

somit als Träger des aufklärerischen Sexualdiskurses angesehen werden, wie er in Deutschland unter französischem Einfluss populär war. Erotik führte in der baltischen Aufklärungsliteratur jedoch zu keinem eigenständigen Diskurs, wie wir ihn in der libertinen französischen Literatur des späten 18. Jahrhunderts finden können. Da sich unter der Herrschaft Katharinas II. nur wenige Autoren des Themas annahmen, wurde es entsprechend den jeweiligen persönlichen Interessen auf ganz unterschiedliche Art und Weise benutzt. Die weitreichendste Wirkung muss dabei wohl Hupel zugesprochen werden, der mit seiner die ständische Ordnung stützenden, anti-revolutionären Interpretation der Sexualität die Erotik der baltischen Aufklärung wohl am deutlichsten auf den Punkt brachte.

SUMMARY

*Libertine Literature and the Erotic
of Baltic Enlightenment*

Baltic literature of the 18th century, prudish as it seems to be at first read, could not do without erotic and sexual stimulation, insinuation and the prickle of the prohibited. Libertine and clandestine literature imported from France and Germany played a role in the everyday reading pleasures of the upper classes, a role likely even more important than emphasized in this article.

Although it is not easy to find traces of the “erotic of enlightenment” – to adopt a phrase coined by Robert Muchembled – within Baltic German literature of the late 18th century, three examples from quite different fields of literary production have been analyzed. While Peter Ernst Wilde, a physician, preached the moderation of all kinds of pleasures, the clergyman August Wilhelm Hupel, one of the most renowned writers of the Baltic enlightenment, delighted himself and his readership with descriptions of nude Baltic peasant women and even let himself be seduced to fieldwork on the physical and moral meaning of virginity among Baltic peasants. August von Kotzebue, one of the most ambivalent and productive writers of his time, known mostly for his plays written for the local theatre in Reval, risked his good reputation as an author with a play full of obscenity that was published to influence cultural politics. Pornography was a weapon in his writing directed against the growing influence of the “German Union of the 22”, a secret society close to the Illuminati.

None of the men were born in the Baltic provinces. All of them came to the Baltics as mediators of the erotic culture of enlightenment spread in

Germany under the influence of pre-revolutionary France. While erotic writings have had direct political intention in France, the Baltic examples referred to in the article did not create a homogenous “Baltic erotic discourse”. Although censorship was extraordinarily liberal under the reign of Catharine II, few authors dared to speak directly about erotic subjects, and they did that in very different ways, and for different purposes. Among the three Baltic authors considered, it can be argued that August Wilhelm Hupel had the greatest influence on local society. In his writings, the “erotic of Baltic enlightenment” was clearly voyeuristic, and helped with its clear anti-revolutionary intention to stabilize the Baltic estate system.