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Herr Daniel Bandmann and Shakespeare vs. the World

Abstract

German actor Daniel Bandmann played his first Hamlet at the age of 20, and made his English language debut as Shylock in New York, 1863. In his prime, he performed extensively in America, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, amongst other countries. Though he played roles which ranged from Narcisse and the Corsican twins to Jekyll and Hyde, he was perhaps most closely identified with a handful of Shakespearean roles: Hamlet, Shylock, Macbeth, Othello, Iago. His apparently ungovernable temper led to a love/hate relationship with the critics, played out in public through the newspapers. His responses to criticism open a window into his playing of these roles. This paper examines Bandmann's acting in the role of Hamlet and the critical interchanges he engaged in around the world, in which he defended his playing of the role.

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This article examines the critical reception and acting choices – with particular reference to the role of Hamlet - of the nineteenth century German actor Daniel Bandmann (1837 – 1905), as played out in his often-stormy relationship with the world press. Herr Bandmann frequently engaged in debate with his critics via letters to the editors of sundry newspapers, or from the stage itself, post-performance. I focus primarily in this article on his relationship with the press in London, Australia and New Zealand in the years 1868 – 1881, and on his playing of the role of Hamlet. This provides a degree of

insight into Bandmann's acting choices, as well as his choleric temper, which had the effect of rousing him to re-action on many occasions. I also briefly touch upon colonial expressions of 'otherness' in the way the actor and his work were viewed by the press.

In his prime, Bandmann travelled the world, playing extensively in America, Great Britain and Ireland, but also visiting Australia, New Zealand, China, India, Hong Kong and other countries. In 1886, he published *An Actor's Tour, Or Seventy Thousand Miles with Shakespeare* a rather pedestrian memoir of a two-year world tour he had just undertaken.¹ He continued to act until 1901 when he was in his early 60s, but his fortunes dwindled, and in those later years, he often played with amateurs or in 'dime houses' in America. At the same time, he had bought a ranch in Missoula, Montana, and raised cattle and crops until his death in 1905.

Bandmann would today be regarded as prime tabloid fodder, and was indeed seen as such in his own era. He was prone to hyperbole, as shown by this billing in a provincial New Zealand newspaper, where he claimed to be 'pronounced by the Press of the entire world to be foremost among the Tragedians of the Century.'² He had an irascible temper, being 'sudden and quick to quarrel', and attracting – even courting - trouble throughout his professional life. He was handy with his fists, occasionally punching people in the face with whom he had disagreements. He was a bully, probably a wife beater, a short-term bigamist, and a vigorous defender of his honour in the press or in the courtroom. He roused anger in his adversaries: for example, in 1894, an American newspaper headline proclaimed 'Bandy's Bloody Shirt: the tragedian's soiled linen waved in the court room' – a report of a court case in which a farm worker was accused of attempting to brain him with a shovel during a heated argument.³ Frequently unable to resist responding to what he regarded as unfair criticism in the press, he often couched it in terms of a reasonable right-of-reply, as in this 1881 letter to the editor of the *Otago Daily Times*:

It is not complaint that leads me to object to the criticism by your reporter of *Richard III*, but simply a duty. I feel it a duty to the gentleman to set him right on many points, for the sake of younger and less experienced artists who may have to suffer from the fallacy under which your critic labours—a scholarly, well-read gentleman, no doubt, but completely lacking the technical experience of our art.⁴

Bandmann's contentious nature and inability to preserve a discreet silence provided entertainment, which the press were not slow to relish. For example, Minnesota's *Daily Globe*, January 4, 1880, noted: 'Bandmann appears at McVicker's, Chicago, tomorrow evening for a brief engagement. Bets are ten to one that he has a quarrel before the first week has passed.' This flippant comment proved prescient. Within a week, Bandmann had accused the *Chicago Tribune* of falsehood for their adverse criticism of his Hamlet, resulting in 'a very cold shoulder from the press and very poor business for the Bandmanns.'⁵ His indiscretion and the ways in which it played out in the press provide a degree of insight into his working methodology as actor and manager/director.

Daniel Bandmann was born in Cassel, Germany in 1837. He made his acting debut aged 18, and first played Hamlet (in German) when he was about 20.⁶ He came to New York c. 1853, and worked for a time in the German-speaking theatre in the Bowery district.⁷ In January 1863, still in his mid-twenties, he made his English language debut as Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* at Niblo's Garden in New York, already billed as

'the celebrated German tragedian'.⁸ He apparently learned the role in English in six weeks, with the aid of an admiring lady teacher.⁹ He attracted attention, both positive and negative, in a number of roles that remained in his repertoire for most of his working life, including *Narcisse*, *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *Iago*, *Jekyll* and *Hyde*, and *Hamlet*.

Physically, he was impressive – a tall, solidly - built man, graceful in his movements, with long dark hair and a so-called tragedian's demeanour. As the *London Times* put it: 'Herr Bandmann is one of the most striking actors, on a grand scale, that have made a debut in London for many years.'¹⁰ He was a very physical actor, expecting a good opposition from his onstage opponents in roles that required sword fighting.¹¹ His voice was powerful and by some was regarded as flexible. However, the quality of Bandmann's performance in roles such as *Hamlet* was evidently variable, ranging from pure melodrama to the stature of the tragedian, depending on the particular point-of-view of his critics, whose responses were 'characteristically polarized', as Nicole Anae also notes in her discussion of Bandmann as *Shylock*.¹² When he played *Hamlet* in Birmingham in 1869, the *Daily Post* somewhat naively stated:

It is simple justice to say that Mr. Bandmann's *Hamlet* is by far the most perfect realisation of *Hamlet* ever seen on an English stage. [...] Mr. Bandmann is far more a master of our English tongue [than M. Fechter]; he speaks our phrases with singular skill.¹³

But his acting in sundry roles did not impress the English theatre critic Dutton Cook, who noted in *Nights At the Play: a View of the English Stage* (1883):

The German-American Mr Bandmann is a coarse and noisy actor, who has not the remotest idea of reciting blank verse [...] his voice is harsh and monotonous, and his face expressionless. His ungainly striding about the stage and his vehement gesticulations, his incessant smiling at the gallery and self-satisfied glances at the pit made his whole performance ludicrous.¹⁴

Throughout his career, Bandmann faced these critical extremes, sometimes within a single review, such as this 1879 *New York Times* report of his performance as *Hamlet*:

His faults were [...] perfectly apparent. Rude force, an unpleasantly familiar manner, frequent colloquialisms of speech, generally heavy demeanour, extreme hollowness or shrillness of voice, and a limited range of facial expression – these are certainly faults which would prevent any actor from attaining greatness, and all of these are characteristic of Mr. Bandmann. Yet, in despite of this, his *Hamlet* was really interesting. To the supreme gift of genius he cannot hope to lay claim; he does not act from inspiration; his emotion is always more or less artificial, and his expressions of extreme passion fall easily into rant. But he is fervent, active, picturesque; and in this particular instance he is certainly original. There is, moreover, a certain intensity about all he does, which keeps his auditors in a state of sympathetic interest and suspense. [...] Mr. Bandmann's conception of *Hamlet*, of whose sanity he plainly entertains no doubt, may be easily imagined; it is not graceful and easy, like Fechter's, nor impassioned and pathetic, like Irving's, nor stately and poetic, like Booth's, but it is, perhaps, all the more conspicuous on this account. It does not take a high place; but it is worth seeing.¹⁵

Even positive reviews might damn with faint praise. After Bandmann's 1868 London debut at the Lyceum, *The Times* observed:

In some of his impassioned utterances [...] he will remind many of Mr. Fechter, but in his command of the English language he is far superior to that celebrated actor. Indeed, there is little in his accent to indicate that he is a German at all, the slight peculiarity in his pronunciation apparently indicating the influence of his visit to America, rather than that of his birth in Fatherland.¹⁶

The question of Bandmann's accent plagued him throughout his career, despite his evident attempts to perfect his English pronunciation. This ensured that there was always a point of difference, an alination, in his inhabiting the roles of Shakespeare. This innately xenophobic mindset on the part of his critics echoes Homi K. Bhabha's discussions of cultural colonialism, where 'the *reference* of discrimination is always to a process of splitting as the condition of subjection: [...] where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something *different* – a mutation, a hybrid.'¹⁷ In terms of that 'otherness' he could never aspire to the greatness - say - of an Irving or Kean. Perhaps the least equivocal pronouncement of this difference came after his death, in a memoir published by a New Zealand judge: 'The first of my 'Hamlets' was Herr Bandmann, a ponderous German actor who gave what was called a 'scholarly performance' in a vile German accent.'¹⁸ More generally, however, his accent was part of the fabric of discussion of his work, as in the *Manchester Guardian*:

His manner and style are simple and unaffected, and herein he follows the example of the best German masters. In declamation he is prone to the habit of making long pauses in the middle both of period and verse, a habit sanctioned by many traditional authorities, but unjustifiable except in rare and exceptional circumstances. [...] His accent [...] is generally correct, though attention is still requisite to the distinction between hard and soft dentals, and to the correct pronunciation of the *u* in unhappy, unkind, &c, though this is, perhaps, only attainable in the third and fourth generation.¹⁹

The same point was made by reviewers in every country where Bandmann played. As an actor who evidently prided himself on seeking perfection, it must have been galling. Certainly, he was moved to respond to a particularly vitriolic critique of his accent in the *London Times* in October 1868, stating:

[...] I regret that, being a foreigner, and never having studied the English language till very recently, it is quite possible that I do not pronounce every word with the accent of a gentleman who has enjoyed the training of Eton and Oxford; but I am a hard-working student, and zealously anxious to do full justice to the language of my author.²⁰

Adding insult to injury was the comment of a provincial critic, in New Zealand's Invercargill, who pointedly marked the perceived difference between an accent in 'old fashioned' Shakespeare and that required for a drama of the modern world:

The old-fashioned and sometimes crabbed English of Shakespeare fits him well, but not Bulwer's smooth and polished diction, which demand such a mastery of the language as few, if any, ever acquire, unless it be their 'mother tongue'.²¹

Not only was his accent perpetually regarded as a kind of barrier to complete success in the role of Hamlet but his acting choices and vocal tics were often held up as evidence of an overly-melodramatic approach to the role. The *Sydney Morning Herald* noted in 1880, for example:

The soliloquy 'O! What a rogue and peasant slave am I' was taken much faster than usual, rather faster, indeed, than is natural when the multitude of ideas contained in it is considered. And the reverse was the case with the succeeding soliloquy, 'To be or not to be', where many of the words were drawled and prolonged to a most unusual extent; while in the interview with Ophelia 'farewell' was sounded more as 'fa-a-are-we-eell' than as one usually hears it. Not the greatest reluctance to part with anyone would induce such a ridiculous prolongation of the words.²²

In Bandmann's defence, it may be noted that Sir Henry Irving himself was often cited for his unusual choices of pronunciation.²³ Encouraged by the negative comments published in many reviews, Tasmania's *Launceston Examiner* in 1881 felt able to pronounce Bandmann's Hamlet as 'the reverse of perfect', again singling out his voice for particular criticism. In his opening encounter with the Ghost, he displayed an unwarranted 'tameness and a lack of animation', while the 'rogue and peasant slave' speech became a rant, 'in a voice that, had such in reality been used within the precincts of a palace, would have been heard from top to bottom.'²⁴

In a London review of *The Rightful Heir*, Bandmann had been accused of imitating the Anglo-French actor Charles Fechter, who had earlier performed with great success on the London stage in plays such as *The Corsican Brothers*. Fechter's 1861 portrayal of Hamlet had been greatly lauded by the London critics, and as John A. Mills notes was "remarkable, not merely for its influence on the subsequent history of Shakespearean production, but for its own inherent value as a work of histrionic art."²⁵ In his October 1868 letter to the editor of *The Times*, from which I have quoted above, Bandmann was moved to respond to this charge of imitation.

I have never seen Mr. Fechter act, except once, and then only in two or three scenes of *Hamlet*. My style of acting was formed in Germany and in the United States. When I landed in England a little more than a year ago, Mr. Fechter was a celebrity of whom I had heard much, but had never seen. I studiously kept from seeing him that I might not be accused of giving back any reflected light, or be charged with the imitation of any of his excellencies. Our common German [sic] origin, and the circumstances of our having both derived much of the knowledge of our art from Continental schools and Continental models, are sufficient to give Mr. Fechter and myself certain characteristics in common; but I cannot be the imitator of an artist whom I distinctly disclaim to have seen except upon one brief occasion.

In his turn, Fechter had drawn much criticism for his French-accented speech. Mills cites, amongst others, a Boston critic, Henry Austin Clapp, who noted: 'Several important and common words [Fechter] never mastered: even 'love' ... he pronounced in a mean between *loaf* and *loave*, to the end of his career.'²⁶

Bandmann was intelligent and well-read, and evidently had a strong knowledge of and love for Shakespeare. He was invited to give a speech at the Theatrical Fund annual dinner in London in 1868, in which he laid claim to Schlegel's often-expressed view that Shakespeare 'belonged' to Germany alone:²⁷

Because, when Shakespeare's genius was sent from heaven to earth, its destination was Germany, but the wind blowing westwardly it rested in England. For himself, he cared little where Shakespeare was born; he belonged to the world, and his plays were acted and appreciated in every civilised nation.

A writer for the *London Review* seethed with great sarcasm about this speech:

Had a parallel speech been made in any country but England, the speaker could hardly have escaped the charge of impertinence, unless by accepting that of stupidity.²⁸

The invective of this writer against German claims to Shakespeare goes to the heart of the innate prejudice against ‘foreigners’, and demonstrates the inevitable challenge that Bandmann faced when he performed Shakespeare. It is further elucidated by the *New York Sun* (June 23, 1907) in a piece headed ‘Few Foreign Actors Liked.’ The paper took the view that:

American audiences have never taken kindly to the actors that came from the German stage. [...] A German accent is to us the dialect of humour, and cannot be made anything else. [...] Even Daniel Bandmann, who has always been mentioned as one of the most successful of all the German actors that ever came to this country, had only a few years of prominence. [...] Our own actors are always liked best.²⁹

Arguably just as frustrating to Bandmann was this mildly patronising 1873 review of *Hamlet* which appeared in *The London Times*:

Herr Bandmann has commenced an engagement at this theatre by appearing in the character of Hamlet. His performance is, in more than one respect, remarkable. Most remarkable is the mastery which he has acquired over the English language. Within the last twelve months the foreign accent was strong upon him; now, were it not for the “Herr” in the programme, it would be difficult to discover that he is not an Englishman. The philosophical attainment is not without accompanying disadvantages. So complete is the fluency of the utterance that it flows over every point in the dialogue. Let us add that Herr Bandmann, like M. Fechter, essays to free himself from the trammels of tradition.³⁰

