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Originality and Taste: Kant on Shakespeare's Genius

Abstract: From the earliest sources up to the *Critique of Judgement*, we can identify some variations in Kant's thinking on artistic creation. The most significant variation that occurred during the pre-critical period, and which took place towards the end of the silent decade, is the specification of genius as a feature of art-making. Kant began to mention Shakespeare as a genius. In relation to the figure of Shakespeare, there is another significant turn in Kant's thinking about artistic creation. This change is expressed in the *Critique of Judgement*, where Kant omits Shakespeare's name and, moreover, adds an explanation of the technical aspects of artistic creation. The present study analyses the evolution of Kant's thinking on artistic production, with a particular focus on the two significant turns that occurred in this intellectual journey. It provides an explanation of these turns, offering a perspective on their implications for Kant's philosophical position.

Keywords: Aesthetic Ideas, *Critique of Judgment*, Genius, Kant, Shakespeare

Introduction

During the 18th century, the figure of William Shakespeare was considered one of the focal points of the debates on artistic creation. His name, however, is not mentioned in a key text in the history of such debates: the *Critique of Judgement*. The fact that Kant did not mention it in his text does not mean, however, that he was unaware of and uninterested in the polemics about his dramaturgy. In fact, Shakespeare is one of the names mentioned in the anthropology lecture notes currently available. I intend to explain the omission of Shakespeare in the *Critique of Judgement* by means of an evolutive historical reading of the doctrine of genius. I argue that between 1770 and 1790 there are two significant alterations in the Kantian view of genius. The first alteration occurred from the middle of the silent decade and caused Kant to specify the notion of genius, and to begin to employ it only to explain artistic creation. The second alteration occurred in the

following decade and brought back previously omitted elements of artistic production, such as training and the culture of genius. I think the omission of Shakespeare is specifically linked to this second change.

In the first section of the text, I will analyse the early vision of genius. For this, I will use the class notes of his students as my main source. In the second part of the text I will deal with what I consider to be the first major change in the Kantian view of genius, which in my interpretation is linked to the reception of Alexander Gerard's thought. In the third section I will analyse what is new in the *Critique of Judgement*, in what I consider to be the second change that motivates the omission of Shakespeare as an example of genius.

1. Kant's pre-critical period and genius as an original talent in general

The overall aim of this section is to analyse the evolution of this concept during the silent decade. Two important pieces of research have previously been done on this topic. Piero Giordanetti (1995) found some changes throughout these years. His main hypothesis is that the relation of the concept of genius to artistic production was not modified until the KU, while its association with science and mechanical arts was. For Giordanetti, the principal reason for this change is the evolution of the Kantian doctrine of taste.¹ It seems to me that the restriction of the concept of genius to the artistic sphere is not already developed in the lectures of the silent decade. But, like Giordanetti, I think that crucial changes in Kant's thoughts are related to his knowledge of Alexander Gerard's book about genius.

Long before Giordanetti, an exhaustive study of the precritical Kantian reflections on this topic had already been made by Giorgio Tonelli (1966). In his work, we can find a detailed explanation of the evolution of the principal notions involved in the doctrine of genius. One of the numerous contributions made in his paper is the explanation of the concept of spirit and its relation to the concept of genius. According to Tonelli, the concept of spirit has a more general meaning than the concept of genius in Kant's reflections before 1776. After that, spirit is considered merely as an animated talent. Tonelli quotes a reflection according to which genius requires spirit, but also involves Judgement and taste.

In this section, I will examine the changes in the Kantian doctrine of genius through the silent decade, using the precritical lecture notes as my

¹ Giordanetti, P., 1995. Das Verhältnis von genius, Künstler und Wissenschaftler in der Kantischen Philosophie. *Kant-Studien*, 86(4), p. 409.

main source. Some manuscripts based on Kantian early lectures are studied.² Two sets of manuscripts from 1771 and 1772, the Blomberg Logic and the Philippi Logic respectively, are currently available. There is also a text from the middle of the silent decade, the Hinz Logic (1775). In these sets of notes, four major topics related to genius are discussed. These are, namely: i) the difference between acquiring knowledge through rules and mere understanding, ii) the concept of *Originalgeist* in opposition to the spirit of imitation, iii) the concept of spirit and iv) the empirical determinations of the development of genius. Firstly, in the Blomberg Logic, Kant introduced the concept of genius to explain different ways of acquiring knowledge. One way is by learning. To learn, it is necessary to have a spirit of imitation (*Nachahmung*). Furthermore, some rules are involved in this process.³ By imitating other people we develop the ability to create artefacts. Another way of learning is through instruction, which requires explicit rules. Through instruction, we improve our ability to develop scientific knowledge.⁴ On the other hand, some sciences, such as Philosophy, also require a healthy (*gesund*) or common (*gemein*) understanding. This healthy understanding is necessary for aesthetic Judgements too.⁵ We can, then, acquire knowledge with rules – through imitation or instructions, or without rules – through our healthy understanding.

In connection with this healthy understanding and the development of those sciences, Kant introduces the idea of the “spirit of genius,” which he explicitly confronts with the imitation of others’ understanding. While in sciences such as Mathematics it is possible to learn through the imitation of others’ faculties, Philosophy needs this specific spirit.⁶ For this reason, Kant concludes that “to Philosophy belongs more genius than imitation.”⁷ Philosophy is presented as a science of genius and genius is described as

² There are many difficulties that have to be taken into account in investigating them. On this topic, s. Conrad, E., 1994. *Kants Logikvorlesungen als neuer Schlüssel zur Architektonik der Kritik der reinen Vernunft. Die Ausarbeitung der Gliederungsentwürfe in den Logikvorlesungen als Auseinandersetzung mit der Tradition*. Frommann-Holzboog, pp. 52–61; Hinske, N., 1999. *Tra Illuminismo e critica della ragione. Studi sul corpus logico kantiano*. Scuola Normale di Pisa, p. 12; Sánchez Rodríguez, M., 2015. Estudio preliminar. In: Kant, I. *Lecciones de Antropología*. Comares, p. xvii.

³ V-Log/ Blom, AA 24: 16.

⁴ V-Log/ Blom, AA 24: 17.

⁵ Kant repeats later that there are sciences that need genius, such as Philosophy and beauty sciences, and, on the other hand, sciences that require imitation, such as the useful sciences and Mathematics. V-Log/ Blom, AA 24: 299; V-Log/ Phil, AA 24: 494.

⁶ V-Log/ Blom, AA 24: 19.

⁷ V-Log/ Blom, AA 24: 20.

an “original spirit.” This is a spirit that never imitates.⁸ There are sciences of genius and sciences that have to be learned. Philosophy is a science of genius because a philosopher wants to demonstrate his ideas and define his concepts.⁹ He doesn't have a book and needs to develop his own method.¹⁰ Thus, according to Kant, there are two kinds of science – sciences of imitation and sciences of genius. The latter are not capable of being taught. So we cannot learn Philosophy, but we can learn Mathematics. Kant does not explain the reasons for this difference. It seems to be related to the intuitive feature of the principles of Mathematics, which is not to be found in Philosophy.¹¹ Another aspect linked to the necessity of genius in the development of science is that the discovery of new knowledge has no rules. For this reason, it cannot be produced through mere imitation.¹²

Kant stresses these considerations at the end of his lectures on Logic. He indicates the contrast between the capacity of imitation and the capacity of genius.¹³ He does not reserve the word “spirit” to describe the latter alone. Indeed, he also mentions a “spirit of imitation.”¹⁴ In these lectures, then, the concept of spirit seems to be less specific than in the later lectures, where it will be considered as a particular feature or even as a synonym of genius.

In the Philippi Logic, dated a year later, the difference between taste and genius is also registered.¹⁵ Taste is not genius, although genius has

⁸ V-Log/ Phil, AA 24: 321.

⁹ It is important to consider this early explanation of the opposition between the sciences of genius and the sciences of learning/ imitation. Giordanetti thinks that Gerard's influence can be detected here (Giordanetti, P., 1995. *Das Verhältnis von genius, Künstler und Wissenschaftler in der Kantischen Philosophie. Kant-Studien* 86(4), 688f.), but it seems that the Kantian doctrine had already been developed. The same is to be remarked about the “vocaboli tedeschi,” including words such as *Kopf* and *Nachahmung* (ibid., p. 690).

¹⁰ V-Log/ Phil AA 24: 322.

¹¹ V-Log/ Blom, AA 24: 53.

¹² V-Log/ Phil, AA 24: 495.

¹³ They are opposed. V-Log/ Phil, AA 24: 493.

¹⁴ V-Log/ Blom, AA 24: 299.

¹⁵ The relation between taste and genius has been a major topic of discussion. Alexander Pope described genius as an irreducible dimension within taste and learning (Pope, A., 1711. *An Essay on Criticism*. London: Lewis, 48f). In *An Essay on Taste*, translated into German in 1766, Alexander Gerard wrote a chapter about it. According to him, both spring from imagination and do not have a regular relation (Gerard, A., 1759. *An Essay on Taste*. London, p. 177). Later, Herder established a priority of taste. This is considered by Herder as a presupposition of genius. Indeed, taste is described as a set of faculties, while genius is considered as some kind of ordering of them (Herder, J. G., 1964. *Ursachen des gesunkenen Geschmacks bei den verschiednen Völkern, da er geblühet*. In: *Herders Werke in fünf Bänden*, drittes Band. Aufbau Verlag, p. 158).

taste.¹⁶ Unfortunately, this difference is not explained in the notes. Finally, another aspect of the doctrine of genius that is elaborated in this lecture describes some empirical determinations of the development of genius. The notes refer to some conditions verified in the countries where genius is specially cultivated. In countries that are small and free, like Greece and England, beauty sciences (*schöne Wissenschaften*)¹⁷ and Philosophy can be improved.¹⁸ For Kant, Germany seems to be a place where genius is not cultivated.¹⁹

Kant also talked about genius in his courses on Anthropology. Several manuscripts of Anthropology notes have been published in the *Akademie Ausgabe*. Two of these might be based on the lectures of the winter semester of 1772/73. They are the so-called Collins and Parow Anthropology. A further set from the winter semester 1775/76 has been published as the Friedländer Anthropology. In them, we can find a study of three principal topics of interest. These are, namely, i) the concept of wit, ii) the explanation of our *Gemütsfähigkeiten*, and iii) the doctrine of genius.

For Kant, wit is a capacity that is necessary for the production of concepts since it makes it possible to compare representations and to find similarities between them. In this sense, it becomes necessary to consider the difference between wit and two other faculties, which are our Judgement and our understanding. Briefly, the main difference between wit and Judgement is that the latter differentiates between our representations, by identifying their variations, while wit recognizes their similarities. On the other hand, our understanding provides some formal element for concepts, while wit presents their content. For Kant, the development of these capacities in the European countries has been uneven: the Germans have great understanding, the English have better wit, and the French have good Judgement.²⁰

In the German translation of Baumgarten, the second meaning of *ingenium* was called *Kopf*. Kant explained this concept in his lectures. The *Kopf* is the totality of our faculties of knowledge. Each person has a proportion of them. This proportion makes a person able to improve

¹⁶ V-Log/ Blom, AA 24: 46; V-Log/ Hintz, AA 24: 943.

¹⁷ On the development and the meaning of this concept, see Strube, W., 1990. Die Geschichte des Begriffs 'schöne Wissenschaften'. *Archiv Für Begriffsgeschichte*, 33.

¹⁸ V-Log/ Phil, AA 24: 325.

¹⁹ V-Log/ Hinz, AA 24: 943. This topic is also developed in the lectures on Anthropology. V-Ant/ Par, AA 25: 437.

²⁰ V-Anth/ Coll, AA 25: 133, 152f. V-Anth/Par, AA 25: 341, 355. V-Anth/ Fried, AA 25: 515, 518.

some kind of science. Like Baumgarten, Kant identified an empirical, a poetical, a mathematical and a philosophical *Kopf*. So far, Kant remained faithful to Baumgarten. But a difference emerged when he explained the contrast between mathematical and philosophical *Köpfe*. For Kant, Mathematics can be considered an art, since it can be taught.²¹ In Mathematics we can follow some order²² and learn through instruction.²³ None of this is possible in the case of Philosophy. That science requires wit to change the disposition of the objects and analyse the consequences of this change.²⁴ A method cannot be developed through instruction, because we do not have a method for the development of methods. A method is something that we have to invent for ourselves.²⁵ Kant concludes that Philosophy is a science of genius.²⁶

The concept of *Kopf* in Baumgarten involves some proportion of our cognitive faculties, so that it seems to be the intellectual component of our *Naturell*. Kant explained the relation between these concepts in his lectures on Anthropology. In Collins, we can read that the innate aptitudes of the *Kopf* belong to *Naturell*.²⁷ In Parow, the former is defined as the set of our capacities of knowledge.²⁸ The concept of *Naturell* involves our capacities (*Fähigkeiten*) and our faculties (*Vermögen*). The capacities of knowledge are called *Kopf*, while the active faculties of knowledge are called *genius*.²⁹ In Friedländer, there is a change. *Naturell* is presented as the totality of our capacities (*Gemütsfähigkeiten*). The *Kopf* seems to be a part of it, since it is defined as the sum of our forces of knowledge (*Erkenntniskräfte*). Talent, on the other hand, is the totality of our gifts (*Gemütsgabe*). If *Naturell* is an aptitude of apprehending, talent is related to the capacity of creating. Genius is a capacity to create, i.e. a talent, without any instruction.³⁰

The concept of genius is defined in Collins and Parow as an *original spirit*.³¹ In Parow, it is, moreover, defined as a spirit from which we

²¹ V-Anth/ Coll, AA 25: 164.

²² V-Anth/ Par, AA 25:364.

²³ V-Anth/ Fried, AA 25: 556.

²⁴ V-Anth/ Coll, AA 25: 164.

²⁵ V-Anth/ Fried, AA 25: 556.

²⁶ V-Anth/ Coll, AA 25: 164. V-Anth/ Fried, AA 25: 556.

²⁷ V-Anth/ Coll, AA 25: 226.

²⁸ V-Anth/ Par, AA 25: 363.

²⁹ V-Anth/ Par, AA 25: 436.

³⁰ V-Anth/ Fried, AA 25: 554f.

³¹ V-Anth/ Coll, AA 25:167. V-Anth/ Par, AA 25: 366.

can derive the origin of our thoughts.³² The spirit is not to be confused with genius. Several things express spirit, such as a speech, a society or a picture, without being products of genius.³³ Spirit is what vivifies (*das Belebende*);³⁴ it is a principle of life.³⁵ Kant underlined the idea of an “original spirit.” This originality is opposed to imitation.³⁶ This opposition, which is maintained in Friedländer,³⁷ becomes meaningful when we consider i) the difference between Mathematics and Philosophy, and ii) the mistakes in German education. It seems that, for Kant, there is no necessity of originality in Mathematics. This science can be taught because it has stable rules. German pedagogy, on the other hand, is grounded in the idea of copying. This is the reason why there are no German geniuses.³⁸

In Friedländer, genius is described as a creative talent that *has* spirit.³⁹ The doctrine of genius is explained more profoundly here. Genius is presented as innate⁴⁰ and rare.⁴¹ It is a capacity for creating without instruction – so that it cannot be learned or obtained, – or rules.⁴² Genius is described as *free* of rules. Moreover, it is a model of rules. Imitators take its productions as a pattern. In other words, it does not follow rules, but provides them.⁴³

Note that Kant emphasises that rules are, however, critical. Everything we do is organised by rules. People without genius cannot overlook the rules. They are necessary for life. It is furthermore crucial to note that genius itself provides the rule when it produces something. For genius, there is no given rule. For this reason, standard forms of education can be unfavourable to genius. In school, people are taught to respect the rules. According to this kind of instruction, they cannot act without rules. But that is precisely what genius does.⁴⁴ In other words,

³² V-Anth/ Par, AA 25: 437.

³³ A “spirit of observation” is, furthermore, mentioned. It is to be found in the medical *Kopf*. V-Anth/ Par, AA 25: 363.

³⁴ V-Anth/ Coll, AA 25:167. V-Anth/ Fried, AA 25: 557.

³⁵ V-Anth/ Par, AA 25: 366.

³⁶ V-Anth/ Coll, AA 25: 167, 227. V-Anth/ Par, AA 25: 437.

³⁷ V-Anth/ Fried, AA 25: 557.

³⁸ V-Anth/ Coll, AA 2: 227. V-Anth/ Par, AA 25: 437.

³⁹ V-Anth/ Fried, AA 25: 557.

⁴⁰ V-Anth/ Fried, AA 25: 556.

⁴¹ V-Anth/ Fried, AA 25: 557.

⁴² The thesis that genius cannot be learned is established in the lectures on Metaphysics of this period, i.e. the so-called Metaphysik L1, too. Cf. V-Met, PM 164.

⁴³ V-Anth/ Fried, AA 25: 556f.

⁴⁴ V-Anth/ Fried, AA 25: 556.

there are ruled and unruled actions. Unruled actions alone correspond to genius and are restricted to its genial production. Standard forms of education are not adequate to the end of developing this kind of production.

Some of these issues are further developed in the notes on Philosophical Encyclopaedia. Kant taught this subject from 1767 to 1782, with a three years interruption between 1772 and 1775, but we only have some notes taken around the middle of the silent decade.⁴⁵ In the notes based on Kant's lectures, we find a classification of the sciences. On the one hand, there are the sciences of erudition (*Wissenschaften der Gelahrtheit*), such as History. On the other hand, there are the rational sciences (*Wissenschaften der Einsicht*), such as Mathematics and Philosophy.⁴⁶ The difference between the latter is, for Kant, related to their form, and not to their objects.⁴⁷ Philosophy is the science of concepts, while Mathematics is the science that constructs them. For that reason, Philosophy is a discursive science while Mathematics is an intuitive one.⁴⁸ Another significant difference between them is the following. Mathematics can be taught: there are rules that one can learn in order to become a Mathematician. This is not so with Philosophy. We cannot memorise a system of Philosophy and then teach it. First of all, there is no such perfect system to be memorised. There is no model to be imitated. Secondly, Philosophy is not just a set of pieces of knowledge. It also involves a method. Someone who would teach Philosophy should explain how to philosophise.⁴⁹

According to this idea of Philosophy, there are some expectations about the nature of a philosopher. A philosopher is not supposed to be superstitious, nor an imitator. Philosophy, like the taste, needs genius and not imitation.⁵⁰ At this point, the question arises about the nature of genius. Genius is not the same as talent. It is, nevertheless, a kind of

⁴⁵ Kühn, M., 1983. Dating Kant's Vorlesungen über philosophische Enzyklopädie. *Kant-Studien*, 74, pp. 302–13.

