

Rada Bieberstein (Ed.)

Beyond Prince Achmed

New Perspectives on Animation Pioneer
Lotte Reiniger

SCHÜREN

Contents

Acknowledgements	7
Contributors	9
Rada Bieberstein	
Lotte Reiniger beyond Prince Achmed	13
Aneka Meier and Christiane Schönfeld	
Lotte Reiniger and Female Creativity in the Weimar Republic	31
Katherine Rochester	
Silhouette Films, Weimar Cinema and Ornaments from the Orient	71
Angela Breidbach	
“In der Welt ists dunkel.”	
Zur Symbolik des Schattens bei Lotte Reiniger	109
Tashi Petter	
“Life in London, Lotte Loves it”	
An A to Z of Lotte Reiniger’s Early Years in Exile	145
Evamarie Blattner	
DREAM CIRCUS – Ein unvollendeter Traum	207
Rada Bieberstein	
“I hate all theories and have none!”	
Lotte Reiniger’s Writings on Animation	225
Jörg Herrmann	
Bruno J. Böttge und Lotte Reiniger	263
Hannes Rall and Bernhard Schmitt	
Tradigital Shadows	
Southeast Asian Silhouette Animation in the Twenty-First Century	299
Rachel Palfreyman	
Hand, Paper, Scissors	
Lotte Reiniger’s Fabrications and the Paper Art of a Post-Digital World	327
List of Figures	361
Index	363

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Evamarie Blattner is the vice director at the Stadtmuseum of Tübingen since 2005, responsible for exhibitions and the collection of Lotte Reiniger. She studied art history, history and educational science at Tübingen university and Freie Universität Berlin. Her doctoral thesis explored early graphic series of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. She was vice director at the Kunstmuseum Spendhaus Reutlingen, lecturer

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Jörg Herrmann, born 1941, trained as a joiner. Later he worked as an animator for the DEFA Studio für Trickfilme (DEFA animation studio). He completed his school education in evening classes and studied directing at the film school Babelsberg. His Diplom thesis dealt with the particularities of animation. Later he took a correspondence degree course in Philosophy during which he wrote various articles. His doctoral thesis also engaged with the specificities of animation. Since 1982 he has owned an animation studio. In 1992 he founded the mediahaus Kreisch. There he produces animation films, in particular silhouette animations. He also teaches. Among his publications is a chapter on the origins and the characteristics of the art of animation for *Die Trick-Fabrik: DEFA-Animationsfilme 1955–1990* (Bertz, 2003).

Aneka Meier is a Part-time Lecturer in the Department of German Studies at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. Originally from Heidelberg, Germany, she resides in County Tipperary, Ireland with her family. Previously, she held a teaching position at East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania. She received her PhD from the University of Florida in 2008. The focus of her dissertation, *Working Girls: Fictional Representation of Female Office Workers in Weimar Germany*, is the depiction of young female white-collar workers in popular fiction during the interwar years in Germany, and particularly in Berlin. Her current research interests include Weimar Culture, technology-enhanced language learning, world language teaching in primary school, and parental involvement in multimedia systems for primary school children.

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A German Dream: Regional Loyalties and National Identity in German Culture 1890–1990 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000). She has published on German contemporary cinema, especially on the theme of Heimat, as well as on the Weimar cinema including “Life and Death in the Shadows: Lotte Reiniger’s *Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed*” *German Life and Letters*, 2011.

Tashi Petter is a researcher and curator based in Berlin, who completed her PhD in Film Studies at Queen Mary, University of London. Her doctoral thesis explores the interwar period when Lotte Reiniger settled temporarily in Britain. A feminist excavation of silhouettes, letters and other archival fragments, this project re-frames Reiniger’s 1930s films and writings through a number of prisms: filmmaking-as-craft, folk modernism, the sponsored silhouette. Tashi enjoys sharing her work in public spaces and curating events including reconstructions of 1930s film society programmes. Her publications include a chapter on Reiniger’s sponsored films for *Animation and Advertising* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) and a forthcoming article for *animation: an interdisciplinary journal*.

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Katherine Rochester is the Director of Curatorial Research at VIA Art Fund (New York / Boston). A specialist in German modernism, contemporary art and film, she has published numerous essays on experimental animation in interwar Europe and co-edited the book *Intersubjectivity Vol. 2: Scripting the Human* (Sternberg Press). Recent exhibitions include *Bauhaus Beginnings* and *MONUMENTality*, both at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. Her research has been supported by the Center for Advanced German and European Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin, the Getty Research Institute, the National Endowment for the

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Bernhard Schmitt is Assistant Professor for animation at the School of Art, Design and Media at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore. Since his graduation from Mainz University of Applied Sciences Bernhard has worked as animator and animation rigger for a variety of international studios, notably Walt Disney Animation and Aardman Animations. As screenwriter, director and creative producer he oversaw several independent projects, such as a series of animated music videos for the German band “die ärzte”. Prior to joining NTU he scripted and directed episodes for the German TV show DER SANDMANN. Bernhard’s research interests are in the areas of stop-motion animation, experimental animation and interdisciplinary research in art and technology.

Christiane Schönfeld studied in Freiburg, Bonn and at The Pennsylvania State University, where she completed her PhD in 1994. After lecturing at the University of Wales (Lampeter, GB) and the National University of Ireland, Galway, she was appointed Head of the Department of German Studies at Mary Immaculate College (University of Limerick) in 2009. Among her publications are *Dialektik und Utopie: Die Prostituierte im deutschen Expressionismus* (1996) and *The History of German Literature on Film* (2022), edited and co-edited volumes such as *Commodities of Desire: The Prostitute in German Literature* (2000), *Denkbilder* (2004), *Practicing Modernity: Female Creativity in the Weimar Republic* (2006), *Processes of Transposition: German Literature and Film* (2007), *Representing the ‘Good German’ in Literature and Culture after 1945: Altruism and Moral Ambiguity* (2013), *Ernst Toller. Sämtliche Werke* (2015), *Ernst Toller in Exile* (2022), and articles on German literature and cinema, focusing especially on Weimar and exile cultures, adaptation, creative women of the 19th and 20th century, and representations of alterity.

Lotte Reiniger beyond Prince Achmed

Lotte Reiniger, the animation pioneer and life-long promoter of silhouette animation fascinates animation artists around the globe to this date. *THE TALE OF THE THREE BROTHERS* in *HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS – PART 1* (Yates, USA/UK 2010) is probably the most widely known example of animation film that testifies to Reiniger's lasting influence as animator Ben Hibon has created a masterpiece made of silhouettes and puppets, intricate lace and translucent layers of shadows.¹ Reiniger is a household name in animation history. Her artistic mastery and inventiveness, the first to-date preserved feature-length animation film *DIE ABENTEUER DES PRINZEN ACHMED* (*THE ADVENTURES OF PRINCE ACHMED*) completed in 1926² and the construction of the first multi-plane camera years before Walt Disney patented his one in 1940³ have secured her place in animation history and its canon of films, where still few female animation artists are included.⁴ Yet, these well-known facts and films tend to focus Reiniger's work on *THE ADVENTURES OF PRINCE ACHMED* and marginalise her more than 60 years of creative work and contribution to the establishment of animation as an art form.⁵

- 1 Desowitz, Bill. "Shadow Play with 'Potter's Tale of Three Brothers.'" *Animation World Network*, 3 Dec. 2010, <https://www.awn.com/animation-world/shadow-play-potters-tale-three-brothers>.
- 2 The year of production or release of Lotte Reiniger's films indicated depends on the source used and may vary in different contributions of the collection.
- 3 Schönfeld, Christiane. "Lotte Reiniger and the Art of Animation." *Practicing Modernity: Female Creativity in the Weimar Republic*, edited by Christiane Schönfeld, Würzburg, Königshausen & Heumann, 2006, 182–184.
- 4 Buchan, Suzanne. "Introduction: Pervasive Animation." *Pervasive Animation*, edited by Suzanne Buchan, New York, Abingdon, Routledge, 2013, 6; Pilling, Jayne. "Historical Milestones: Who Gets to Tell Whose Stories? (Or ...the dilemmas of programming...)." *Tricky Women: Animationsfilm-Kunst von Frauen*, edited by Birgitt Wagner and Waltraud Grausgruber, Marburg, Schüren, 2011, 9–35.
- 5 See Bendazzi, Giannalberto, and Ulrich Wegenast. "Lotte Reiniger." *Animation: A World History – Volume I: Foundations – The Golden Age*, edited by Giannalberto Bendazzi, Boca Raton, CRC Press, 2016, 63; Furniss, Maureen. *Animation: The Global History*. London, Thames & Hudson, 2017, 74–76.

Building on the invaluable research produced on Lotte Reiniger so far in dedicated books and the rising number of articles that have been recently published,⁶ *Beyond Prince Achmed* further explores the life and work of Reiniger. Although there is still plenty to be discussed about THE ADVENTURES OF PRINCE ACHMED, this collection of original essays broadens the discourses on Reiniger to include little considered works, life periods and aspects in her art. New perspectives on Reiniger are introduced such as the author and business woman, the networker, the animation critic. Then, *Beyond Prince Achmed* continues the call first made by William Moritz in 1996 and again by Rachel Palfreyman in 2010 to engage more deeply with Reiniger's work and to look beyond the dark surface of her enchanting silhouettes.⁷

- 6 See more recent publications, for example, Blattner, Evamarie, and Dorothee Kimmich, editors. *Lotte Reiniger im Kontext der europäischen Medienavantgard.* Tübingen, Universitätsstadt Tübingen, 2011; Fitzner, Frauke. *Lotte Reiniger: Zur Rolle der Musik im frühen Film.* Tübingen, Universitätsstadt Tübingen, 2011; *Lotte Reiniger – Tanz der Schatten / Lotte Reiniger – Dance of the Shadows.* Marschall, Susanne, Rada Bieberstein and Kurt Schneider. DVD. Berlin, absolut medien, 2012; Blattner, Evamarie, Bernd Desinger, Matthias Knop and Wiebke Ratzeburg. *Animation und Avantgarde: Lotte Reiniger und der absolute Film / Animation and Avant-garde: Lotte Reiniger and Absolute Film.* Tübingen, Universitätsstadt Tübingen, 2015; Rochester, Katherine. "Close-Ups and Fast Cuts: Physiognomy, Choreography, and the Silhouette Films of Lotte Reiniger." *Physiognomisches Schreiben: Stilistik, Rhetorik und Poetik einer gestaltdeutenden Kulturtechnik*, edited by Hans-Georg von Arburg, Benedikt Tremp and Elias Zimmermann, Freiburg, Rombach Verlag, 2016, 243–264; Grace, Whitney. *Lotte Reiniger: Pioneer of Film Animation.* Jefferson, McFarland & Company, 2017; Rall, Hannes. "Lange Schatten einer Pionierin: Der Einfluss von Lotte Reiniger auf nachfolgende Trickfilmer-Generationen." *Märchen im Medienwandel: Zur Geschichte und Gegenwart des Märchenfilms*, edited by Ute Dettmar, Claudia Maria Pecher and Ron Schlesinger, Stuttgart, J. B. Metzler, 2017, 101–120; Happ, Alfred. *Lotte Reiniger 1899–1981: Schöpferin einer neuen Silhouettenkunst.* 2nd ed., Tübingen, Universitätsstadt Tübingen, 2018; Cleghorn, Elinor. "In a Tiny Realm of her own: Lotte Reiniger's Light Work." *Women Artists, Feminism and the Moving Image: Contexts and Practices*, edited by Lucy Reynolds, Bloomsbury Academic, 2019, 39–56; Petter, Tashi. "Sponsored Silhouettes: Lotte Reiniger's 'Useful' Films in Britain." *Animation and Advertising*, edited by Malcolm Cook and Kirsten Moana Thompson, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 73–88; Ruddell, Caroline, and Katharina Boeckenhoff. "Lotte Reiniger: The Crafty Animator and Cultural Value." *The Crafty Animator: Handmade, Craft-based Animation and Cultural Value*, edited by Caroline Ruddell and Paul Ward, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 75–98; Rochester, Katherine. "Visual Music and Kinetic Ornaments: Lotte Reiniger and the Animation Avant-Garde in Weimar Berlin." *Feminist Media Histories*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2021, 115–146.
- 7 Moritz, William. "Some Critical Perspectives on Lotte Reiniger." *Animation – Art and Industry*, edited by Maureen Furniss, New Barnet, John Libbey Publishing, 2009, 13–19; Palfreyman, Rachel. "Life and Death in the Shadows: Lotte Reiniger's Die Abenteuer des Prinzen Achmed." *German Life and Letters*, vol. 64, no. 1, 2011, 6–18.

Beyond Prince Achmed

“Lotte Reiniger was certainly exceptional, but also a product of her time.”⁸ Aneka Meier and Christiane Schönfeld develop this point by placing Reiniger’s life and work up to the early 1930s in the greater context of female creativity in the Weimar Republic. The authors frame those years of Reiniger’s life by referring to the horrific experience of World War I, the rise of the Weimar Republic and social changes such as the emergence of the “New Woman”. The analyses of gender roles by the contemporary of the time Alice Rühle-Gerstel, for example, and the concept of expression dance enrich the reading of Reiniger’s art and her position as an artist of this period. The authors proceed to embed Reiniger among the creative women in the Weimar Republic that have contributed to the diversity of artistic modernity in literature, arts, dance and film singling out artists such as Hannah Höch, Jeanne Mammen, Mary Wigman, Valeska Gert and Anita Berber. Despite many creative women of the Weimar Republic having been recently (re)discovered, many more names have been lost, as Meier and Schönfeld argue. Reiniger is certainly one of the artists who has not been forgotten. She is not absent from animation history and yet her contribution to this history beyond *THE ADVENTURES OF PRINCE ACHMED* still has to be brought to light.

Lotte Reiniger’s evolution of style in the films of the Weimar Republic is the focus of the contribution by Katherine Rochester, which she addresses through a discussion of Orientalism and the use of ornament, chinoiserie and Egyptian hieroglyphs. A close analysis of three films – *DER FLIEGENDE KOFFER* (*THE FLYING TRUNK*, Germany 1921), *THE ADVENTURES OF PRINCE ACHMED* and *DER SCHEINTOTE CHINESE* (*THE SEEMINGLY DEAD CHINAMAN*, Germany 1928) – identifies “the rhythmic force of ornament”⁹ as central to Reiniger’s style and artistic means. In the comparison between the visualisation of orientalism in live-action film of the time and the animator’s reworking of the theme, Rochester shows how, “Reiniger overturned both racial stereotype and artistic convention to diffuse the trope of the exotic hieroglyph across a cast of characters starring in oriental

8 See this collection Meier and Schönfeld, 40.

9 See this collection Rochester, 76.

and European fairy tales alike"¹⁰. Indeed, the analysis of Reiniger's style foregrounds her consciousness as an author and as an artist who expresses her own vision. Essential to this contribution is Rochester's call for a sharp distinction between silhouette and shadow in the discourse on the work of the artist. She stresses that "silhouettes and shadows signified differently on film"¹¹. In consequence, this affects the reception and analyses of Reiniger's animation films.

In the production process of her animation films Lotte Reiniger clearly separated silhouette from shadow and in her writings she underlined the silhouette's distinction as an independent artistic form.¹² Attributing to the spectator an active role in the interpretation of Reiniger's work, Angela Breidbach looks at the little-explored aspect of the reception of her films. She investigates what happens when the spectator "turns the silhouette into shadow"¹³ as he watches the films and through his imagination begins to 'illustrate' the shapes and outlines he recognises on screen. Breidbach introduces different connotations of shadow and silhouette in art history and psychoanalysis to discuss how in the spectator's imagination the silhouette can turn into what she calls *Schattenbild*, a shadow image. The argument is developed on the understanding of the silhouette as a metaphor and includes William Kentridge's reflections on the potential mistranslation of metaphors in his own art work, which is indebted to Reiniger's art. Ultimately, the metaphoric shadow image is linked to one of Reiniger's pre-dilected subjects – fairy tales. Breidbach concludes that, "the actual poetic potential of Reiniger's films lies with [...] what she calls 'limitations of your medium'. Their [the silhouettes'] partial indefiniteness and emptiness is transferred into the underlying associative medium of the shadow images."¹⁴ Whilst being well aware of reading Reiniger's work against the animation artist's insistence on her films

10 Ibid., 103.

11 Ibid., 81.

12 Reiniger, Lotte. *Shadow Theatres and Shadow Films*. London, Batsford, 1970, 13.

13 See this collection Breidbach, 119. "Umschlag von der Silhouette in den Schatten". All translations of the contributions of this collection are my own.

14 Ibid., 140. "Das eigentliche poetische Potential von Reinigers Filmen liegt [...] in dem, was sie die 'