbstkomponierte Sonette ein, mit denen er nach Art eines *presenter* die Gruppen von jeweils 18 bzw. 28 Shakespeare-Sonetten einführt und dem heutigen deutschen Leser nahebringt.

> Increase – das Mehr, das Wachsen, darum gings
> und geht's in diesem Auftakt eines Rings.[15]

So bereitet zum Beispiel der Schluss seines ersten Sonetts auf die Gruppe der *procreation sonnets* vor. Mit seiner gewagten, durch Selbstironie geschützten Zugabe weckt er die Neugier auf das, was folgen wird, macht auf gestalterische Besonderheiten der Gruppe aufmerksam, spezifiziert mit Rück- und Vorverweisen die gruppenübergreifenden Zusammenhänge, die er mit den Schlüsselwörtern benennt, und fordert die Leser zum eigenen sorgfältigen Studium des Originals auf, das ihnen einen ebensolchen oder ähnlichen Bauplan offenbaren würde.

Im Unterschied zu Shakespeares *Sonnets* erschließen sich Samuel Daniels *Delia* und Draytons *Ideas Mirrour* relativ leicht der Erfassung als numerisch wohlproportionierte Gebilde. Umrahmt von zusätzlichen Gedichten und von Prosatexten liegt hier jeweils ein zentrales Korpus von 49 Liebessonetten vor. Plessow setzt für diese einen Bauplan von sieben Sonettgruppen von jeweils sieben Sonetten an. Die Aufgliederung wird dezidiert nicht als Anspielung auf kosmologische Ordnungsprinzipien verstanden; lediglich ein poetologisches Kompliment an das französische dichterische Siebengestirn der Pléiade schließt Plessow nicht aus. Wie bei Shakespeare, so werden auch hier die Gruppen durch jeweils verbindende 'Tonlagen' definiert und durch Veränderungen derselben voneinander unterschieden.

Die Titel, die den Siebenergruppen in *Delia* voranstehen, kündigen ein poetologisch und liebespsychologisch motiviertes Gegenspiel von Klage und Lob an: "THIS POORE RIUER – HER HARDEST HART – MY THOUGHTS-MAZE – HER FAIREST

[13] Shakespeare (2003), 205.
[14] Shakespeare (2003), 219.
[15] Shakespeare (2003), 7.

EYES – DELIAS MIRROUR – ILIADES OF MY WO – VNHAPPY PEN" – dies sind die sieben Sätze von Daniels Komposition. Daniels elegisch allgemein gehaltenes Vokabular setzt dem behutsam strukturierenden Gestus relativ wenig Widerstand entgegen. Mit eingefügten Kommentaren zu jedem Sonett und interpretierenden Kurzkommentaren zu den Sonettgruppen schafft sich Plessow die Möglichkeit, den Stellenwert von Einzeltext und Gruppe im Zyklus zu bestimmen. Die sieben Einheiten von je sieben Sonetten werden als durchstrukturierte 'Bögen' von Stimmungs- und / oder dichterischen Gestaltungsimpulsen erfasst: "Das erste und siebte Gedicht bilden zwei Fixpunkte, dazwischen pulsiert es; sei es als nervöse Zickzacklineatur oder als stetige Sinuskurve, sei es als aufschwingender Bogen oder als durchhängende Kettenlinie".[16] Sonett 25, in der Mittelposition der Sequenz, wird zugleich als das semantische Zentrum des Ganzen ausgewiesen. Plessow schlägt vor, die eigenartige Gesamtbewegung der Sequenz, die mit ihren raschen Stimmungsumschwüngen, widersprüchlichen Ausdrucksimpulsen und kontrastierenden Überredungsversuchen die Einzelaussage, kaum dass sie ausgesprochen ist, wieder relativiert, als 'Oszillogramm' abzubilden.