⁴⁶ PhilEnz, AA 29: 5.

⁴⁷ This is a thesis that Kant reiterates from the very beginning of the sixties. In the commented notes on logic, however, the classical rationalistic thesis, according to which the difference between Mathematics and Philosophy is determined by their objects, is also stated by Kant. See Deut, AA 2: 276, V-Log/Blom, AA 24: 24.

⁴⁸ PhilEnz, AA 29: 6. This contrast is also presented in the lectures on Anthropology. In Friedländer, the mathematical talent is described as intuitive, while the philosophical talent is a discursive one. Cf. V-Anth/ Fried, AA 25: 558.

⁴⁹ PhilEnz, AA 29: 7.

⁵⁰ PhilEnz, AA 29: 10.

talent. Genius is a talent from which many others originate, and it is free of ends. Kant also stated that the talent needed in Philosophy, i.e. genius, is quite different from the talent needed by the builder who constructs concepts, i.e. the Mathematician.⁵¹ A philosopher must have wit and the capacity of considering abstractly the singular and concretely the general.⁵² He cannot imitate and requires genius, like taste.⁵³

2. The first turn: Kant and Gerard⁵⁴

In 1774 a major contribution to the topic of genius was published by Alexander Gerard. This is his *Essay on Genius*. In 1776, the text was translated into German, by Christian Garve.⁵⁵ Kant got notice of this book immediately.⁵⁶ Indeed, he wrote an annotation on it in those years. Specifically, in R494⁵⁷ Kant suggested an objection to Gerard. He accused Gerard of considering genius as a particular capacity of our soul. In this case, genius would have a determinate object. Instead, it is, according to Kant, a *principium* for the vivification of our capacities through the ideas of the desired objects. Kant considered two different ways of producing. On the one hand, we can produce a determined object through one of our faculties. There is no explanation of the nature of this object and its determination. On the other hand, some principles can stimulate our capacities with the idea of the desired object.

An invention is the product of the stimulation of our faculties and not just a result of any of them. This invention requires an idea of the desired object and this idea intervenes in the stimulation. Without this idea, which is conceived as an aim of our production, we do not produce

⁵¹ PhilEnz, AA 29: 12.

⁵² PhilEnz, AA 29: 13.

⁵³ PhilEnz, AA 29: 10.

⁵⁴ In his book on this topic, Bruno considers Gerard as the main influence on Kant. I agree with him in considering Gerard as a great influence, but the basis for his conviction is not clear. See Bruno, P., 2010. *Kant's Concept of Genius*. Continuum, p. 30ff.

⁵⁵ On the reception of Gerard's *Essay*, see Klukoff, P. J., 1967. Review of Alexander Gerard. An *Essay on Genius* (1774), ed. by B. Fabian (Theorie und Geschichte der Literatur und der Schönen Künste, vol. III). München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 5(3), pp. 201–202.

⁵⁶ A very detailed study of the relevance of Gerard for the evolution of Kantian doctrine of genius has been carried out by Piero Giordanetti (1991). Joãozinho Beckenkamp (Beckenkamp, J., 2015. Kant und Gerard über Einbildungskraft. In: Dörflinger, B., Rocca, C. La, Loudon, R., Azevedo Marques, U. R. de. *Kant's Lectures / Kants Vorlesungen*. Walter de Gruyter; Beckenkamp, J., 2016. Kant e Gerard sobre imaginação. *Studia Kantiana*, 20, pp. 117–127) argues that the target of Kant's criticism was not actually Gerard, but a comment on Gerard, written by Johann N. Tetens.

⁵⁷ R. 494, phase φ, 1776–1778, in AA 15: 420f.

an invention, but an accidental discovery. An invention is something that has been produced in accordance with an idea. There is another Kantian consideration that is to be explored. This is, namely, a comparison between the stimulation of our cognitive faculties through an idea and the sharpening of our learning capacities.

Briefly, Kant distinguishes two different doctrines of genius. On the one hand, genius can be considered as (a) a singular power. This, according to Kant, is Gerard's idea of genius. On the other, it can be considered (b) as a principle of the animation of the other powers. I think that in the comparison between (a) and (b) and in the preference for (b), an argument with three moments is to be identified. The first moment is related to the *object* that is produced by genius. If genius were a power, its object would be a determinate one. But a genius as a principle of animation involves ideas of wanted objects. For Kant it seems obvious that the product of genius must be undetermined. The second step in Kant's argumentation is related to the *action* of genius: genius *invents*. Somebody who invents is considered a genius. However, in order to invent, having a great power of learning isn't enough. For this reason, a genius, i.e., someone who invents, is not just a person with developed powers. The third step in Kant's argumentation distinguishes invention from discovery. An invention is a creation of something that did not exist before. One discovers something that actually existed but was not known. To the end of inventing, it becomes necessary to have some idea. Then genius is an animation of powers through some ideas of a wanted object. To sum up, Kant considers that genius is not a power, but an animation of our powers. His argumentation is grounded on three premises. These are: i) invention does not suppose a determined object, ii) inventing is not the power of learning, iii) inventing is not discovering. Through this triple negation, Kant puts forward the representation of a genius who invents thanks to an animation of their powers through ideas.

The concept of idea is in this context especially meaningful. On the one hand, a stimulating idea grounds the possibility of the production of an object that is not determined. The product of a singular faculty is determined, but the product of our stimulated faculties can be whatever we want to produce. On the other hand, however, because of this idea, the product is not an accidental discovery, but an invention. The reason for this is that the idea functions as an end.

According to Beckenkamp, it is possible that R949 does not refer directly to Gerard's book. I think, however, that the analysis of the main

theses of Gerard's work makes it evident that the objections contained in this reflection are pertinent *apropos* of them, even if Kant had not read Gerard directly. Firstly, Gerard describes a genius as someone who has numerous powers. But the power that makes them a genius is their imagination. For Gerard, as for Kant, a genius invents. But invention is directly associated with a singular power, i.e., the imagination, and this association can be considered the target of Kant's objections. In the second place, a common misreading in the consideration of genius is the belief that it consists in the capacity of learning. This belief involves two mistakes. Firstly, it forgets that the capacity for learning belongs to the human condition, and is not, for this reason, a privilege of genius. Secondly, this belief does not consider that learning involves Judgement and memory, but not imagination. Kant picks up the argument of the difference between inventing and learning, and uses it against Gerard. To this end, Kant associates the capacity of learning with the development of a power, on the one hand, and invention with the animation of *all* powers, on the other. Thirdly, Gerard mentions two kinds of geniuses. Artistic genius produces beauty. Scientific genius discovers truths. Kant objects to this second kind of genius. In the analysed reflection, Kant explicitly regrets the assignment of discovery to genius. As a consequence of this differentiation and the identification of the genial task with inventing, the idea of a scientific genius should not be accepted.

2.1 The last years of the silent decade

In agreement with Tonelli's view, I think that, perhaps as a consequence of Kant's contact with Gerard's ideas, there was a turn after 1776. In the previous section, we studied the Kantian objections to Gerard's doctrine of genius – or to some interpretation of it. Kant considered that genius was not a singular faculty, but a harmonious unification of our faculties. These objections were presented in R 949. We have just one set of manuscripts that corresponds to the precritical lectures on Anthropology after this reflection. This is the Pillau Anthropology (1777–78).

Mixed up with the repetition of some topics that have been developed in the previous courses, such as the independence of genius from rules, its presentation as a source of rules and the emphasis on its innate character, we can find in the above-mentioned annotations some issues first presented in R 949. In Pillau, indeed, the distinction between inventing and discovering, the topic of the unity and harmony of our

faculties and the concept of an idea are explained. We can find other innovations that could be related to Gerard's book but are not mentioned in R 949. During the final years of the decade, Kant developed a concept of spirit that is not to be identified with the French concept "*esprit*" and is considered a synonym of genius. In what follows, we will examine our sources, in order to mention some insights that were developed before the reflection and maintained in Pillau, analyse the effects of the criticism of Gerard and describe and explain the changes matured in Pillau.

There are three main opinions that Kant preserved from the beginning of the decade. The first of them is the representation of genius as being free of rules. Furthermore, in Collins, Kant described the poet as having some freedom concerning the intellectual rules.⁵⁸ In addition, he still emphasised genial originality and linked it with spirit.⁵⁹ Finally, he insisted on discussing a topic that could be considered critical at the beginning of the decade. This is, viz, the contrast between Philosophy and Mathematics. If Philosophy is to be considered a science of genius, Mathematics can be learned. This last point indicates that in the lectures of the end of the decade the restriction of genius to the sphere of art had not yet appeared. At the beginning of 1778, Kant still stated that there were sciences of genius.⁶⁰

In this set of notes, the difference between discovering and inventing, which played a significant role in the criticism of Gerard, is explained. Kant introduced it as an explanation for some phrases that are used in everyday speech. We say that someone has discovered something if they were the first in finding what was already there. In this set, there are two good examples of this kind of experience. Firstly, Kant repeated the instance of the discovery of America. Then, he mentioned the discovery of heliocentrism. America was already existent when Columbus arrived, and the Earth was already moving around the Sun before Copernicus. On the other hand, the above-mentioned example of the invention is Pythagoras' theorem.⁶¹

As in the previous lectures, in Pillau the concept of genius is linked with the invention.⁶² Two main features of genius are emphasised in the notes. It is first all a *principium* of the new and an original talent. Sec-

⁵⁸ V-Anth/ Col, AA 25: 761f.

⁵⁹ V-Anth/ Col, AA 25: 783.

⁶⁰ V-Anth/ Col, AA 25: 784.

⁶¹ V-Anth/ Pill, AA 25: 758.

⁶² V-Anth/ Pill, AA 25: 784.

ondly, it has spirit, which makes it rare.⁶³ Both features are connected, since genius and spirit can be considered identical, and originality is their main feature.⁶⁴ There is a detailed explanation of these concepts in the notes. It is to be emphasised that Kant did not confuse imagination and genius. He inquired into the nature of the mentioned *principium* of originality. For him, this nature cannot be easily defined. The products of the imagination are chaotic, but the product of genius is organised according to an idea.⁶⁵ Moreover, genius cannot be considered as a singular faculty. The spirit, according to Kant, is not a faculty, but something that gives unity and harmony to our faculties.⁶⁶

The concept of spirit received much attention in this lecture. In the French language, the concept of “*esprit*” is ambiguous and means not only genius, but also wit.⁶⁷ In the German language, two different words refer to different talents. Our talents are aptitudes to make use of certain faculties. They are gifts.⁶⁸ Wit is a talent required for comparing things.⁶⁹ Spirit is a talent to invent or create.⁷⁰ As mentioned previously, this capacity of invention involves a special unity and harmony of our faculties. Although it is not easy to explain the relation between this disposition of our capacities and a gift that makes us able to invent. Kant does so through the doctrine of ideas.

First of all, the concept of spirit can be considered as an adjective.⁷¹ We can use it to describe a book, society or even a person. We say that they have spirit and we mean that they are stimulated (*belebend*). This representation of being stimulated is linked to a particular disposition of our faculties, in which they are in a harmonious play (*harmonische Spiele*). This harmony can make us eloquent, if our concepts are stimulated, or poetic, if our sensibility is stimulated.⁷² Poetry and eloquence seem to be two spiritual talents. The stimulation of our sensibility

⁶³ V-Anth/ Pill, AA 25: 784.

