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‘Bold liberals who fought for the cause of freedom’: the German Reception of the Graphic Satires of James Gillray and Thomas Rowlandson at the Fin de Siècle (1895-1908)

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Investigating the reception of visual culture can reveal rich international exchanges. The complexities of interpretation and multiplicities of afterlives become legion when more than one language and culture is involved. Fixing exactly what qualities attracted commentators to foreign objects and what domestic contexts gave these items value for international audiences necessitates close examination. These exchanges took place within an intricate framework of rhetorical, art historical and socio-political discourses. The position of graphic satire within the hierarchy of the genres further complicates matters. Its marginal canonical status does not discount its potential to contribute to complex cultural debates fuelled by international cross-pollination. This article focusses on one such phenomenon. It examines the previously unstudied relevance of the satirical cartoons of James Gillray (1756 – 1815) and Thomas Rowlandson (1756 – 1827) to the aesthetic, political and cultural debates of fin-de-siècle Germany. Between 1895 and 1908 two critics from Germany, Richard Muther (1860 – 1909) and Hans Wolfgang Singer (1867 – 1957), and two critics from the Low Countries, Charles Polydore de Mont (1857 – 1931) and Jan Veth (1864 1925), undertook a series of interventions into the critical reputations of Gillray and Rowlandson and engaged with developing narratives on the nature of modern art and internationalism. These were all written specifically for a German-speaking audience and therefore signify self-conscious responses to the cultural environment of the *Kaiserzeit* (the age of Imperial Germany, 1871 – 1918). Exploring what these critics wrote about British graphic satire from the Napoleonic era provides an important insight into the continuing currency of Gillray and Rowlandson over time and geographical borders.

The First Age of Reception, 1798 – 1820

This fin-de-siècle German reception did not occur without precedent, and the previous

chapters in this history need to be borne in mind in order to fully understand the later developments that form the primary focus of this essay. British cartoons from the Napoleonic era were subjected to widespread continental scrutiny immediately they were published. In the 1780s, for example, British prints were sold at William Remnant's English bookshop in Hamburg and Bremer and Sons in Braunschweig.¹ The trade in British prints to European nations was disrupted by the French prohibitions and conflicts of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars (1792 – 1815) but such commodities nevertheless found their way through these barriers.² Napoleon Bonaparte went to great lengths to quash foreign and domestic satirical prints that targeted him, and French intolerance for the medium endured into the Restoration regimes.³ Napoleon's retreat following the Battle of Leipzig (October 1813) ended the censorship of the French occupation and increased the supply of domestic (largely from Nuremberg and Berlin) and foreign (predominantly British, French and Russian) political cartoons in the German states.⁴ During that era Gillray's prints provided models for German cartoonists who readily plagiarized them.⁵

There were considerable difficulties in the early reception of the British cartoons in Germany. Even when prints possessed integrated explanatory captions their German audiences seldom had sufficient English language skills to understand them. However, between 1798 and 1806 the Berlin-based journal, *London und Paris*, reproduced pirated copies of key prints by Gillray swiftly following the London publication of the originals. They also published commentaries on these images, reaching wider audiences via the membership of reading clubs and libraries.⁶ Whilst in London, Johann Christian Hüttner tutored the son of George Leonard Staunton (a British diplomat and East India Company employee), wrote for *London und Paris*, and knew Gillray personally.⁷ Hüttner was one of 30,000 Germans in London at that time who were crucial conduits in transmitting information about British graphic satire to a continental audience.⁸ Critically Hüttner announced the four key characteristics that contributed to Gillray's pre-eminence: the artist's ability to make literary references; his allegorical knowledge; his facility in creating accurate and recognisable portraits; and his

¹ Clayton, 'The London Printsellers', 147, 158.

² Baker, *The Business of Satirical Prints*, 136; Clayton, 'The London Printsellers', 146-7, 156, 160

³ Goldstein, *Censorship of Political Caricature*, 40, 97-99; Mainardi, *Another World*, 31, 37, 198

⁴ Clark, *Zeitgeist and Zerrbild*, 71.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 72-80.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 33-55.

⁷ Donald, *The Age of Caricature*, 36.

⁸ Clayton, 'The London Printsellers', 157.

‘constant regard for the true essence of caricature’ which together contributed to his works attaining ‘high art’ qualities.⁹ At this initial stage of the German reception, Reverend Frederick Wendeborn, a London-based pastor to a German congregation, felt that British graphic satire appealed to early-nineteenth-century Germans due to the generic humour they contained, rather than because of their specific lampooning of British celebrities and politicians. As he wrote, the Germans ‘laugh at them, and become merry, though they are entirely unacquainted with the persons, the manners, and the customs which are ridiculed. The wit and satire of such prints, being generally both local, are entirely lost upon them’.¹⁰ The *London und Paris* commentaries sought to educate the German public in the latter, but in terms of motivation the casual interest in humour remained the primary motive for Germans looking at the Georgian caricatures. Furthermore, the German reception of these satirical works effectively defied the foundational Victorian categorisations. Henry George Bohn (1796 – 1884), for example, adopted a division of the prints of Gillray into a ‘political series’ and a ‘humorous’ or ‘miscellaneous series’ with ‘satires on persons and manners’ for his two volumes of reproduction prints, which Wright and Evans took as the structure for their 1851 digest.¹¹ Meanwhile, F.G. Stephens adopted a chronological record by subject for his record of the ‘political and personal satires’ in the British Museum collection.¹² The subsequent analysis pays little critical attention to the categories used by the Victorians and subsequent British scholars on this topic as these were irrelevant to the Germans who were interested in compositional conceits and the practical methods of the cartoonists.

Graphic Satire in Germany 1820 – 90

More generally, the German reception of British graphic satire was a product of the social, art historical, constitutional and nationalistic developments of the nineteenth century. New opportunities for graphic satire were forthcoming with innovations in publishing. The ground-breaking British publication, *Punch* (1841 – 1992), had equivalents in German

⁹ Banerji and Donald, *Gillray observed*, 37, 41-4, 114, 162, 165, 175, 183-4, 201, 204, 242.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-2: quoting Frederick A. Wendeborn, *A View of England Towards the Close of the Eighteenth Century* (London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1791: 2 vols.), 2:213-14; Clark, *English Society 1660 – 1832*, 209; Clark, *Zeitgeist and Zerrbild* 167: Gillray frequently labelled his figures to ease identification. However, Gillray’s German copyists did not always transcribe such marginalia for the names were mostly meaningless to their audience.

¹¹ Wright and Evans, *Caricatures of James Gillray*, xiv, 1, 367

¹² Turner, ‘Collections of British satirical prints’, 256.

magazines like the *Fliegende Blätter* (1845 – 1944) and *Simplicissimus* (1896 – 1944 and 1954 – 1967). Edgar Feuchtwanger describes the latter publication as ‘the German Punch’, and both attracted polite, liberal and middle-class audiences similar to those enjoyed by their British model.¹³ However, such influences are not directly part of the history of the reception of the Napoleonic caricatures under survey in this article, for the stinging and raucous fare of the long eighteenth century quickly gave way to the lighter comedy featured in these illustrated comedic journals, which effectively produced a ‘satirical hiatus’ in both countries as evident in the gentler content of such magazines.¹⁴

Meanwhile, within German art historical practices, nineteenth-century nation-building activities fuelled historic inquiries into the graphic art legacy of Albrecht Dürer, who enjoyed a heroic status due to his subversion of academic rules and the hierarchy of the genres.¹⁵ Elsewhere, the graphic satire produced by other countries slowly crept into historical surveys undertaken in Germany. The 1837 *Handbuch der Geschichte der Malerei* by Franz Kugler (1808 – 58), for example, briefly noted how William Hogarth pioneered with the ‘element of the caricature’, subsequently visible in the work of Gillray and others.¹⁶ However, no in-depth analysis was forthcoming from German-speaking scholars at that time.

With German Unification (1871) pressure was increasingly placed on the middle class to conform to conservative and nationalistic tastes, and this also left its mark on the graphic arts. During the first decades of the *Kaiserzeit* graphic art publications tended to hedge their bets. Whilst the *Fliegende Blätter*, for example, rounded on avant-garde artists who had been influenced by foreign styles, such as Max Liebermann and Arnold Böcklin, the ‘philistine’ public was also frequently ridiculed in the same papers.¹⁷

A German Renaissance of interest in British Napoleonic Cartoons (1890 – 1908)

¹³ Feuchtwanger, *Imperial Germany 1850-1918*, 107; Schulz-Hoffmann, ‘Zur Geschichte der illustrierten satirischen Zeitschrift’, 31-34 and Sailer, ‘Glanz und Elend des *Simplicissimus*’, 35-47.

¹⁴ Kunzle, *The History of the Comic Strip*, 20; Maidment, *Comedy, caricature and the social order*, 3.

¹⁵ Lenman, *Artists and society in Germany 1850 – 1914*, 49; Kuhlemann, ‘The Celebration of Dürer’, see also 293-314.

¹⁶ Lenman, *Artists and society in Germany*, 25-40; Paret, *Art as History*, 13-60; Kugler, *Handbuch der Geschichte der Malerei*, 295.

¹⁷ Lewis, *Art for All?*, 76, 91, 143-157; Schulz-Hoffmann, *et al.*, *Simplicissimus: eine satirische Zeitschrift*, 221-252, 287-310.

Political and art critical developments combined at the end of the nineteenth century to create an ideal context for re-igniting German interest in Gillray and Rowlandson. Germany's national culture was the subject of great debate between conservative and avant-garde art critics who adhered to opposing nationalist and internationalist principles respectively. Whilst a philistine alliance of the Prussian *Junkers* (aristocrats) and German *Mittelstand* (middle class) united behind nationalism, the learned *Bildungsbürgertum* (educated elite) rallied in support of internationalism.¹⁸ Complicating matters further, *Kaiserzeit* xenophobia also infiltrated some intellectual circles. While Heinrich Wölfflin (1864 – 1945), for example, rejected charges of excessive Italian influence on Germany's preeminent artist in *Die Kunst Albrecht Dürers* (1905), he ultimately conceded that the talismanic artist had wasted energy on attempting the impossible in trying to reconcile Northern and Southern spirits.¹⁹ As a foreign (Swiss) art historian, Wölfflin may have been pandering to the nationalism of the Prussian establishment and popular jingoists in order to avoid their opposition to his appointment in Berlin.²⁰ The essay *Deutsche Kunst und Deutsche Geschichte* (1907) by George Dehio (1850 – 1932) went even further in its nationalism by codifying quintessential German artistic traits.²¹

There are various reasons to assume that German Conservatives should have been enthusiasts for many Napoleonic British satirical cartoons: the anti-Catholicism and Francophobia of Otto von Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* policy and the *Kaiserzeit* more generally matched up with the anti-French subject matter of many of Gillray's cartoons for example.²² In fact this did not occur. The xenophobia of the German *Mittelstand* was all-encompassing and British culture was just as problematic in their eyes as French.²³ The internationalism of the *Bildungsbürgertum* was also compromised in regards to the reception of these works.²⁴ The greatest enthusiasm for internationalism occurred amongst advocates of French art, but such influential writers as Hugo von Tschudi (1851 – 1911: Director of the National Gallery, Berlin, 1896 – 1908) and Julius Meier-Graefe (1867 – 1935) did not discuss Gillray or

¹⁸ Potter, *The Inspirational Genius of Germany*, 176.

¹⁹ Belting, *The Germans and their Art*, 52; Schiff, 'Introduction', *German Essays on Art History*, xxxviii.

²⁰ Dalle Vacche, 'Introduction', *The Visual Turn*, 12.

²¹ Belting, *The Germans and their Art*, 53-4.

²² Lenman, *Artists and society in Germany*, 21.