Er beschreibt Draytons *Ideas Mirrour* in analoger Weise als Gesamtwerk von sieben Gruppen von sieben Sonetten, die er jetzt begrifflich als 'Siebengestirne' oder auch als 'Septette' voneinander abgrenzt. Überschrieben werden sie wiederum mit Wortzitaten, die Aspekte der Liebe(sdichtung) hervorheben. Der klagende Grundton der *Delia*-Sequenz ist abgelöst worden von einem idealisierenden Tenor: "INCENSE – ALPHABET OF LOVE – SWEETEST SHADOW – MY MOST MERVAILE – IMMORTAL STRIFE – SWEET DISPAIRE, UNKINDEST FAYRE – PATIENCE" lauten die Titel. Drayton wechselt von absoluter Idealisierung der Dame (in wörtlicher Übersetzung von dessen "sweet Mayd" apostrophiert sie Plessow als 'süßes Mädchen') zu ihrer groben Beschimpfung, und von dichterischer Hochstimmung zu totaler Verzweiflung. Entsprechend der dramatischen Konturen der Sequenz fällt auch die Strukturbeschreibung profilierter als bei Daniel aus. Bestimmter als zuvor beschreibt Plessow die Septette nun in architektonischer Fachsprache als durchstrukturierte Sinneinheiten. Die Gedichte innerhalb der Siebenergruppen erfasst er konsequent als Bauelemente für je einen der sieben symmetrisch gestalteten 'Bögen' – möglicherweise eine Reminiszenz an die Bögen in den architektonischen Aufrissen. Die Sonettbögen setzen an, steigen auf, erreichen im jeweils vierten Gedicht ihren 'Scheitelpunkt' oder ihre 'Schwerachse', senken sich wieder ab und setzen mit dem siebten Gedicht einen 'Schlußstein' oder auch ein markantes 'Widerlager'. In den fein gezeichneten Arbeitsblättern, die er der Ausgabe beigibt, präzisiert Plessow den Aufriss für jeden der sieben Bögen. Diese wiederum fügen sich

[16] Daniel (2008), 210.

als umfassende Gespanntheit von 'Bögen' und 'Gegenbögen' zur Formation der Gesamtsequenz. Der Bogen des vierten Septetts bildet, wie das vierte Sonett in jedem Septett, die 'Symmetrieachse' des Ganzen.

Plessow zeigt sich von den Bauplänen, die er für *Delia* und *Ideas Mirrour* ausmacht, fasziniert. Im Essay "Sonettseptette" im Anhang zu *Ideas Mirrour* weist er darauf hin, dass sich auch in Shakespeares *Sonnets* eine erste Subsequenz "Fair Youth" (Nr. 1–126) von 18 Siebenergruppen und eine zweite Subsequenz "Dark Mistress" (Nr. 127–154) von vier solcher Gruppen ausmachen lässt. Vermutlich wird er nicht ruhen, bis er auch deren Baupläne durchschaut hat, zumal er davon ausgeht, dass Daniels Zyklus ein wichtiges Modell für Shakespeare war.[17] Doch er vermeidet dogmatische Festlegungen. Letztlich hält er offen, ob die Pläne, die er entwirft, der Absicht der Dichter oder einem ihnen nicht voll bewussten Ordnungs- und Symmetriestreben entsprechen – oder ob sie vielleicht eher dem strukturierenden Verständnisbemühen des Leseprozesses zu verdanken sind. In jedem Fall ist das entschiedene Plädoyer für die Sonettsequenz als integrales Kunstwerk ein wichtiges Korrektiv für die Gewohnheit, nur ausgewählte Sonette als Einzelwerke, oft im entfremdenden Kontext von Anthologien, wahrzunehmen.

Es drängt sich eine Parallele auf zwischen den von Plessow aufgezeigten Sonett-Septetten und den in Shakespeares Dramen hineingelesenen Fünf-Akt-Strukturen. Auch diese Aufgliederung ist in keinem damaligen Regiebuch vermerkt und in keiner der Quarto-Ausgaben verzeichnet, die zu Lebzeiten des Autors erschienen sind. Erst seit der First Folio Edition von 1623 wird sie gebräuchlich. Für den Leseprozess und für die Aufführungspraxis sind diese Zäsuren jedoch unverzichtbare Orientierungs- und Erinnerungshilfen geworden. Ähnlich möchte auch Plessow seine Sonettausgaben als Dienst an den Lesern und Leserinnen verstehen, die er in seine unakademische Begeisterung hineinziehen will:

> der ganze Band
> von Sechzehnhundertneun ist neu zu lesen.
> Von jedem. Und zu jeder Zeit. Dem Stand
> der Dinge und den allerklügsten Thesen
> ist er von eh und je voraus gewesen[18]

– so sein oberlehrerhaft gut gemeinter Rat im Epilog zu der Ausgabe von Shakespeares *Sonnets*. Wie das Publikum die alte Musik in Originalaufnahmen neu zu

[17] Daniel (2008), 207. Während der Drucklegung dieses Beitrags ist bereits die entsprechende Darstellung erschienen: *Shakespeares Sonettseptette,* gelesen von Günter Plessow (Badenweiler: Bachmann, 2016).

[18] Shakespeare (2003), 203.

hören und lieben gelernt hat, so hofft er, dass es auch die kleinen elisabethanischen Sprachkunstwerke in ihrer Originalfassung und in ihrem ursprünglichen Kontext zu schätzen beginnt.[19]

Summary

In her article, Ina Schabert discusses Günter Plessow's German translations of early modern sonnet sequences as informed by his former work as an architect. In his translations of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, Samuel Daniel's *Delia* and Michael Drayton's *Ideas Mirrour*, Plessow approaches the poetic texts by studying their complex 'building plans', and he sees the individual sonnet as forming part of a complex composition, made up of a sequence of thematic groups or 'arcs'. Schabert reads Plessow's comments as an interesting contribution to understanding the systematic organization of early modern sonnet sequences, which has long been ignored by scholars in the field.

[19] Vgl. Daniel (2008), "Editorische Notiz".

"SHAKESPEARE IS A CULTURAL JOURNEY INTO THE HUMAN PSYCHE": AN INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE TABORI (1990)

BY

LAWRENCE GUNTNER AND ANDREW MCLEAN

The 23rd of July 2017 marks the tenth anniversary of George Tabori's death. Tabori was a writer and theatre director who, like Shakespeare, enjoyed and excelled in exploring "the green world" of the human psyche, the emotions, passions and desires of the lovers and the lunatics. As he himself remarked in Weimar: "For me Shakespeare is a cultural journey into the human psyche" and "somewhere along the line, you fall into a big hole in your own biography. And it can be unpleasant."[1] Tabori's personal biography can also be characterized as a 'journey' – from Budapest to Berlin, to the Near East, to London, to Hollywood, to New York, to Vienna and finally back to Berlin – and it was not always 'pleasant'. His own plays – *Kannibalen* (1969), *Mein Kampf* (1987), *Mutters Courage* (1979), *Jubiläum* (1983), *Goldberg Variationen* (1991) or *Weisman und Rotgesicht* (1990) – depict a topsy-turvy world, like Shakespeare's Athenian Wood, at times light, witty and ironic on the surface but dark, threatening and even horrifying beneath.

In 1990 the German Shakespeare Society invited Tabori, together with his troupe from the Theater Der Kreis in Vienna, to perform during the Shakespeare-Tage in Weimar. The atmosphere, just six months after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, was heady with anticipation, energy and optimism, but there was also a wariness and anxiety about what the future might hold in store for the GDR as well as the Shakespeare Society. Tabori was then at the highpoint of his career and in demand as a director as well as a dramatist. His own plays were among the most frequently performed plays on the German language stage, and his recent productions of *Othello* (1989) and *Hamlet* (1990) had been received enthusiastically by theatregoers and critics alike.[2]

Verliebte und Verrückte – eine Shakespeare Collage ("Lovers and Lunatics") and *Lears Schatten* ("Lear's Shadow") were the productions that were scheduled to be

[1] "Wenn man sich konzentriert mit Shakespeare beschäftigt, dann fällt man irgendwann durch ein großes Loch in die eigene Biographie. Das kann sehr unangenehm sein." (Qtd. in Maik Hamburger, "Theaterschau", *ShJb* 127 [1991], 160.)

[2] Cf. Christian Jauslin, "Bühnenbericht 1988/89", *ShJb West* (1990), 185–186; and Jauslin, "Bühnenbericht 1989/90", *ShJb West* (1991), 197–198, 203.

performed. The former consisted of thirteen scenes from the Shakespeare canon, which explored the battle of the sexes, and Tabori himself, at that time seventy-five, played the part of Romeo. The latter was Tabori's radical rendition of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Lear, his daughters, Poor Tom / Fool, and Death were played by five women and one man; the other male characters had been cut. The original version, performed at the Bregenzer Festspiele in 1989, had continued Tabori's fascination with the battle of the sexes and depicted Lear as a sexual abuser of his daughters, "a dirty old man"[3] in Tabori's words. The revised version that opened at the Akademietheater in Vienna focused on Lear's tortured psychological 'journey', not through a 'green world' but a barren heath, from the pains of abdication to liberation through madness. By the end of this therapeutic passage Lear has become, in Tabori's words, "what Jews call 'ein Mensch', that is, a truly good person.[4] Due to sickness, *Verliebte und Verrückte* was replaced by *Hamlet*. For Tabori, it was impossible for a good person to become a politician. He saw Hamlet as a slender, sensitive, fragile young man unfit to become a liar, killer and schemer, and felt that the role should be played by a woman (Hildegard Schmal) – in the tradition of Sarah Bernhardt and Asta Nielsen. Due to illness among the cast, a full performance had to be cancelled. In its place Tabori and his troupe staged a public rehearsal, a night long workshop on *Hamlet* in the tradition of Actors Studio. Its intention was to provide the audience with an insight into their method of approaching the play, a method that taxed the attention of both spectators and cast.