⁶⁴ Cf. V-Anth/ Pill, AA 25: 772, 782.

⁶⁵ V-Anth/ Pill, AA 25: 783.

⁶⁶ V-Anth/ Pill, AA 25: 782.

⁶⁷ V-Anth/ Pill, AA 25: 782. This point is not explained in the studied sources. Tonelli states that spirit is called *genius* by the French because the word *esprit* means ‘wit’. (Tonelli, G., 1966. Kant’s Early Theory of Genius (1770–1779): Part II. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 4(3), p. 116).

⁶⁸ V-Anth/ Pill, AA 25: 780.

⁶⁹ V-Anth/ Pill, AA 25: 753f.

⁷⁰ V-Anth/ Pill, AA 25: 781.

⁷¹ Tonelli considers that we can find several meanings for the word “spirit” in Kant’s reflections during these years. (Tonelli, G., 1966. Kant’s Early Theory of Genius (1770–1779): Part II, *ibid.*, p. 115)

⁷² V-Anth/ Pill, AA 25: 772.

through an idea produces the harmony that characterises genius. This idea is not an intellectual concept. Intellectual concepts are originated by our understanding through abstraction. An idea is a design for a whole and involves its unity. This kind of representation is necessary when we want to produce (*verfertigen*) something or to design a whole science.⁷³

According to this interpretation of the text, genius originates new, original representations. It has a spirit that provides harmony to its faculties through ideas. This harmony is actually a stimulation of sensibility that makes genius able to invent. This invention is not grounded in rules or intellectual concepts. Moreover, it is based on ideas, which are drafts or designs of desired representations. For this reason, genius is free from the coercion of rules,⁷⁴ since it is not stimulated by concepts and does not follow them in order to create. The origins of this creation do not lie in abstraction, but rather in ideas.

3. The second turn: Kant on Shakespeare

In relation to the issue I am interested in addressing in this section of my paper, which is the Kantian view of William Shakespeare as a genius, the documents of the 1770s and 1780s exhibit a subtle, but not non-existent, process in which some changes can be seen. I have already pointed out the effect on these documents of Kant's reception of Alexander Gerard. Moreover, since the 1780s, Kant's doctrine of genius seems to have become much more specific, including a detailed treatment of the faculties of genius, the notion of aesthetic ideas, and the role of scholastic training in the manifestation of genius.⁷⁵

One of the most evident changes over the two decades prior to the publication of the *Critique of Judgement* concerns precisely the scope of genius. In the 70s, Kant still admitted the possibility of genius expressing itself in some areas of knowledge. Already in the *Critique of Judgement*, he not only rejected the consideration of outstanding scientists, such as Newton, as holders of genius, but even restricted the list of artists he included in this select group.

One of the most notable cases is precisely that of William Shakespeare. Although, according to the testimony of his students, Kant mentioned him in his lectures in the 1780s, his name does not appear in the

⁷³ V-Anth/ Pill, AA 25: 782.

⁷⁴ V-Anth/ Pill, AA 25: 784.

⁷⁵ For a detailed explanation of this, see Martínez, L., 2020. El desarrollo del genio artístico, *Con-Textos Kantianos*, 11, pp. 176–190.

edition of the *Critique of Judgement*. In order to suggest some reasons for this omission, we will first briefly comment on the relevance of the dramatist in the Enlightenment discussions of genius. Secondly, we will dwell on the passages in the Kantian corpus in which he is mentioned. Finally, we will review the changes in the consideration of genius in the years between these passages and the publication of the *Critique of Judgement*.

3.1 Shakespeare's controversial genius

At the end of the 17th century, certain poetic ideas were developed in France that sought to regulate artistic production in accordance with Aristotelian indications, reinterpreted. This artistic movement had supporters of the stature of Nicolas Boileau. Already in the first lines of the third canto of his *L'Art poétique* (1674), Boileau makes clear what the basic rules of dramaturgy are. William Shakespeare's plays violated such rules. His figure has been instituted, precisely, as a paradigm of the break with neoclassicism and of a revision of the possibility of establishing rules for art.⁷⁶

In France, in Voltaire's texts, references to Shakespeare combine praise with harsh criticism. If Voltaire recognises him as the father of English theatre and does not fail to point out his genius, the bad taste, banality and chaos of his plays are also identified by the French author.⁷⁷ In England, Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) relegate the problem of taste to the background and rescue, instead, the *originality* of Shakespeare's work. The modern writer must make a choice: either repeat tradition or invent something new. The original genius chooses the second of these options. For Young, moreover, excessive admiration of the classics must be avoided, for it could act as an inhibitor of creativity.⁷⁸ In this direction, Alexander Gerard mentions Shakespeare as a model of supreme genius. Gerard, however, highlights the relevance of judgement in artistic production and points out that although in Shakespeare's work judgement is subordinated to genius, its

⁷⁶ Cf. Olszevicki, N., 2022. El concepto de 'genio' en la Francia pre-Ilustrada. In: Martínez, L., E. Ponce, E. *El genio en el siglo XVIII*. Herder, pp. 13–32.

⁷⁷ Cf. Brandão, R., 2014. Voltaire sobre Shakespeare e Newton ou o gênio e o gosto nas artes e ciências. *Discurso*, 1(44), pp. 161–188.