²³ Blackbourn, 'The Discrete Charm of the Bourgeoisie', 212.

²⁴ Geppert and Gerwarth, 'Introduction', and Blackbourn, "As dependent on each other as man and wife", in Geppert and Gerwarth, *Wilhelmine Germany and Edwardian Britain*, 1-13, 17-18, 21.

Rowlandson.²⁵ Ironically the anti-Gallicism that provided the unfulfilled potential to attract the Conservatives also repelled the Francophiles. Nevertheless, a smaller niche still existed within the progressive camp who were interested in these graphic satirists, and the remainder of this article focuses on the content and causes of their investigations. One of the reasons progressive German art writers began to look abroad for inspiration was a perception of the declining international status of German art centres.

Munich especially suffered from the virtual Parisian monopoly that existed at the time.²⁶ The Secession movements that emerged were part of this response. The Berlin Secession (1899 – 1913) formed the major rallying point against academic art and allied institutions of the Wilhelmine era: Impressionism was dominant but more modern styles were also represented through associated exhibitions.²⁷ The Munich Secession (1892 – 1933) was founded not only earlier but also in a far less oppressive environment. It emerged out of the egalitarian spirit of the *Münchner Künstlergenossenschaft* (Munich Artists Association: established 1868) which was dedicated to liberal ideas of representative government, the free market and the elevation of the public via *Bildung* (education).²⁸ Munich had nevertheless faced its own specific challenges with declining arts patronage from the Bavarian royal family, the Wittelsbachs, after 1864, despite Prince Luitpold's culturally interested Regency (1886 – 1912).²⁹

Berlin and Munich offered fertile ground for a revived interest in satirical culture more generally. While the German *Kabarette* reached their apex under the Weimar Republic (1919 – 33), the theatrical foundations of that golden age were established in the counter-cultural sections of the cosmopolitan cities of the Wilhelmine era. From 1895 a group of progressives combatted conservative taste and censorship via the establishment of Parisian-style variety cabarets in Berlin and Munich, including Frank Wedekind (1864 – 1918), Otto Julius Bierbaum (1865 – 1910), and Oskar Panizza (1853 – 1921: author of the essay on 'Der Klassizismus und das Eindringen des Variété' ('Classicism and the inroads of variety theatre': 1896)).³⁰ The exchange between theatrical and artistic circles was unsurprisingly

²⁵ Paret, 'The Tschudi Affair,' 589-618; Paul, *Hugo von Tschudi*; Hohenzollern and Schuster, *Manet bis van Gogh*.

²⁶ Lenman, *Artists and society in Germany*, 126.

²⁷ Matelowski, *Die Berliner Secession 1899-1937*; West, *The Visual Arts in Germany*, 23, 26.

²⁸ Makela, *The Munich Secession*, 10-11, 14.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, xvii, 16.

³⁰ Segel, *Turn-of-the-century Cabaret*, 119-122, 132; Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret*, vii, 36.

great: not only did Wedekind contribute to *Simplicissimus* but Wassily Kandinsky (1866 – 1944) was a great enthusiast of the cabaret.³¹ Crucially, German *Kabarett* culture shared much with the world of the Georgian cartoons with their melange of ephemerality, criticism, cynicism, intimacy and satire.³²

Richard Muther and the *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert* (1893-4)

Muther very much personified the Secessionist zeitgeist. The Munich-based art critic and art historian was heavily influenced by his studies under Anton Springer (1825 – 91).³³ Springer ‘integrated his intensive study of art and of social life’ in opposition to G.W.F. Hegel’s idealist view of culture and history, substituted relativist and historicist values for Hegel’s universalist ones, and subscribed to a Schillerian belief in the importance of human relations, social life, and the artist’s personality as artistic catalysts.³⁴ Muther also wished to swim against the Wilhelmine tide and place German art within a firmly international context. Unlike his contemporaries, such as Cornelius Gurlitt (1850 – 1938) and Adolf Rosenberg (1850 – 1906), Muther believed that internationalism was central to innovation in art.³⁵ The Munich International Exhibition of 1888 provided a useful forum for developing such theories, exhibiting 2,732 contemporary artworks from fifteen countries. While allowing T odor de Wyzewa (1862 – 1917) in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* to assess modern German painting, German critics such as Friedrich Pecht (1814 – 1903) took it as an opportunity to evaluate the works displayed by artists from foreign schools including those of America, Britain and France.³⁶ Muther, for example, felt the exhibition helped highlight how ‘In general, little is known about English art on the Continent. While every major newspaper provides correspondence upon the Paris Salon every year, English exhibitions are almost never reported; English works but rarely come to us’.³⁷

³¹ Segel, *Turn-of-the-century Cabaret*, 143, 180-1.

³² *Ibid.*, 1-3, 5: see Rowe, *Representing Berlin* on the prominence of sexual over political contents.

³³ Schleinitz, *Richard Muther*, 20-21.

³⁴ Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art*, xxiv, 30, 152-5.

³⁵ Jensen, *Marketing Modernism*, 212-3; Schleinitz, *Richard Muther*, 145, 274-7, 455n4.

³⁶ Holt, *The Expanding World of Art*, 302-7; Lenman, *Artists and society in Germany*, 82, 207n74; Anon., ‘Die M nchener Ausstellungen’, 569-572; see also Pecht, ‘Die M nchener Ausstellungen von 1888’, 5: where Pecht discussed Jules Bastien-Lepage as an inferior version (schooled and overly-theoretical) compared to Fritz von Uhde in the realms of painters of shepherdesses consistent with contemporary nationalistic agendas.

³⁷ Muther quoted in Schleinitz, *Richard Muther*, 65.