Like the city of Weimar, the Weimarhalle has had a chequered history that intersects with Tabori's own biography, and Tabori was aware of this. Home to Goethe and Schiller and the historic seat of the German Shakespeare Society, the city is situated at the foot of the Ettersberg and the Buchenwald Concentration Camp. The Weimarhalle, built by Bauhaus architects in the Neue Sachlichkeit style for the 100th anniversary of the death of Goethe in 1932, was appropriated by the Nazis after 1933 for mass rallies, including appearances by Adolf Hitler. Now George Tabori, the outsider, the foreigner, the Jew, who fled Nazi Germany in 1935 to escape the Nürnberger Rassengesetze, was to perform Shakespeare in the hall where the hangmen and their henchman, who had murdered his family, had celebrated racial purity.

In the course of the Shakespeare-Tage, Lawrence Guntner and Andrew McLean, who were interviewing various East German theatre people for their book *Redefining Shakespeare: Literary Theory and Theater Practice in the German Democratic*

[3] Sigrid Löffler, qtd. in Jauslin (1991), 197.

[4] "Was die Juden 'ein Mensch' nennen." (Tabori quoted by Löffler in Jauslin [1990], 190); for a description of the performance in Weimar, cf. Hamburger (1991), 161.

Republic (1998), spoke with George Tabori about Shakespeare, his productions of *King Lear* (*Lears Schatten*), *Hamlet* (Bremen, 1978; Vienna, 1990) and a *Merchant of Venice* entitled *Improvisationen über Shakespeares Shylock* (Munich, 1978). The interview, which took place at the Hotel Elephant, on 28 April 1990, was conducted in English. It has been edited where necessary, extraneous material and repetitions deleted, but as much of Tabori's English has been retained as possible.

Andrew McLean (AML): Let's begin with your *Lears Schatten*.

George Tabori (GT): I must explain the context of this production. We've been experiencing a learning process about Shakespeare the past two years. In Vienna we presented a collage called *Verliebte und Verrückte – eine Shakespeare Collage*, which consisted of big scenes dealing with the problems in man / woman relationships. Shakespeare probably knew more than anyone else about these and with dealing with relationships as a kind of learning process. I didn't want to jump into it. To me Shakespeare is a cultural journey into the human psyche. It's a definite learning process. *Lears Schatten* is part of that process. The performance you saw was an independent evening in which we tried to deconstruct the play so that we deal with only certain aspects. Meanwhile, I did a full *Othello* at the Akademietheater in Vienna [1989], which is not easy to do in blackface; but I didn't know a German speaking black actor. And now we are doing *Hamlet*, but this is part of the educational process, too.

AML: What kind of education do you mean?

GT: It's for the actors. I found that in Shakespeare the man / woman relationship is done in such an extremely radical, in-depth manner. No one else comes near to it. Proust or Joyce or Henry Miller is kid's stuff in comparison. And it's usually done in a fig leaf. A. C. Bradley once said [something like]: "You don't really like to perform Shakespeare. It's embarrassing." And it's true. We tried to deal with Eros and only Eros. Traditional performances of Shakespeare deal only with the historical eras without asking what happens between men and women. In "Lovers and Lunatics" we did fragmented and complete scenes from *Macbeth* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. *Shrew*, I think, is the most brutal play ever written; it's usually done for its charm and with an attitude that it is funny to get down on the lady. But I think that what really happens to Katherine is brainwashing, and it destroys the human spirit. There's the other thing, too; the fun of it all. What those guys are doing to Katherine – especially Petruchio, who is usually played like a sort of Errol Flynn character – is that they are starving her. Not letting her eat is driving her crazy. This should be taken seriously, not just in fun. I don't think it's fun. This is a

matter of opinion. But anyway, in our collage, *The Taming of the Shrew* is viewed from a series of sources from *Troilus and Cressida*, and then scenes from *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, *Macbeth* and *Richard III* (the wooing scene). It was six hours long and we performed it on two evenings in some places. We were going to present it here, in Weimar, but we were in the middle of *Hamlet*, which we hadn't done in six months. So we did only fragments from *Hamlet* – the scene with the mother, and the scene with Ophelia, played by the same woman, then a scene from *Measure for Measure* – the Angelo, Claudio, Isabella thing. You know, to extract from the canon these confrontations between men and women was an educational process, to really find out what Shakespeare's developing attitude was about this. And we learned an awful lot.