⁷⁸ Nascimento, L., 2022. Crear y apreciar: el genio en la Inglaterra del siglo XVIII. In: Martínez, L., E. Ponce, E. *El genio en el siglo XVIII*. Herder, pp. 77–100.

function is not eliminated.⁷⁹

In Germany, Johann Christophe Gottsched tried unsuccessfully to maintain the classical French roots, even avoiding the use of the term “genius”. The English influence, however, was massive. The doctrine of genius in Germany was immediately confronted with attempts to subsume artistic creation under rules, and in the work of numerous thinkers such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Johann Gottfried Herder it was directly associated with the example of Shakespeare.⁸⁰ Herder links artistic genius with the ability to express the spirit of a nation in an epoch. The rules had succeeded in capturing this element in classical antiquity, but their recovery by the moderns constituted a kind of blindness, a mistake. Shakespeare's creative capacity consists, for Herder, precisely in being able to express the spirit of an epoch.⁸¹

3.2 Mentions of Shakespeare in the Kantian corpus

In this general framework, it is interesting to note that we find some mentions of the dramatist in Kantian sources. Most of these sources are notes from students attending Kant's courses. Admittedly, these sources present specific difficulties,⁸² but they serve as testimony that Kant was aware of the aforementioned controversies and intervened by defending Shakespeare's genius in his lectures. There is a reference to Shakespeare in the lectures on Philosophical Encyclopaedia, supposedly taken in 1775/76. Kant discusses the utility of literature for the development (*Bildung*) of the human character and mentions the case of the Shakespeare's *Comedien*. Kant states in the text that to this end it is crucial that the work is produced by genius.⁸³ In a similar way, the Shakespearean

⁷⁹ Amaral, A., 2022. El genio y la naturaleza humana según Gerard. In: Martínez, L., E. Ponce, E. *El genio en el siglo XVIII*. Herder, pp. 127–146.

⁸⁰ Del Valle, J., 2022. Dos glosas sobre A. G. Baumgarten dentro de la historia del concepto de genio en el siglo XVIII. In: Martínez, L., Ponce, E. *El genio en el siglo XVIII*. Herder, pp. 147–170.

⁸¹ López Domínguez, V., 2022. La idea de genio en Herder y el Sturm und Drang. In: Martínez, L., Ponce, E. *El genio en el siglo XVIII*. Herder, *ibid.*, pp. 191–208.

⁸² For an insight into the difficulties involved in working with lecture notes and the methodological issues to be taken into account, see Conrad, E., 1994. *Kants Logikvorlesungen als neuer Schlüssel zur Architektonik der Kritik der reinen Vernunft. Die Ausarbeitung der Gliederungsentwürfe in den Logikvorlesungen als Auseinandersetzung mit der Tradition*, *ibid.*, pp. 52–61; Hinske, N., 1999. *Tra Illuminismo e critica della ragione. Studi sul corpus logico kantiano*, *ibid.*, p. 12. Also, about Kant's “double life thesis” and the relationship between what he taught in his classes and what he wrote in his works, cf. Sánchez Rodríguez, M., 2015. Estudio preliminar, *ibid.*, pp. xvi–xix.

⁸³ V-Phil Enz, AA 29: 29.

comedies had already been referred to in the previous Lectures on Anthropology. Both in Collins⁸⁴ and Parows⁸⁵ a passage from *As You Like It* is invoked. This reference is to be found in Home's *Elements of Criticism*, too. Like Home,⁸⁶ Kant considered that Shakespeare deeply understood the human heart, and, for this reason, his work was useful for anthropological research.⁸⁷

At the very beginning of the silent decade, Shakespeare was mentioned in relation to the concept of esthetical perfection. This requires taste, spirit, sensation (*Empfindung*) and Judgement. The distinction between them and their relation is unfortunately not explained. It is stated that some of them are to be found in different proportions within different countries. In Germany the Judgement is more developed, while in France people have better taste. In Shakespeare's texts we can find spirit, *but not taste*.⁸⁸ This topic is also introduced in the lectures *Menschenkunde* (1780/1781). In this source, the requirements for genius are examined. They are, namely, sensation, Judgement, spirit, and taste. Sensation involves sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*) and imagination. It is, so Kant, specially developed in Shakespeare. The British author is not identified in this lecture as an example for spirit, but for sensation.⁸⁹

The lack of taste in Shakespeare's work is mentioned in these notes as well. An interesting metaphor is used there to explain the relation between the faculties that are required by genius. This is the metaphor of a tree. The relation with vegetation for the description of genius was already used in Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759).⁹⁰ Kant introduced it for the first time, according to the available documents, in the lectures on Anthropology of the winter semester 1781/82. He explained the original, i.e. genial, production as a mirror of a tree, in which each element has a meaning, i.e. a function. The taste is presented as the flower of the tree, which makes this one pretty but not productive. The actual product of the tree is a fruit. We can get, then, original products, that is: fruits, that do not involve taste. Shakespeare is mentioned as an example of this kind of production. His work is not delicate, but rough.⁹¹

⁸⁴ V-Ant/ Col, AA 25: 120.

⁸⁵ V-Ant/ Par, AA 25: 336.

⁸⁶ Home, H., 2005. *Elements of Criticism*. Liberty Fund.

⁸⁷ V-Anth/ Fried, AA 25: 472; V-Anth/Mensch, AA 25: 858.

⁸⁸ V-Ant/ Col, AA 25: 175, n.

⁸⁹ V-Anth/ Mensch, AA 25: 1060.

⁹⁰ Ritter, J., 1971. Genie. In: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. Schwabe Verlag, v. 3, p. 283.

⁹¹ V-Anth/ Mensch, AA 25: 1062; also, V-Anth/ Mrong, AA 25: 1312; R.1509, AA 15:823.

In the same notes, Shakespeare is considered as a paradigm of another crucial aspect of genius. Since the beginning of the silent decade, genius had been described by Kant as the opposite of imitation. A genius produces without copying others' productions. It creates originals and does not follow rules. This is the point in which Shakespeare appears in *Menschenkunde* as the best example of genius. He did not respect the classic drama rules. The reason for this is not some lack of knowledge. His imagination is rich and not to be limited by external rules. As a genius, he is not a slave of rules but a master of them. His own, free creations are to be considered as rules. Conventional rules go against the possibility of the development of genial products. However, this is not to be considered as an apology of disobedience, but as a *licentia poetica*.⁹²

Without later explanation, Shakespeare is finally mentioned in some manuscripts from the end of the 1780 decade. There his name is used to differentiate genius from mere talent. This one is able to be cultivated and developed. Genius, on the other hand, is just given and cannot be increased.⁹³ After this, the only remaining reference to the British author is in the published text of *Anthropology*. This reference, however, does not refer to the writer's aesthetic virtues, but to one of his characters' capacity to fantasise.