Muther's magnum opus, the *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert* (1893 – 94: translated as *The History of Modern Painting*), was written in a synthetic style, offering a grand modernist survey of nineteenth-century art related to cultural and social values, loyal to Springer's ideals.³⁸ While it was rejected by Wölfflin and the Vienna School for its unscientific and biographical qualities, and has been criticized by Udo Kultermann as 'unflatteringly confessional' and obsessed with the erotic qualities of fin-de-siècle art, such values spoke to the Aestheticist, Symbolist and Secessionist appetites of the time.³⁹ Indeed Muther's friendship with Munich Secessionist poets encouraged his attempt at popularising art history by introducing his intellectual content in a beguiling literary style praised by the art historian and museum director Max Schmid-Burgk (1860 – 1925).⁴⁰ Muther's *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert* was a seminal text that provided the rhetorical and logical frameworks for many modernist arguments in Germany and beyond based on anti-academicism, autonomy, internationalism and naturalism.⁴¹

Graphic satire played a minor but important part in the narrative of the *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert*. Muther's time as the conservator of the *Königliche Graphische Sammlung* (the King's prints and drawings collection) from 1885 established him as an authority on this medium.⁴² As with the other artists featured in the text, Gillray and Rowlandson were seen by Muther to have contributed to the development of internationalist modern art due to their foregrounding of personal expression, another concept owed to Springer. For Muther, after the unfortunate retreat to Classicism triggered by the tumult of the French Revolution, the Romantic caricaturists were distinctive in bravely seizing upon their modern subject matter for 'the great draughtsmen of the nineteenth century were the first who set themselves with their whole strength to bring modern life and all that it contained earnestly and sincerely within the range of art.'⁴³ Muther's bibliographies provide clear evidence of his research into the extant international art critical literature.⁴⁴ However, the coverage of Gillray and Rowlandson was uneven: of the monographic works he listed on the Napoleonic British caricaturists, Rowlandson was the focus of only two, while Gillray was represented by none, with Thomas Wright's *The Works of James Gillray* (1873) a prominent

³⁸ Lenman, *Artists and society in Germany*, 176.

³⁹ Johnson, *The Memory Factory*, 21-22; Kultermann, *The History of Art History*, 133.

⁴⁰ Schleinitz, *Richard Muther*, 92-3, 97, 116, 177, see also 354-78.

⁴¹ Jensen, *Marketing Modernism*, 212.

⁴² Schleinitz, *Richard Muther*, 22.

⁴³ Muther, *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert*, 2:19; Muther, *The History of Modern Painting*, 2:24.

⁴⁴ Schleinitz, *Richard Muther*, 147.

omission.⁴⁵ Muther's investigation of British political cartoons was admittedly brief, but in the English edition he added references to more marginal satirists, such as Henry William Bunbury (1750 – 1811) and also drew connections between Rowlandson's work and the savage indignation of [Jonathan] Swift'.⁴⁶ Like Wedeborn before him, Muther found the universal comedic register important but felt there was a greater role for graphic satire to play in addressing the visual crisis of modernity. He introduced this in a section where he championed Dürer's ability to represent his times for 'the whole age is reflected in the engravings of this one artist with a truth and distinctness which put to shame those of the most laborious historian' and noted how this had been lost in modern times for 'It was not until the beginning of the nineteenth century that this connection with the life of the present and the soil at home was lost to the art of painting'.⁴⁷

Muther believed that this erstwhile equilibrium could be restored via the nineteenth-century Aesthetic movement with its rejection of the historicisms of the early- to mid-nineteenth century. Eighteenth-century graphic satire also provided succour. Not only did caricaturists like Gillray and Rowlandson constitute 'a power of political warfare of their time' but Muther wanted to retrieve them from aesthetic obscurity. Muther believed that the original utility of these works was short-lived for 'The worst of it is that the interest excited by political caricature is always of a very ephemeral nature. The antagonism of [William] Pitt [the Younger] against [Charles James] Fox and [the Earl of] Shelburne against [Edmund] Burke, the avarice and stupidity of George III, the [1801 Act of] Union, the conjugal troubles of the Prince of Wales, and the war with France seem very unimportant matters in these days'.⁴⁸

Muther passed over specific political meanings to emphasize their generic radical power. These cartoonists were 'bold liberals who fought for the cause of freedom with a divine rage and a slashing irony, while, at the same time, they were masterly draughtsmen in a vehement and forceful style'.⁴⁹ Muther saw these artworks as influential levers in the struggle against oppression and assertion of true liberal ideals during the Napoleonic period, and presumably also a timely inspiration for opponents of the repressive and philistine cultural policies of the *Kaiserzeit*.

⁴⁵ Muther, *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert*, 2:647: the works cited were Grego, *Rowlandson*, 1880, and Stephens 'Thomas Rowlandson the Humourist', 1891.

⁴⁶ Muther, *The History of Modern Painting*, 2:32.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:13-14: translating Muther, *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert*, 2:10-11.

⁴⁸ Muther, *The History of Modern Painting*, 2:27; Muther, *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert*, 2:20: refers incorrectly to the 'madness of George II' [die Dummheit Georgs II.].

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Gillray did not receive the greatest attention in Muther's account, for 'Rowlandson, since he was not a pure politician, appeals to us in an intelligible language even after a hundred years have gone by. Like Hogarth, he was the antithesis of a humourist. Something bitter and gloomily pessimistic runs through all he touches'.⁵⁰ While the *London und Paris* commentaries assessed the aesthetic merits of prints as well as their political meanings, Muther gave greater emphasis to the former task. Additional distance in time presumably meant he felt justified in leaving analysis of historical contexts to historians. Muther's reference to 'humourists' relates to Victorian suppliers of more anodyne entertainment – John Leech (1817 – 1864), Charles Keene (1823 – 91), and George du Maurier (1834 – 96) – who he treated later in the *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert*. Indeed, when Muther surveyed the nineteenth-century graphic art of Germany he explicitly cited their lack of an equivalent to Rowlandson: seeing Johann Adam Klein (1792 – 1875) and Johann Christian Erhard (1795 – 1822) as merely capable of nascent naturalism, and Ludwig Richter (1803 – 1884) as only achieving a "Gemüth" (heartly-feeling) comparable to Leech.⁵¹

By contrast he found a darkness specifically in the humour of Rowlandson which perhaps resonated with fin-de-siècle fashions for degeneracy nurtured by Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1895).⁵² The unseemliness of late eighteenth-century satirists was in harmony with the atmosphere of the close of the nineteenth century. The topsy-turvy nature of Rowlandson's vision was the key to his continued modern appeal for while 'He is brutal, with an inborn power and an indecorous coarseness. His laughter is loud and his cursing barbarous' he made fun through 'the simplest means'.⁵³ Rowlandson balanced 'fat and thin, big and little, young wife and old husband, young husband and old wife, shying horse and helpless rider on a Sunday out. Or else he brings the physical and moral qualities of his figures into an absurd contrast' with deaf musicians, bandy-legged dancing masters, pretentious servants, absurdly coquettish old maids, drunken parsons, all receiving a fall from grace in the punchlines as Hogarth had done, although Rowlandson also provided insight into social history with other

⁵⁰ Muther, *The History of Modern Painting*, 2:28; translating Muther, *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert*, 2:20.

⁵¹ Muther, *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert*, 2:29-33; Muther, *The History of Modern Painting*, 2:38-42.

⁵² Ledger and Luckhurst, *The Fin de Siècle*, 16, 121.

⁵³ Muther, *The History of Modern Painting*, 2:28; accurately translating Muther, *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert*, 2:20-21.

images that ‘represent the life of the people’.⁵⁴ Despite Muther’s hagiographic treatment of Rowlandson, Gillray returned to the spotlight in the German author’s general assessment of British graphic satire. While Rowlandson shared key characteristics with the latter-day Victorian cartoonists, Gillray represented a more consistently scathing oppositional spirit. Muther noted how in Georgian Britain:

People loved juicy delusions, exuberant power and stark rudeness. A broad, Aristophanic laugh shook people to the core such that they appeared like epileptics. In the time when Empire fashion came to England, Gillray dared to portray some of London's most famous beauties getting dressed in a manner in which even the beautiful and uninhibited Madame Tallien would not have indulged.⁵⁵

Muther was making complex allusions here to social satire and Gillray’s oeuvre. It probably referred to the artist’s lampooning of female fashions for classical attire and extreme décolletage, visible in *Ladies dress, as it soon will be* (20 January 1796) which in turn aped Thérèse Tallien’s personal style.⁵⁶ It also invoked Gillray’s notorious 1805 print showing Tallien and Joséphine de Beauharnais (the future empress) dancing in a state of undress before Paul Barras (the leader of the Directory), with Napoleon stealing a glance from behind a curtain.⁵⁷ Muther did not illustrate either of these works in his text. He did, however, give a sense that he regretted something valuable being lost as mores changed, for ‘Such things were no longer possible since England had grown out of its adolescence’, although the contemporary English translation arguably better captured the implied meaning when it

⁵⁴ Muther, *The History of Modern Painting*, 2:28; translating Muther, *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert*, 2:21.

⁵⁵ Muther, *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert*, 2:24; my translation: the original German is: ‘Man liebte saftige Zoten, überschäumende Kraft und unverhüllte Derbheit. Ein breites, aristophanisches Lachen durchschüttelt die Menschen, so dass sie wie Epileptiker aussehen. In der Zeit, als die Empiremode nach England kam, konnte Gillray wagen, einige der bekanntesten Londoner Schönheiten unter voller Porträtähnlichkeit in einer Toilette darzustellen, wie sie ungeni[e]rter die schöngewachsene Madame Tallien nicht hätte tragen dürfen.’ Muther, *The History of Modern Painting*, 2:34; translated this passage as ‘There was a delight in a juicy ribaldry, effervescing power, and a coarseness that was unveiled. Men were shaken by a broad Aristophanic laughter till they seemed like epileptics. At the time when the Empire style came into England, Gillray could dare represent by speaking likenesses some of the best-known London beauties, in a toilette which to the well-grown Madame Tallien could not have worn with greater coolness. Such things were no longer possible when England grew out of her saucy youth.’

⁵⁶

https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1634191&partId=1&searchText=Tallien&page=1.

⁵⁷

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1639425&partId=1&searchText=gillray+occupations&page=1.

replaced ‘adolescence’ with ‘saucy youth’.⁵⁸ As Muther continued:

Since the time of Gillray a complete change came over the spirit of English caricature. Everything brutal or bitterly personal was abandoned. The clown put on his dress-clothes, and John Bull became a gentleman ... his disciples were indeed not caricaturists at all, and addressed themselves solely to a delicately poetic representation of subjects. They know neither Rowlandson’s innate force and bitter laughter, nor the gallows humour and the savagery of Hogarth; they are amiable and tenderly grave observers, and their drawings are not caricatures, but charming pictures of manners.⁵⁹

Muther’s account of the decline in British graphic satire chimes with the conclusions of later historians. The shift from savage rebukes and raucous outbursts to humorous observations and polite middle-class laughter is now universally recognized. The precise reason for Muther attributing more column width to Rowlandson than Gillray is hard to ascertain, however. It may have been due to the greater simplicity of Rowlandson’s visceral humour, but, more likely it was triggered by the less overtly political nature of his work, as previously noted. Rowlandson’s cartoons would be more easily comprehended by Germans without the need for extensive explanations, and this played to Muther’s generalist approach to imagery. Nevertheless, Gillray’s inspirational status amongst German copyists no doubt persuaded Muther to ultimately maintain him as the lodestar in his narrative.