AML: What great discoveries did you make?

GT: There's an extraordinary contradiction between the utopia – what might have been, the idealistic attitude that something is possible – and the extraordinary realization that it isn't possible. As in *Othello*, Iago isn't evil; he is very unhappy, basically a jealous man full of frustrations. What Shakespeare says through Iago is so realistic, so devastatingly realistic. It's extraordinarily full of contradictions in that Iago never gives up hope that it might work out, that it might be possible for man and woman to live up to each other's expectations. We didn't start with a series of theoretical ideas. We just said, "Let's do these scenes and let's see what evolves in rehearsal." The one great discovery, although perhaps obvious, was that the women are usually the victims. They either go crazy or kill themselves. It displeased the ladies in the troupe. And at some point I said to myself, "Why are the guys like this?" And for one thing, why do the men talk so much, and so well? The answer seems to be that the ladies don't listen, or that they don't want to, and either they play dumb, or they are dumb. They probably play dumb, which is a wonderful way of fighting back – much like Gertrude does in *Hamlet*. Here is the kid coming home from the university, his father is dead, there is a war on, and his uncle has married his mother. Hamlet has got a lot of problems to deal with. And Gertrude says, "Don't be so sad. Why are you so sad?" I know I'm making it sound simple, but its simplicity is like that found in Shakespeare's father-daughter relationships.

Lawrence Guntner (LG): Some would argue that the main conflict in Shakespeare is the father-daughter conflict.

GT: I think that's probably true. Look at the way Polonius speaks to Ophelia, for example. There is a certain intensity in the way he says: "uh-uh". The same can be

said when Shylock talks with Jessica or Brabantio with Desdemona. Prospero has an extraordinary relationship with Miranda. And always there is the basic contradiction – on the one hand he really wants her for himself, while on the other hand he forces her to meet with Ferdinand.

LG: The conflict is so central to *King Lear*, and to uncovering emotion and feeling in its performance.

GT: Yes! Lear is a dirty old man; he probably cannot really be done wholly satisfactorily. [Laurence] Olivier once said that it doesn't matter what you do, you can't really grab hold of it. Olivier played Lear when he was quite young [London, Old Vic, 1947]. The role is bigger than any actor. Furthermore, if you do the whole play, no matter how well performed, you can't as an audience or even as director, get more than a part of it. For instance, we began work on *Lear* last Sunday. When I read one of the final lines, "Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say", it suddenly hit me what Albany really means in this epilogue: "Say what you feel and not what you ought to say." That's such a moral imperative, especially in the German culture. It's the attitude toward emotions, which is partly a misunderstanding of Brecht, but also political. The Germans are afraid of strong feelings – on stage and in themselves. They're afraid of their own aggression, I mean, I'm putting it mildly. And because it's so much suppressed, the cultural credo becomes, "Don't express your feelings." Alexander Mitscherlich stated it quite accurately in his famous book with Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern* ["The Inability to Mourn", 1967]. I think it is very true. And the same attitude is very strong in the theatre. Even the best of actors have great difficulty in dealing with authentic feelings. They can deal with Shakespeare's wit, intelligence and irony, but when it comes to Shakespearean emotions, they either sidestep it, or find a stylistic way of parodying them. They either make fun of them, or somehow indicate them. They do it terribly well. Only, when you look closely, you say, "Now just a minute, this guy Lear keeps saying 'I must not weep, it's wrong for me to weep.'" But he does weep. Is it just a statement or is it the real thing? And that's one reason why I picked women to play Lear, because women have less shame about weeping in public; they're really emotional instruments. And German theatre is less sensitive.

LG: Have you ever seen a convincing Lear?