Bandmann’s production of *Hamlet* and his portrayal of the role were clearly influenced by German predecessors. He was familiar with Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship and Travels* (1795–96), and observed the general principles of Goethe’s view that ‘Shakespeare set out to portray[:] a heavy deed placed on a soul which is not adequate to cope with it.’³¹ Charles Fechter had also drawn upon Goethe’s novel in his performance of Hamlet, as had the American actor Edwin Booth, and Germany’s Emil Devrient, amongst others. Mills cites George Eliot, who praised Fechter’s ‘naturalness and sensibility’ in the role, and observed that his ‘conception of the part is very nearly that indicated by the critical observations in *Wilhelm Meister*.’³² Joanne Cormac notes that Devrient ‘brought both Goethe’s classical acting style and his conception of Hamlet to his interpretation of the role. According to Rosenberg, “[...] He played for pathos, for touching without disturbing his audiences.”³³ While Goethe clearly had widespread influence on the performance of so many actors, William Diamond, writing in 1925, points out that Goethe did not necessarily intend Wilhelm Meister’s reflections on *Hamlet* to represent the author’s own thinking about the character: ‘In Wilhelm Meister’s picture of Hamlet we have not an impartial critical analysis of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, but a creation that resembles more strikingly Wilhelm Meister himself than Shakespeare’s Prince of Denmark. [...] While Shakespeare’s heroes act, Goethe’s heroes discuss.’³⁴

Contemporary critics were by no means unaware of Goethe’s influence on interpretations of the role when they came to review Bandmann’s work. For example, Auckland’s *Daily Southern Cross* in 1871 commented:

If we may take 'Wilhelm Meister' for our guide — and we desire no better light than that which Goethe's genius has shed upon the exposition of *Hamlet* - it is the 'effect of putting upon a mind unfitted for it an enterprise of too 'great pith and moment,' and of loading it with duties it cannot undertake.' [...] With some such ideas as these we have witnessed Mr. Bandmann's presentment of Hamlet; and, making allowance for the sacrifices of poetical accuracy, necessary it would seem to ensure dramatic effect, we find them realised in his embodiment.³⁵

However, while Bandmann's scholarly application to the study of Hamlet appears clear, it did not necessarily result in a great performance, as the *Daily Southern Cross* went on to observe: 'His conception, if not the effect of an inherent dramatic talent, exhibits great study, care, and meditation of Hamlet's character in abstract.' A Belfast critic writing for London's *Era* in 1874 elaborated on his influences:

[Bandmann] seems to have carefully studied the exhaustive criticism of Goethe on the proper manner of producing *Hamlet*, and in at least one scene – that in which the ghost appears, when Hamlet is closeted with his mother – the instructions of Wilhelm Meister are followed with commendable closeness. We have portraits of both kings, the living and the dead, and both are full-length. The effect, when the perturbed spirit of the murdered king suddenly bursts on our view through the space where hangs his 'counterfeit presentment' on the wall, was striking and indeed startling. The sudden apparition seemed to thrill the audience more than the ghost usually does; and, perhaps, in no part of the representation was Herr Bandmann more weirdly natural, more impressively effective.³⁶

The Bandmann version of the closet scene invariably provoked comment for its scenic splendours, and the element of surprise it produced in the audience as the Ghost emerged from a portrait, exactly as described by Goethe. Some critics prided themselves on recognising the source of Bandmann's inspiration. As Adelaide's *South Australian Register* noted in 1870: 'The mechanical effects produced in the ghost and the closet scenes are Germanic in their working out of weird notions.'³⁷ However, not all critics appeared aware of Bandmann's direct influences, with Melbourne's *Argus* stating that he had clearly adopted 'the arrangement made use of by Mr. Barry Sullivan of having wainscoting around the apartment, and the panels filled with portraits.'³⁸ Sullivan, who played Hamlet in Australia in 1862, had been much admired for the power and subtlety of his performance. Bandmann, however, took his performance to extremes. At the moment the Ghost emerged from the portrait, 'Herr Bandmann's acting [...] is of a kind to startle the most apathetic into enthusiasm. He falls back prostrate on the ground, and the whole situation is of that electrically enthralling kind which no words can possibly describe.'³⁹

Bandmann was incensed when critics he deemed lacking in knowledge of European theatre practice attributed praise to certain actors whom he felt were not necessarily innovators in the role, whilst disregarding his own efforts. When the *London Times* in June 1875 compared Italian Tommaso Salvini's performance as Hamlet with that of Henry Irving, noting that both depart from 'common traditions',⁴⁰ a frustrated Bandmann wrote to the paper, under the heading 'The Stage Business of Hamlet':

Great credit has been given both to Signor Salvini and Mr Irving for the invention of new business. It should be borne in mind, however, that much which may be new, as far as [London audiences] are concerned, may be old on other stages. I have played in German or English all over Germany, England, America and Australia. I have seen many of the great Hamlets [...] I find credit given to Signor Salvini for bringing the Ghost from under the stage. This is done in

every theatre in Germany. Again, the introduction of a M.S. of the play in the play scene, and the nervous turning over of its leaves during the performance to hide the Prince's excitement, and to mask his due scrutiny of the King, has been done by myself years ago. The introduction of the M.S. is, in England at least, due to the late Mr. Bellew, who taught it to Mr. Fechter. [...] The fall into Horatio's arms after the play-scene is over is very old, and is done by every Hamlet in Germany. The action originates with Emil Devrient. Mr Irving has been highly praised for having his back turned to the Ghost at his first appearance. This business originated with no less a personage than Garrick himself. [...] I may claim to have reintroduced this business at my first appearance as Hamlet in Gratz, 1860. The sinking down of Mr. Irving after the disappearance of the Ghost I myself have always practised. ⁴¹