Muther’s *Geschichte der Malerei* was distinctive for its rich illustrations, an advantage not afforded to his predecessors.⁶⁰ Given the broad chronological parameters of his book, it is perhaps unsurprising that Muther chose to illustrate only one work by a British cartoonist from the Napoleonic age in the original German edition: Rowlandson’s *Fight in an Ale House* (Figure 14). He did not include any provenance for the image so it is unknown from which collection he sourced the work. He also failed to discuss the image, deploying it as an undissected generic illustration. Without the clues provided by textual analysis the particular reasons for reproducing this image are elusive. It was possibly taken from his or another

⁵⁸ Muther, *Geschichte der Malerei im XIX. Jahrhundert*, 2:24: ‘Solche Dinge waren, seitdem England aus den Flegeljahren herausgetreten, nicht mehr möglich’; Muther, *The History of Modern Painting*, 2:34.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Schleinitz, *Richard Muther*, 101.

private collection for there is no record of the *Königliche Graphische Sammlung* holding etchings by Rowlandson or Gillray at that time.⁶¹ Muther may have selected it as representative of Rowlandson's oeuvre due to its chaotic combination of drink, gambling and threatened violence. The scene (which Grego speculated was one of Rowlandson's best productions of the year, and a subject with which the cartoonist was 'perfectly at home') depicts a soldier losing at Hazard (a dice game) to his opponent (identified by Dorothy George as a Frenchman due to his ponytail) – they are drawing pistols on each other whilst those around them wield various improvised weapons in order to participate in the dispute.⁶²

Given his admiration for the British contribution to modern art and his internationalist values, Muther's intention in including this image was surely not xenophobic. However, it may perhaps partly have been his fear that English-language readers would accidentally impute a slight (that all Britons were alcoholic gambling thugs) that led Muther to supplement the illustrations for the 1893 translation. Rowlandson's *A Fight in an Ale House* was thus joined by Gillray's *Affability* and Rowlandson's *Harmony* (1790), inserted as whole-page illustrations between the extant text on pages 19 and 25 respectively. Again neither work was referred to in the letterpress.

(Royal) Affability was illustrated by Thomas Wright and Graham Everitt whose book featured in Muther's bibliography and may well have been where he saw the image first. Wright explained how the image depicted George III interviewing a rural inhabitant (an occupant of one of the smallholdings the King – 'Farmer George' – established at Windsor), but Wright discussed neither Gillray, Rowlandson nor this work for they did 'not fall within our definition of a "nineteenth century" satirist' due to the hatred and injustice in them.⁶³

Muther's detached approach was therefore not without precedent. *Harmony* was a partial reproduction of *The Duchess of Devonshire and the Countess of Bessborough* watercolour (with the musician removed from the composition) but it is unknown from where Muther

⁶¹ I am grateful to Michael Grassl and Sabine Wölfel at the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung München, which now incorporates the Königliche Graphische Sammlung, for this information. The first graphic work by either artist to appear in the collection was a feather drawing by Rowlandson of a drawing room scene which was acquired seventeen years after Muther's volume was published (inv.no. 1910:50).

⁶² Grego, *Thomas Rowlandson, the caricaturist*, 2:24, 274; George, *Catalogue of prints and drawings in the British Museum*, 6:745-6.

⁶³ Wright, *The Works of James Gillray*, 187; Everitt, *English Caricaturists and Graphic Humourists of the Nineteenth Century*, 24-5.

sourced the derivative print.⁶⁴ Muther's decision to include examples of Rowlandson's watercolour drawings (albeit engraved reproductions of these) is intriguing as it hints at the growing trade in this aspect of the artist's work. Muther's aversion to political content is further demonstrated by his failure to refer to the Duchess of Devonshire, a prominent Whig leader at the time.

Idealism, Internationalism, National Schools and Naturalism: Singer, de Mont, and Veth

Scholarly analysis of Gillray and Rowlandson continued beyond Muther amongst art writing circles in Germany. Hans Wolfgang Singer was born in New York but was educated and worked in Germany. He studied in Munich, Leipzig and Berlin, before settling in Dresden, first, in 1891, as Directorial Assistant then Curator at the Museum of Prints and Drawings, before becoming Professor at the Royal Saxon Polytechnical School in 1903.⁶⁵ It was from there that he made numerous observations about British art from a progressive perspective especially in the *Künstlerlexicon* (1894 – 1901), developed his expertise on black and white artworks with Max Lehrs at the Dresden Gallery's *Kupferstich-Kabinett* (Cabinet of Prints, Drawings and Photographs), and also wrote for British journals about German art topics.⁶⁶

In an article on international poster art for the Berlin art magazine *Pan*, Singer indulged in an art historical digression which compared the British and Continental artistic schools and their aesthetic motivations. Singer felt that 'English artists' were prone to 'simplification' and 'stylization' in their works, and that 'the principle of "nature is the only teacher" has never been so highly esteemed as on the Continent' while "'truth'" or 'the conscientious faith in nature' had never been promoted by British artists.⁶⁷ Singer believed Raphaelites", decorative artists of the type of Walter Crane, and the most subjective masters of caricature such as Leech, Gillray and others, valued the rhythmic play of lines over natural forms, and self-consciously arbitrary harmonies of colours over every-day sunlight'.⁶⁸

Britain's graphic satire tradition was seen by Singer to conform to the aesthetic principles of

⁶⁴ Hargraves, 'Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire', 273, Pl. 65.

⁶⁵ Betthausen, 'Singer, Hans Wolfgang', 390-91.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 389; Potter, *The Inspirational Genius of Germany*, 206; Lenman, *Artists and society in Germany*, 168.

⁶⁷ Singer, 'Plakatkunst', 334: author's translation.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

its national school with subjectivity and idealism dominating its practice in contrast to the objectivity and naturalism of the German school. Interestingly, this ran counter to British narratives for the formation of their national visual cultural identity. Idyllic landscape naturalism was adopted as a conceptual framework of political economy not only by John Ruskin in *Modern Painters II* (1846) and *Lectures on Art* (1870) but also Richard and Samuel Redgrave in *A Century of Painters of the English School* (1866).⁶⁹

German-language interventions on Gillray and Rowlandson were not only produced by German critics. Art writers from the Low Countries also played a significant role as internationalist go-betweens in the fin-de-siècle German reception. Their historical connections with Britain and Germany placed them in a perfect position to bridge the critical gap between the two nations. Charles Polydore de Mont was one such figure. He was a Flemish poet and curator who was appointed as the Director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp in 1904. De Mont's liberalism manifested in several ways that impacted nationally and internationally.