GT: Strangely enough, the most convincing Lear was the last thing Olivier did. It's a very conventional production. But it's unique: a dying actor is playing a dying man. And he did it without shame; it was apocalyptic. It's really quite revealing, his sick body. He was not afraid. He could not have done it twenty years ago. I

know there was a great Lear performance by Giorgio Strehler [Milan, Piccolo Teatro, 1972], there was a beautifully boring one in the Schaubühne Berlin by Bernhard Minetti [1985], but no one else has attempted what Olivier did. The director [Michael Elliott] told him to just perform, and it was very beautiful. Olivier really revealed the shameful sickness of the body and soul. He was not noble from the beginning. For instance, when he asks, "Which of you shall we say doth love us the most?" he becomes childish, a senile child, and, I guess, in that sense every old man is a King Lear. I saw Olivier's performance twice and thought it was really good. He had the courage to reveal himself. Olivier wasn't thinking of dignity or of playing a king; instead he played Lear as a dying old man who was madly in love with all his daughters, especially with Cordelia. Lear goes through this hell. It's a very Christian play.

LG: Last night, in the last act, the actors pulled down the red banners. The political immediacy in *King Lear* at this moment struck me, the problem of Socialism in Eastern Europe is that the old men were ruling the young people.

GT: Even though they [the audience] might think I'm trying to create sympathy for Honecker, because Honecker was also something of a Lear, I don't approve of this guy. But his actions and the experiences are so Shakespearean. There was a TV report on the trial and execution of Ceauşescu and his wife, and, of course, the moment a tyrant becomes a victim he lays claim to your love, to one's love, and he gets it. Why is it that the terrible, terrible criminals who rape and kill children, once they're in jail, get all kinds of letters, or women fall in love with them? They become victims of the Jewish-Christian traditions as in "Love your enemy as yourself". So, when I saw the Ceauşescus – this old man and woman – they didn't expect to be executed. The wife says, "What are you doing to me? I always treated you like my own children." It is a very Shakespearean moment. When one knows what happened to the children.[5]

AML: When you find yourself producing a play like *Lears Schatten* in Weimar, do you approach it the same way as you would in Vienna, or are you conscious of the different political climate?

GT: Yes, although I was a little unhappy yesterday because here the space is really not very communicative. It's not only the Nazi architecture of the Weimarhalle – I don't mind that; but it's really not a theatre. It's a concert hall.

[5] Tabori here refers to the infamous orphanages installed by Ceauşescu for children who were 'separated' from their parents to be raised by the State.

AML: Surely the kind of space used influences your production.

GT: We did perform *Lears Schatten* in Hamburg in the Schauspielhaus, which is the largest theatre in Germany. It was very different because the space does influence the atmosphere. Most of the people in the audience were great Shakespeare experts; it wasn't a normal audience because they were saying things like "Just a minute, it's not Cordelia." "How come Lear is blind and not Gloucester and all the rest of them?" Such questions arise, of course, from the context of the production. As I said, it's an educational process and I will do *Lear* because an actor or director should be old to understand it all. It seems so appropriate that Shakespeare somehow knew those things. But in *Lear* there is something of the old man's childishness, the curses and all that…

AML: Were you exposed to Shakespeare as a child? Did you grow up with Shakespeare?

GT: Well, the Hungarian Shakespeare translations are very good because the great poets did them, and not some dramaturge. The German translations are like a black and white reproduction of Titian; they change colours. The one we used was by Erich Fried, a poet who lived in London for thirty or forty years, and his English is better because he's also been involved in the latest linguistic research done on the classical translations. The German classical translations are very German, that is to say, Romantic. However, the colours and the Shakespearean music aren't there.

LG: Is there anything in the *Gestus* of Fried's language translations that particularly appeals to you?

GT: Well, he's dry. And Shakespeare isn't. I am working with his translation of *Hamlet*, but it doesn't work to pick at the text and add one's own ideas. Because then the play loses its unity. But there are some things we did change. But Fried's translation is accurate and very actable. Especially since we do it in modern dress.

AML: In choosing a translation did you look at others, say by Maik Hamburger or Heiner Müller?

GT: We did *Hamlet* fifteen years ago in Bremen [1978]. We used Heiner's translation, which was still in manuscript. Only I can't use it now because his *Hamlet/Maschine* was done in Vienna recently. I thought that might get us in trouble. Then, we met Fried about three years ago when he was very ill; *Lear* was his last work. It was kind of a tribute to him that we decided to use his translation for

the collage and we also picked his *Hamlet*. I did look at several of the other translations but one can go crazy, you know, spending a year or two trying to decide! But Fried's translation is correct. On the other hand, some of those translations by the dramaturges sound like they're translated by a committee.

LG: What made you decide on the title, "Lear's Shadow"?