Bandmann was evidently not the only German to comment on Irving's performance. In January 1875, *The Times* had published 'A German critique of Mr. Irving's Hamlet' – reprinted from the *Kölnische Zeitung* - which *The Times* patronisingly felt might provide its readers with amusement because of the 'foreign writer's intimate knowledge of the general state of playgoing London'. The unnamed writer made the claim that Irving's conception of the role would be difficult to clarify

[...] to the satisfaction of German Shakespearologists. Mr. Irving is not learned in Shakespearian knowledge, nor is half so thoroughly fitted with a heavy aesthetic panoply as is commonly the case with our leading actors. With the various interpretations of Hamlet he is only superficially acquainted, and if he inclines to Goethe's this is not the result of a comparing conscious reflection, but the effect of his instinct...⁴²

In November 1875, Bandmann further demonstrated his familiarity with the lineage of German actors when he published a short and largely anecdotal article entitled 'The German Stage – A Sketch' in *Macmillan's Magazine*. Here, he touched on the work of actors such as Johann Brockmann, who appeared in the first production of 'Schroeder's version of the play, based on Wieland's translation' in 1777, of which the resultant 'sensation was so great that for a time nothing was talked of in Hamburg but Brackman's [sic] Hamlet [...] whose conception of the part was principally bitterly ironical and humorous.'⁴³ Simon Williams notes that 'Brockmann's Hamlet was frequently compared with Garrick's, not always to Brockmann's advantage.'⁴⁴

The first appearance of the Ghost in Bandmann's production was imbued with heightened melodramatic artifice, aided by the liberal use of limelight. As Melbourne's *Age* noted: 'During the dialogue between Hamlet and the Ghost on the castle platform, the rays of the moonlight were made to glance upon the horror -stricken prince's face with an effect which was perfectly natural and gave an appropriate weirdness to the scene.'⁴⁵ This demonstration of fear and horror was a common response to the Ghost's appearance, as suggested by Wilhelm Meister, who 'turned around sharply [... and] stood there petrified. [...] He stared at the figure, took a few deep breaths, and delivered his address to the Ghost in such a distraught, broken and compulsive manner that the greatest of artists could not have done better.'⁴⁶ Fechter as Hamlet, however, had chosen a different path: 'his acting was conspicuous by the absence of the conventional quivering, trembling, teeth-chattering agony which is apt to be the result of the coming of the apparition.'⁴⁷

Bandmann reinstated Claudius' 'O my offence is rank' speech [III iii], often omitted in the nineteenth century, to reveal the King's remorse. This found general approval, *The*

Argus noting in 1869, for example: 'It is inconceivable that this scene should ever have been omitted, and now that it has been shown with what excellent effect it can be used, it is to be hoped that its excision will be a thing of the past.'⁴⁸ He also restored the appearance of Fortinbras at the end of the play. As *The Argus* approvingly observed, 'The contrast furnished by the marching of a military train in upon the scene of death tempers its gloom, and produces a far from disagreeable feeling of relief.' Indeed, the biggest drawback to Bandmann's re-configuring of the text was its inordinate length, with an Auckland performance in 1871 recorded as lasting four hours and a quarter, and not concluding until after midnight.⁴⁹ Perhaps understandably, the critic who made this observation was somewhat testy about the production's dramaturgy:

Several liberties were taken with the play: of those intended to compress it within actable limits we do not complain; but we think that some of the patchwork which was embroidered on the original text might have been done better: at least the nonsense should scan properly.⁵⁰

The role of Ophelia was played in Bandmann's tours of Australia and New Zealand by (amongst others) his second wife, Miss Milly Palmer (Mrs Bandmann) and by Miss Rose Evans. As it happens, both women would themselves later play the role of Hamlet – Palmer in 1894 and thereafter, and Evans in New Zealand in 1872, which led the *New Zealand Herald* to 'anticipate an intellectual treat of the very highest order.'⁵¹ In playing Hamlet's encounter with Ophelia, Bandmann delivered further innovations, certainly in the opinion of the *South Australian Register*, which commented admiringly on his vocal dexterity and acting decisions. 'Get thee to a nunnery', for example,

[...] was reiterated with a series of distinct significations which rose from an apparent jeer to a solemn adjuration. The coarseness bordering on brutality with which it was first said was seen to have served its purpose in convincing Ophelia of her lover's madness. After her exclamation, 'Heavenly powers restore him!' he calmed imperceptibly, and without relinquishing the wild expression of his face he threw passionate glances of warning at the distracted lady. The 'To a nunnery go,' which he repeated several times during his exit, was really his farewell entreaty to her.⁵²

This view was endorsed by the *Otago Daily Times* in 1881, which considered Bandmann to be at his best in his rendition of this scene.⁵³ Simon Williams notes that Brockmann and Schröder played opposite interpretations of this scene, in which 'Schröder made it clear that Hamlet loves Ophelia passionately, while Brockmann played the fool with her.'⁵⁴

Bandmann particularly struggled with colonial and small-town critics, who often applied a degree of irreverence to their assessments of his worth as an actor. For example, in 1890, the *Salt Lake Herald* joked about his *Hamlet*:

Owing to an inborn sense of courtesy and three full seats on either side we remained until *rigor mortis* set in on the whole family and the curtain shut out the cheerful scene. We do not wish to wound anyone's feelings by unjust comparisons, or unduly elate any of the actors; but we think the public will sustain us in the assertion that Yorick acted his part the best.⁵⁵