His long-standing activism on behalf of the Flemish movement at home caused trouble with the Church and the establishment, whilst his fund-raising in 1899 for the Boers in South Africa was problematic for Anglo-Dutch relations: the difficulties these caused him as a public servant led to his resignation in 1919 from the museum.⁷⁰ In his 1900 article on James Ensor for the Viennese journal, *Die Graphischen Künste*, de Mont described how the Belgian artist shared affinities with foreign artists including the colourism of Franz Hals, the fantasy of Hieronymus Bosch, the dreaming poetry of Goya and Turner, and how he was 'a ruthless caricaturist like Gillray or Rowlandson'.⁷¹ The graphic satire of the Napoleonic cartoonists was particularly useful to de Mont in promoting his internationalist and oppositional agendas. He attributed Ensor's syntheticism to his dual national origins, enjoying the 'exuberance of a southern Dutchman and the phlegm of a British man' through his English father and Flemish mother.⁷² His paternal line gave him 'his cold-blooded mockery, his talent to see and imagine everything as an injustice, his talent as a

⁶⁹ Helsinger, 'Ruskin and the Politics of Viewing', 9; Ruskin, 'Lectures on Art (1870)', 41; Cheetham, *Artwriting, Nation, and Cosmopolitanism in Britain*, 65; Codell, 'Righting the Victorian Artist: A Century of Painters of the English School and the Serialization of Art History,' *Oxford Art Journal*, 115-6.

⁷⁰ Galle, 'Pol de Mont of het noodlot van de factotum', 703; Beyen, *Held voor alle werk*, 40, 49, 51; Schoeman, *Brothers in Arms*, 2.

⁷¹ de Mont, 'Die Graphische Künste im heutigen Belgien und ihre Meister', 35-36: my translation.

⁷² *Ibid.*

caricaturist’, and formed a direct line of visual cultural genealogical descent. De Mont went on to exclaim that ‘Here you can see the great-grandson of Gillray and Rowlandson again’, and ‘How successfully he parodies the parades, triumphal entries and other so-called patriotic events in an inimitable and funny way!’⁷³ Such allusions were rhetorical, and a more literal connection was neither proved nor necessary. The international currency and significance of the British cartoonists of the Georgian era was demonstrable by such effortless gambits, and de Mont felt no reticence in abandoning the safer ground of canonical art history in order to conjure with the names of Gillray and Rowlandson as apt predecessors of a modern misanthropic artist like Ensor.

Several years later a Dutch writer, Jan Veth, treated British graphic satire even more directly in two articles for the progressive Berlin magazine *Kunst und Künstler* (1902 – 33).⁷⁴ Veth was a painter, poet, art critic and later Professor Extraordinary in History of Art and Aesthetics at the *Rijksakademie voor Beeldende Kunsten* in Amsterdam.⁷⁵ As with Muther before him, Veth sharply contrasted the British satirical cartoonists of the brash Napoleonic and staid Victorian eras. In April 1908, for example, he noted how Charles ‘Keene did not possess the brutal grasp of a Rowlandson, Gillray or Cruikshank’ but relied more upon observational comedy.⁷⁶ Veth used similar dualism to Singer – naturalism versus idealism – although in his case he did so in order to set Georgian fancy against Keene’s prosaic decorum, for the latter’s self-proclaimed methodical ‘formula’ was to “‘Draw things the way you see them.’”⁷⁷

Given the prominence that Rowlandson enjoyed in Muther’s narrative, interestingly, he was the only Napoleonic cartoonist to receive a monographic article in Germany during the fin de siècle. In that piece Veth argued for a paradoxical art historical significance for that ‘mockers of the great Napoleon’, for:

even if the many caricatures by his hand are only of moderate interest in the long run due to the monotony of their rugged tendencies, it certainly remains characteristic that Bonaparte’s furious challenger, especially by the very nature of his art beyond

⁷³ Ibid., 36, 40.

⁷⁴ Feist and Feist, eds., *Kunst und Künstler*, 437-8; Paret, ‘Review’, 1472-1473.

⁷⁵ <http://www.dwc.knaw.nl/biografie/pmknaw/?pagetype=authorDetail&Id=PE00003534>.

⁷⁶ Veth, ‘Charles Keene, 1823 – 1891’, 287: my translation.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

caricature, is the strangest antagonist of that Empire style, which prescribed regulations for a whole epoch. For Rowlandson was born the opponent of everything which can be called law or rule or demonstrable principle.⁷⁸

Veth believed that Rowlandson and his art were the acme of the Romantic genius of the time, opposing the Neo-Classicism of Jacques Louis David and his followers, echoing Muther's earlier judgement.

The issue of the ephemerality of Rowlandson's art was germane for Veth. He may have judged that its 'moderate interest' to modern eyes owed as much to its outdated political references as to its repetitive formal morphology, but he believed that there was nevertheless a transcendent value in Rowlandson's cartoons, 'the sight of which is still invigorating, amusing and liberating for us', due to their ability to stage a scene simply and amusingly.⁷⁹

The satirist was a 'funny buccaneer classic in his way' who was 'gruff, sometimes a little mannered, and not infrequently almost too burlesque; but free of any tameness'.⁸⁰ The language which Veth employed to describe the artist emphasized repeatedly his nervous energy. He referred to 'Rowlandson's restless drawing art', his 'Volcanic' nature, the apparent 'constant liveliness through all his drawing', and how 'Turmoil and restlessness are his favourite spheres, and sometimes it is as if he has regarded life as an eternal carnival'.⁸¹ The visceral and tantalising characteristics of Rowlandson's art had a special charm for Veth, which suggested to him a peculiarly evocative, fanciful, and creative genius:

With Rowlandson you can feel that this road beyond the turn goes even further, that there is new life behind every corner, that through this picturesque gate you will reach a city with spacious squares and all sorts of surprises, that men dwell behind the windows in the streets which he draws, that behind this hill a valley extends, that behind every tree the heavens spread out. His tree trunks appear to be rooted in the soil, the branches are eagerly reaching out into the open, and the tufts of leaves, loosely planted in a tree, seem to breathe fertility and to sway in the gentle breeze.⁸²

⁷⁸ Veth, 'Thomas Rowlandson', 39a: my translation.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 39a, 42a.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 42a-b.

⁸¹ Ibid., 39b, 40b.

⁸² Ibid., 40a.

It is quite possible that Veth, while not referencing them, was doffing his cap to the Redgraves and their observations on the Romantic genius of British landscape painting – drawing a line of continuity between Thomas Gainsborough’s landscapes and portraits, and those of Rowlandson, with the dual intention of elevating the latter’s art historical status.⁸³ Rowlandson’s ‘physicality in his outlook on life’ was tempered by a ‘mental grasp’ of the literature of Henry Fielding (1707 – 54) and Oliver Goldsmith (1728 – 74), demonstrable in his idyllic drawing of *The Church, Promenade* (presumably *The Vicar’s Family on their Road to Church* (1817) illustrating Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766)).⁸⁴ His ‘electrified’ sketch of *The Cockpit* (Figure 16), from the collection of the Berlin art dealers and print sellers Amsler and Ruthardt (active 1860 – 1921), was thought by Veth to be ‘sumptuously daring’ and equal to ‘a Daumier or Goya’.⁸⁵ *The Cockpit* was another example of German commentators choosing to illustrate examples of Rowlandson’s social observation rather than his political satire. Meanwhile, Veth extended his art historical comparisons to link Rowlandson to Golden Age artists from the Low Countries due to their mastery and invention in the two fields of landscape and genre painting, including the Dutch artists Pieter Brueghel the Elder (1525 – 69), Adriaen Brouwer (1605 – 38), Adriaen van Ostade (1610 – 85), Aelbert Cuyp (1620 – 91), Jan Steen (1626 – 79), and Willem Van de Velde (1610 – 93), and the Flemish artists Peter Paul Rubens (1577 – 1640) and Jacob Jordaens (1593 – 1678).⁸⁶ Despite the potential validity of these parallels, such a heavy-handed deployment of these masters spoke no doubt of his pride in his own national art historical legacy, and furthermore was part of a counter move against the contemporaneous German attempts at cultural colonisation evident in Julius Langbehn’s *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (*Rembrandt as Educator*) (1890) and moves to ‘Germanize’ Vincent van Gogh.⁸⁷ However, internationalist and nationalist agendas were not always diametrically opposed. Veth possessed further intellectual connections to Germany. His theory of *gemeenschapskunst* (community art) drew

⁸³ Redgrave, *A Century of Painters of the English School*, 1:160, 164.

⁸⁴ Veth, ‘Thomas Rowlandson’, 40b.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*: possibly a preparatory sketch for *The Royal Cockpit* or a pastiche of Hogarth’s 1759 etching of the same subject, see:

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/term_details.aspx?bioId=134418;

Thomas Rowlandson, *Microcosm of London* (1808), plate 18:

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/744264>; William Hogarth, *The Cockpit* (1759), Royal Academy of Arts, London: <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/work-of-art/the-cockpit>.

⁸⁶ Veth, ‘Thomas Rowlandson’, 40b-41a.

⁸⁷ Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair*, 34, 49, 60, 87–8; Potter, *The Inspirational Genius of Germany*, 10, 160, 226.

upon Richard Wagner's 1849 development of K.F.E. Trahndorf's concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (1827), yet, Veth subverted the transformative political effect of individual artists upon the *Volk* (the people) in order to give greater emphasis to how artworks reflected the communal values of the societies which produced them.⁸⁸

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated how British graphic satire from the Napoleonic period received renewed attention in fin-de-siècle Germany. As art historical research grew so British graphic satire came under increasing scrutiny. An awareness formed of the distinctions that existed between the later Victorian polite social satirists and their earlier more savage Georgian counterparts, who indulged in more political fare. However, greater formal analysis of individual works tended to focus on images that were generically funny rather than reliant upon specific knowledge of their political subjects. Deeper political values were nevertheless identified in these artworks by liberal critics. Muther lamented the passing of an age of vibrant and at times 'saucy' censoriousness, and while he did not wish to use the artists as kindling for revolt or revolution, he did wish to encourage by their example the capacity for intelligent criticism in his own age of cultural conservatism and anti-modernism.

Individual aesthetic principles often generated divergent readings on particular points amongst the liberal German-language writers on the topic of Gillray and Rowlandson. These were usually in alignment with personal political agendas. While Singer constructed a narrative for British art that placed graphic satirists alongside their Romantic artistic countrymen as idealists (consistent with Muther's arguments but at odds with the perspective of the British), Veth found that the naturalism of Rowlandson's Romantic landscapes constituted an essential connection with his own homeland and its art history. However, there was a consensus amongst all the critics surveyed here from Germany and the Low Countries regarding the internationalist agendas they promoted in their treatment of this material. The ability of the works of Gillray and Rowlandson to speak to critics across national borders and over expanses of time provides ample evidence of the powerful liberal messages that could be

⁸⁸ Maas, 'A Pragmatic Intellectual: Dutch Fabians, Boekman and cultural policy in the Netherlands, 1890 – 1940', 40; Lajosi, 'Wagner and the (Re)mediation of Art, 43-46, 52-8; see also Brown, *The Quest for the Gesamtkunstwerk and Richard Wagner*.

read in their work by later audiences. Even if the specific political situations which had first spawned these cartoons had since passed and modern Anglo-German diplomatic antagonisms were on the rise at the dawn of the twentieth century, the capacity of British Napoleonic graphic satire to produce humorous effects, promote positive values of internationalism, and encourage public accountability remained obvious to German-language critics between 1895 and 1908. Muther, Singer, de Mont and Veth were thus 'bold liberals who fought for the cause of freedom' in a similar manner to the British graphic artists they celebrated in their writings.