GT: We didn't want to call it "Lear" because we wanted to make it clear that it is part of our collage process. We wanted the title to encompass all that we had put into the play. First, we wanted to call it "Queen Lear and His Daughters". One critic says it's "redemption through suffering and loss". That's a religious interpretation, but you could also put it therapeutically: that by giving up everything including Cordelia, Lear is healed and can die well. So we tried to depict a sick Lear on stage, played by an actor, with the women trying to heal him. But it didn't work because it created a double focus. It was really like a sitcom. The main Lear was silent and you didn't know if he had had a stroke or something. What did work for a while was that the women, Goneril and Regan, were not nasty or mean; rather they tried to tell the old man where it's at, to give him a sense of reality. But, as I said before, we then created a double focus and you didn't know which Lear you should follow.

AML: What made you decide on having a woman play Lear?

GT: Well, let's put it this way. For thousands of years men were playing women. It's not a question of social justice. But why is it more acceptable than the other way around? I mean, *vive la difference*, O.K. But one might also argue that in this culture women have a kind of openness and sensitivity, or lack of hanging on to the male image, which may open them up more easily to what is really going on. I'd rather argue this: Shakespeare's women characters acted so much from the inside [i.e. from the heart], and he certainly had a very strong feminine side which enabled him to see their femininity. Also in *Hamlet* most of the Hamlets I've seen had such a macho problem. There is, of course, more than one interpretation, one that he's 18 and the next that he's 33, and then both. But I wanted a very young Hamlet: sensitive, decent, a progressive student from Wittenberg, who comes home to a world which she can't accept and which she rejects. Can a decent guy become a good politician? Shakespeare's answer is he cannot. He cannot because power corrupts the world around us and every country has the same problem. The heroes of my youth have all turned out to be Stalinists. Like Mátyás Rákosi, the Hungarian Stalinist. He spent 17 years in jail in the Soviet Union. I didn't know anything about Marxists and Communists, but as a kid I heard about him. He start-

ed so many hunger strikes; he was a martyr. The moment he was in power, however, he became such an incredible dictator. And I think that the idea that power corrupts is very much in Shakespeare, as in *Richard II* – can a decent, sensitive person be an efficient prince? And the answer, I think, is no. For me, the tragedy of Hamlet is not that he dies, but that he becomes a killer or a politician. After all, he kills Polonius, he kills Claudius, he kills Laertes – he is responsible for all their deaths. The interpretation that we are trying to portray is his resistance to a feudal world in which lying, intrigue and killing is what a good politician always has had to do – especially killing. The key speech is "How all occasions do inform against me." At first he says, "The terrible war, that 2000 Christian men ["two thousand souls"] will die for nothing", and then he says, "Look at this delicate young prince and he does this thing." Then words like "honour", "courage" and "to be great" are in this precious culture. But it is only talk. Hamlet says, "from now on my thoughts, only my thoughts are bloody". So we try to trace that and Uschi [Ursula Höpfner, who plays Hamlet] looks like 19 on stage. I have no male actor who could do that.

AML: Heiner Müller told us that the problem in *Hamlet* is "who is Fortinbras?"

GT: I love him. He's so clear: "Who is Fortinbras?"

LG: Who is Fortinbras in your *Hamlet*?

GT: Who's Fortinbras? Fortinbras is the opposite of Hamlet. I mean, that's what Hamlet says. He goes and kills and makes people kill. And we're going to do something interesting with that in our production. In the last scene with all the jewellery and diamonds, we're going to have Fortinbras watching the killing and the dying on his own TV. He'll see all the great and good Hamlets and what happened to them – all their killing and dying; Fortinbras is alone with some of his guys, and he sees the whole thing on TV. It is then that he thinks something is rotten in the state of Denmark. The last scene on the TV screen should be the final moment between Horatio and Hamlet. Before Fortinbras turns off the TV, Hamlet says "I'm dying", and he says all those bloody lines and then Horatio comes. They all go off and only the TV set is left playing; someone –Horatio, perhaps – comes and turns off the TV. Then you have the scene and "the rest is silence".

AML: We're also interested in the set design that you used for "Lear's Shadow", the simplicity of the set, the columns in the back contrast with the bright red hanging tapestries or banners. But I was particularly struck by the use of translucent plastic figures; they looked almost heart-like. In the storm scene when these figures were pulled, they vibrated – it was electrifying to me. I sat right up front last night

and I could see these red tapestries vibrating. When the actors started to tear them down and to deconstruct the set, I thought of how literally these red sets are coming down in "Red Germany".