In short, the passages under discussion highlight one of Shakespeare's virtues: his originality. This originality is linked to his genius and not to a talent. It also involves a deviation from the rules which Kant admits only as poetic licence. But over the years Kant also pointed out a weakness of the dramatist, associated with his lack of taste. His work is neither subtle nor meticulous, but crude and rough.

3.3 A piece of speculation: about the lack of Shakespeare in the Critique of Judgement

In the most elaborate and careful text devoted to the study of genius, Shakespeare is not mentioned. I refer in particular to the explanation of the doctrine of genius that Kant included in the deduction of judgements of taste in the *Critique of Judgement*. In this account of the subject, Kant does not mention Shakespeare. Considering that this writer was regarded by several thinkers as a model of genius and that Kant himself had mentioned him earlier, the omission may come as a surprise.

⁹² V-Anth/ Mensch, AA 25: 1057.

⁹³ V-Anth/ Dohna, Ko 171; V-Anth/ Bus, AA 25: 1496.

Within the limitations of this contribution, we cannot analyse the changes in the doctrine of genius as it is presented in the *Critique of Judgement*. Nevertheless, I would like to highlight some peculiar aspects of this text. First, the doctrine of genius appears in the context of a justification of the thesis that judgements of taste are based on a priori principles. The guiding thread of the text is provided, precisely, by the investigation of reflective judgement. In this framework, the doctrine of genius allows Kant to introduce a key notion for understanding beauty. This is presented, after all, as an expression of aesthetic ideas.⁹⁴ Kant explains the possibility of judgements of taste about artistic objects through an analysis of the concept of art that concur in the explanation of genius. Thus, in the general investigation of the a priori principles of reflective judgement it becomes possible for Kant to intervene in the debate about genius, which had already developed extensively in and outside Prussia. The Kantian doctrine of genius contains numerous specificities. One of them is that it includes a notion of the spirit and, with it, of aesthetic ideas. The inclusion of aesthetic ideas in this context also constitutes real progress in the understanding of beauty. For this notion makes it possible to understand what natural beauty and artistic beauty have in common and makes the possibility of pure aesthetic judgement in general comprehensible.

Aesthetic ideas have their origin in a highly developed imagination, which for Kant is a talent.⁹⁵ The *expression* (*Ausdruck*) of these ideas, however, involves two aptitudes.⁹⁶ On the one hand, it is necessary to find a suitable concept to present them. Aesthetic ideas cannot be exposed (*exponiert*), since they are representations of intuition for which no concept is adequate. However, they can be presented (*dargestellt*).⁹⁷ Finding a concept that presents an aesthetic idea is a skill of the spirit.⁹⁸ But this only provides the material for the art. The material of art is, I repeat, an aesthetic idea associated with a concept. The work of art also requires someone to give form to that material. Giving form to the material consists of presenting it through words, or marble manipulation, or a combination of aquarelles. Although beautiful art differs from mechanical art, in the *Critique of Judgement* Kant mentions that the production of beautiful art

⁹⁴ KU, AA 05: 320.

⁹⁵ KU, AA 05: 342.

⁹⁶ This broader view of the notion of genius, found in the *Critique of Judgement*, has already been described in detail by Robert Clewis, who distinguishes a 'thin' and a 'thick' version of it. (Clewis, R., 2023. *The Origins of Kant's Aesthetics*. Greenwich Medical Media, p. 103f).

⁹⁷ KU, AA 05: 342.

⁹⁸ KU, AA 05: 314.

does involve a mechanical aspect. Here Kant recaptures the importance of the scholastic training of the artist. Thanks to it, the artist is able to elaborate his material and “come out on top before the Judgement.”⁹⁹

In the whole consideration of art that Kant develops, rules and schools have a function.¹⁰⁰ It is true that much of the development of the doctrine of genius, especially during the pre-critical period, is closely linked to the investigation of the conditions under which it is possible to think and create without following models. A crucial question in this framework is the question of the role of education in relation to the production of genius. Kant is emphatic about the thesis that genius is innate and not acquired, and cannot be learned. Furthermore, the philosopher wonders whether and how it is possible that education does not affect the possibility for genius to express itself. The school, in the various spheres of human experience, appears to be the space to teach and train people to follow the rules. This is precisely the opposite of genius. The concern about the possibility of the school becoming an obstacle to the expression of genius is a constant in Kant's thought, according to the available evidence.

In the *Critique of Judgement*, however, the references to school education are less unambiguous. On the one hand, Kant is still aware that the genius aspects of artistic beauty cannot be learned and that mere teaching does not make us capable of producing beautiful art. Beautiful art does not follow rules, but provides new rules and is therefore original.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, however, Kant recognises that school is the place where technique is trained. It is at school that artists learn the details of metrics, the manipulation of materials and the elements of harmony.¹⁰² The notion of genius associated with the figure of Shakespeare was a kind of negation of this.

It has already been pointed out in more exhaustive research works than this one that the omission of Shakespeare may be associated with an intervention by Kant in the context of the emergence of Romanticism.¹⁰³ By virtue of the general thread of the 1790 text and the function that the

⁹⁹ KU, AA 05:310.

¹⁰⁰ J. Lemos has analysed in detail the difficulties that arise in the passages of the KU dealing with genius around these theses. He finds and resolves some tensions that we do not elaborate here. See: Lemos, J., 2017. *Se e como poderá uma obra de arte ser bela*. Madrid: CTK E-Books, Ediciones Alamanda, p. 232ff.

¹⁰¹ KU, AA 05: 307.

¹⁰² KU, AA 05: 309.

¹⁰³ Del Valle, J., 2004. *Der Kompass und die Segel. Kants Bestimmung der Kunst und des Genies, Inauguraldissertation zur Erlangung des Grades eines Doktors der Philosophie der Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg*. Publisher.

doctrine of aesthetic ideas has in it, I think that, in addition, there are internal, systematic motives in the work that can also make this decision of the philosopher from Königsberg explainable. These reasons have to do with the fact that along with the spirit, other talents are required for artistic beauty, such as Judgement. With a cultivated doctrine of aesthetic ideas it becomes clear that a multiplicity of talents is involved in the expression of them. And such talents, in the usual view of the time, are not present in Shakespeare's compositions.

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