Bandmann made his first appearance in New Zealand in 1870, and returned for a triumphant progress (as he hoped) in 1881, as part of an extensive world tour. He was indeed appreciatively received in many cities. For example: 'Herr Bandmann's artistic

and living embodiment of Shakespeare's creations have evoked unbounded enthusiasm in Dunedin.⁵⁶ But elsewhere around the country, equivocating or outright negative views appeared. The Christchurch *Press* noted of Bandmann's performance as Othello, for example, that: 'the whole character may be said to have been very unevenly played.' In particular, the reviewer was displeased by the actor's inability to regulate his voice, noting that 'the introduction of a high-pitched intonation [...] entirely spoilt what up to that point was a very fine piece of elocution.'⁵⁷ Not surprisingly, this provoked Bandmann to a sarcastic response to this (in his view) ignorant colonial critic:

It is with the profoundest feeling and consciousness of my unworthiness and ignorance that I approach this 'holy' subject, in the hope that you will do me the justice to insert this letter. [...] May I ask why — for what reason or authority — your wiseacre uses his rusty and malicious cheese-knife to try and make insertions upon a well-established reputation of 25 years' standing, backed by half the civilised world, and such men like (*sic*) my late friends, Lord Lytton, John Forster, Tom Taylor, John Oxenford, Charles Dickens, the present Ralph Waldo Emerson, Longfellow, [and others]? [...] I appeal to the community of Christchurch whether the Liliputian attacks by a man to whom Shakespeare is a 'sealed book' upon a well-established world-wide famed artist are worthy of a first-class paper.⁵⁸

Even this did not match the display of invective he unleashed upon the editor of the Calcutta *Statesman* in 1883:

Sir, — I have read your report in this morning's Rag — otherwise called the *Statesman*. It was sent to me by one of your friends. [...] Your treachery all along to me, led me to no other expectations from such a JUDAS as you are. You have been, and are still trying to mislead the public and throw dirt upon my good name, and had I time and did I consider it worth the trouble I should put you in JAIL as I did your confrere in Hong-Kong, and where such curs like you ought to be. Publish this letter intact if you have the courage. But you have NOT. You can only stab in the dark like a COWARD. — Yours, Daniel Edward Bandmann.⁵⁹

Perhaps the unkindest words came from certain provincial towns in New Zealand, such as Invercargill, near the bottom of the South Island, where Bandmann was moved to speak with asperity from the stage:

He had been on the stage upwards of twenty years — an actor in two languages. He had travelled all over the world, and had been successful in every corner of it, and he was prepared to say that the company he had at present with him to support him, in spite of what the evening paper had said, was a better one than had ever before appeared in New Zealand. He would wager £100 that it was so. He would place the money in the Bank of New Zealand, and forfeit it if what he said was not true.⁶⁰

It should be noted that such speeches were viewed with a degree of disdain or amusement by the papers reporting them. It is clear that Bandmann's cavalier responses were responsible for much of the opprobrium that descended on him. For example, Melbourne's *Leader* was moved to comment in 1870, when Bandmann came forward to make a speech post-performance:

Now everybody knows that the bulk of the actors in the colony don't make much of a figure when in front of the curtain. There were and are exceptions to the rule of course. Brooke was one, Copping is one. But we don't get men every day who can go in front of the curtain and address an audience. Mr. Bandmann certainly should never venture to cross the line, which divides the stage from the auditorium.⁶¹

He was further roused to anger by his encounter with the provincial town of Wanganui (population in 1881 between 4,000 –5,000). In his memoir, his only reference to his visit to this town is as follows: ‘The people in Wanganui are the worst in the country; the church and drink are their only means of passing their leisure. [...] But fortunately for the colony, most of them are going mad.’⁶² What could have provoked such comment?

The *Wanganui Chronicle*, one of two local daily newspapers, reviewed his opening performance of *Hamlet*, noting that it contained ‘numerous differences’ to other ‘acknowledged masters’ of the role, and implying that such changes would not sit well with the Wanganui public. The review ends with what Bandmann clearly regarded as impertinence, referring tartly to both an unexplained loud ‘thumping, dragging and hammering’ coming from backstage before the final scene, and to the fact that ‘the orchestra’ consisted merely of an abominably out of tune piano, in response to which ‘the stamping of some larrikins in the back part of the pit was a positive relief to the nerves.’⁶³

Incandescent with rage, Bandmann stormed the newspaper’s office the next day, swearing and threatening profusely about the ‘damned lousy’ article, and complaining also about the placement of his daily advertisement. The paper had quite deliberately buried it beneath an advert for a troupe of performing dogs. To add further intentional insult, the paper reported this entire exchange the following day, as if it were reviewing one of Bandmann’s performances:

As we said of Herr Bandmann's *Hamlet* so we say of his foul language. The numerous differences in manner, intonation, and expression between him and other acknowledged masters of the art make it a very difficult matter to form a full judgment on the first performance, and we should have to hear his abuse a second or even a third time before pronouncing a definite opinion as to the full extent of its merits. [...] It must not be forgotten, however, that Herr Bandmann was giving expression to his sentiments in a (to him) foreign language.⁶⁴

And therein perhaps lies the cruelest cut of all: that even this small town, which might have been supposed to welcome with open arms the rare treat of an internationally-famous tragedian, finds humor in putting him in his place for his ‘otherness.’

Endnotes

¹ An anecdote in the *New York Tribune* Sunday Magazine for February 5, 1905 indicates that the book had not sold well. On tour to a small town in the Western United States, a colleague was amazed to find a copy of Bandmann’s book in the local newsagent. The actor paid the newsagent to approach Bandmann with the book, and tell him that it was in such demand. He had been forced to double its price. Bandmann’s response was to fire off a vitriolic letter to his publisher.

² Amusement advertisement in: *Southland Times*, December 22, 1880, 3.

³ *Anaconda Standard*, Montana, August 19, 1894, 6. Also: "Hardly a transaction of any kind between Bandmann and his fellows but it results in either a lawsuit against him or the severing of those friendly ties supposed to exist between man and man", *Kansas City Journal*, May 4, 1898, 8.

⁴ ‘*Richard III*: To The Editor. *Otago Daily Times*, January 18, 1881, Page 3. Bandmann’s specific complaint was that the critic had not recognised he was playing Colley Cibber’s version of the play, and had thus made comments on entirely incorrect grounds. In a similar vein, the *Otago Witness* reported: ‘He did not fear criticism— he wished for it; but he had a right to say that the criticism should be fair and just. But this criticism they had been subjected to had not been fair.’ *Otago Witness*, January 8, 1881, 20.

- ⁵ Reported by Melbourne's *Lorgnette* April 28, 1880, 2. The fact that this was considered news in Australia reinforces the world - wide press fascination with Bandmann's regular contretemps.
- ⁶ An anecdote suggests he began acting as a child, treating his friends to performances of Bible stories in which he would play all the parts. This was promoted and circulated in Bandmann's publicity, as in the *Timaru Herald*, February 12, 1881, 2: 'Herr Bandmann may be said to be a born actor, as in his childhood he is said to have been in the habit of inviting his playfellows to the cellar of his house to play scenes out of the Bible such as Adam and Eve, when he spoke both the parts.' As a young actor in Germany, Bandmann was a pupil of 'Dr. Carl Grunert, of the Hof-theatre at Stuttgart; a most profound scholar and rhetorician', according to Bandmann's 'The German Stage – A Sketch', 435.
- ⁷ Bandmann's request for naturalization in July 1858 stated that he 'has resided five years within the United States, including the three years of his minority, and one year at least immediately preceding this application, within the State of New-York'. <http://search.ancestrylibrary.com/>.
- ⁸ For a discussion of Bandmann's interpretation of Shylock, see Nicole Anae, "The Majestic Hebrew Ideal': Herr Daniel E. Bandmann's Shylock on the Australian Stage, 1880 – 1883", *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, 150, 2014: 128 - 145.
- ⁹ 'It is said that an English lady, enthusiastic in his behalf, undertook the task of teaching him to pronounce word by word the part of Shylock', "Herr Bandmann", *Illustrated Sydney News*, Nov 25, 1869, 12.
- ¹⁰ *London Times*, February 21, 1868, 5.
- ¹¹ For example, the actor Clay Clement – whose fighting lessons were paid for by Bandmann – was told that Bandmann 'was a most dangerous antagonist in a stage duel, and very often forgot his surroundings and put up a real fight. If his opponent showed the white feather, the old man would fly into a paroxysm of rage and fight like a demon. On more than one occasion he had completely driven Richmond and [Macduff] off the stage', *The Jewish South*, June 18, 1897.
- ¹² Anae, *ibid.*, 129.
- ¹³ *Birmingham Daily Post*, March 22, 1869.
- ¹⁴ *Nights At the Play: A View of the English Stage*, 63 – 64. Dutton Cook here discusses his impression of Bandmann in Lord Lytton's *The Rightful Heir* (1868).
- ¹⁵ *New York Times*, October 4, 1879, 5 (Performance of *Hamlet* at the Standard Theatre, New York City).
- ¹⁶ *The Times*, February 21, 1868, 5.
- ¹⁷ Homi K. Bhabha 1985, 153.
- ¹⁸ Judge O.T.J. Alpers, "Cheerful Yesterdays", published 1951. (Alpers died in 1927.) <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tei-source/AlpChee.xml>
- ¹⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, April 20, 1868, as cited by *The Era*, London, April 26, 1868.
- ²⁰ Letter to the Editor, *The Times*, October 9, 1868, 7, in relation to the production of *The Rightful Heir*.
- ²¹ *Southland Daily News* (Invercargill), December 29, 1880, 2. The play under discussion was Bulwer Lytton's *The Lady of Lyons*.
- ²² "Herr Bandmann as Hamlet", *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 4, 1880, 6.
- ²³ For example, speaking of Irving's portrayal of Shylock: 'He would say 'Gud' for 'God'; 'Cut-thrut-dug' for 'Cut-throat-dog.' (Edward Gordon Craig 1930, 62).
- ²⁴ *Launceston Examiner*, September 20, 1881, 3.
- ²⁵ John A. Mills 1974, 60.
- ²⁶ Mills, *ibid.*, 61. On the other hand, Mills also cites Charles Dickens, writing of Fechter: 'Foreign accent, of course, but not at all a disagreeable one. And he was so obviously safe and at ease, that you were never in pain for him as a foreigner.' (62)
- ²⁷ Schlegel's often-quoted 1796 Hamlet lecture, "reclaimed Shakespeare for Germany: he [i.e. Shakespeare] belongs to no other people, apart from the English, as particularly as to the Germans" (Sabine Schülting, 2010, 291).
- ²⁸ 'Shakespeare and the Germans' from *London Review*, reprinted by the *Sydney Morning Herald* on July 7, 1868, 3. Also: 'Considering that Herr Bandmann was speaking in England to an audience of Englishmen, it must have required some audacity to assure his hearers that after all the credit of having produced Shakespeare belongs not to England, but to Germany.'
- ²⁹ *New York Sun*, June 23, 1907.
- ³⁰ *The Times*, February 13, 1873, 5. Bandmann was appearing in *Hamlet* at the Princess Theatre, London.
- ³¹ Goethe, Volume 9: *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, edited and trans. Eric Blackall (Princeton University Press, 1995), 146. Also: 'A fine, pure, noble and highly moral person, but devoid of that emotional strength that characterizes a hero, goes to pieces beneath a burden that it can neither support nor cast off. [...] How he twists and turns, trembles, advances and retreats....' (146).
- ³² Mills, *ibid.*, 62.
- ³³ Joanne Cormac 2013, 32.
- ³⁴ William Diamond 1925, 92.
- ³⁵ *Daily Southern Cross*, Auckland, January 5, 1871, 2.
- ³⁶ *The Era*, London, Sunday, September 27, 1874; Issue 1879. *Theatre Royal*, Belfast. The specifics of the Wilhelm Meister version of the portraits in the closet scene may be found in Book V, Chapter IX.

- ³⁷ "Herr Bandmann's Hamlet and Mrs Bandmann's Ophelia", *South Australian Register*, August 16, 1870, 6.
- ³⁸ *The Argus*, Melbourne, October 4, 1869, 5.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ "Signor Salvini", *The Times*, June 4, 1875, 7.
- ⁴¹ "The Stage Business of Hamlet", *The Times*, June 9, 1875, 12. Bandmann allowed that possibly Irving and Salvini had come to these ideas independently, which 'is an argument in favour of their appropriateness to the situation.'
- ⁴² *The Times*, January 18, 1875, 8.
- ⁴³ Daniel Bandmann, 'The German Stage: A Sketch' in *Macmillan's Magazine*, Nov 1, 1875: 430. However, (Simon Williams 2004, 78), notes the opposite, describing Shröder's Hamlet as highlighting 'bitterness and cynicism', while Brockmann's performance was 'more malleable and pleasing'.
- ⁴⁴ Simon Williams 2004, 74.
- ⁴⁵ *The Age*, Melbourne, October 4, 1869, 3.
- ⁴⁶ Goethe, trans Blackall, *ibid.*, 194.
- ⁴⁷ Mills, *ibid.*, 68, citing *Curiosities of the American Stage*.
- ⁴⁸ *The Argus*, *ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, Auckland, January 5, 1871, 2.
- ⁵⁰ *Otago Daily Times*, Dunedin, January 5, 1881, 3.
- ⁵¹ *New Zealand Herald*, October 4, 1872, 3.
- ⁵² *Otago Daily Times*, January 5, 1881, 3.
- ⁵³ *Otago Daily Times*, January 5, 1881, 3.
- ⁵⁴ Simon Williams 2004, 81.
- ⁵⁵ *Salt Lake Herald*, January 19, 1890, 7.
- ⁵⁶ Reported in the *Wanganui Chronicle*, April 16, 1881, 2.
- ⁵⁷ Reported by Puck in the *Otago Witness*, Dunedin, March 12, 1881, 20.
- ⁵⁸ As the editor of the *Christchurch Press* is reported to have replied, the review must have made him 'quite wild, as it is impossible to believe he penned the letter calmly.'
- ⁵⁹ Reported in the *Otago Witness*, Issue 1638, April 14, 1883, 23.
- ⁶⁰ "A rather flighty utterance that, Herr. Better have contented yourself with saying Invercargill; it would have been nearer the truth.— Puck", *Otago Witness*, Issue 1522, 8 January 1881, 20. More: 'He did not fear criticism— he wished for it; but he had a right to say that the criticism should be fair and just. But this criticism they had been subjected to had not been fair; it was in bad taste, and seemed as though it were prompted by the food of the person who wrote it not having agreed with him — as if he had gone away, and dipping his pen into three or four potsful of gall and venom, had given the company the benefit of it.'
- ⁶¹ *The Leader*, Melbourne, September 24, 1870, 18. Sydney's *Australian Town and Country Journal*, March 10, 1883, 13, published a letter written from Calcutta while Bandmann ('the German sausage') was touring there which made a great point of mocking the actor's failed boast that he would close the opposing theatres in town 'in four nights.'
- ⁶² Daniel Bandmann, "An Actor's Tour", 1886, 52. 'Out of every hundred madmen in Taranaki state asylums, seventy five are from Wanganui.' (52).
- ⁶³ *Wanganui Chronicle*, April 18, 1881, 2.
- ⁶⁴ Reported in the *Otago Witness*, April 30, 1881, 20.

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