GT: Well, I hope so… Luise Czerwonatis is a very young designer who's been working with us, a student of Karl-Heinz Hermann, one of the best set designers. I just said to her: "Just think of the forest and columns." And she came up with the banners. In the beginning they look solid, then they appear to be transparent, and ultimately they dissolve in the storm scene. My favourite aspect of this production is how we developed the storm scene. Usually the actors have to scream so loud to be heard over this storm. Then one day the sound man wasn't there to reproduce the storm. So Hildegard Schmahl, as Lear, performed the same scene without the background noise. At that point she said, "Come on blow." If all the thunder and lightning would've been blowing, she would not have had to demand it. The silence became so strong for her that now she talks to the storm, whatever the storm represents. So that's why we pick on the silence. Well, don't you think that that's the whole point? There was sound, and suddenly God is silent, so to speak. Maybe it's the Jew in me that likes this silence. People who've been in the camps often talk about the absence of God and the lack of dialogue with him, which is very important to Judaism. One can't talk to God; the conversation has been interrupted, and he has been silent because what could he say? How could he allow this to happen? Paul Celan, a most extraordinary post-war poet, deals with this in his work, too.

AML: What Shakespeare productions have you done earlier in your career?

GT: We did a *Hamlet* in Bremen in 1978, and I did a strange *Merchant of Venice* entitled *Improvisationen über Shakespeares Shylock*. It was one of the most effective things we did in Munich. We were rehearsing when, in about the fourth week, two things hit me. One was that I didn't know that the play had not been done in Munich since the war. Some of the other German productions were done so sentimentally, playing Shylock as if he were some kind of Moses or a prophet. So I asked the cast what was their attitude toward Shylock? They started to talk about it and suddenly the whole cast opened up. One was Felix von Manteuffel, whose father was a Nazi general [Hasso von Manteuffel]. He was in charge of the army in Hungary, but Felix is very left-wing, aggressive, and can be very abrasive. So was his father, so I hear. Then there was one actor whose father was a Communist, who died in a concentration camp. But there wasn't a single Jew in the cast. This presented a whole new dimension. And so I said, "The most interesting and most important premise of the production should be your attitude towards Shylock, to this

kind of Jew, and what Shakespeare had in mind." We tried various approaches, and kept falling into a stereotype of Shylock. So, we did a crazy thing. We did an improvisation. The main thing was to get away from the clichés, the stereotypes.

So everybody played Shylock once. There were five main Shylocks. The guy who played the first Shylock in the first scene, later became Portia in the trial. The next one, who was Bassano, always played Shylock, the soft one. And so you've got a kind of cubistic thing, like Marcel Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase". We settled on one improvisation and performed the play without the Belmont scene and the trial.

When we came to the scene where Shylock returns to find Jessica gone, somebody said, "You know most of the German actors have played some great Shylocks." Then somebody else said, "Yeah, and I remember so-and-so did that." So we had another improvisation in which everybody – the whole cast – could play the scene. Anyway, one old actor who was playing Antonio said, "Well, if I went home as Shylock, I would just take off my shoes, wash my hands, read the paper, and then want a cup of tea. I'd say, 'Jessica, can I have some tea', and discover she's not there." And then there was one who played Shylock as if in a silent movie. It was all in pantomime, some of it funny.

It worked out very well because, I think, I got the best reviews, except for *Othello*. We performed in a rehearsal studio, not in a real theatre, and the audience sat all around us. There was no set, there was just a piano in the middle. I had asked Stanley Walden, a composer from New York, and an old friend, who is Jewish, to compose the music for the play. So, there he sat as the only Jew, the only real Shylock, at the piano on stage. It was an intense situation.

There were ninety-nine people in the audience and lots of inter-acting between players and audience. We found a sixteenth-century ballad, which Shakespeare must have known – a Greek "Merchant of Venice"-ballad – about the rich Jew and the pound of flesh. He's not called Shylock, but it's the evil Jew who asks for the pound of flesh. So Stanley set it to music. The play began with the whole cast looking like black birds around the piano, as if tuning it. And then, they turned around and put on enormous noses. One of the actors jumped on the piano and sang this very anti-Semitic song. And all of the others played the evil Jews. They went around to all the fine ladies in the audience and stole their handbags and then gave them back. So, it was a transformation game all the time, which I first saw done in New York by Megan Terry.[6]

[6] Terry's influential 'transformational drama' technique composed dramatic action into brief sequences that are suddenly transformed into different sets of characters and circumstances.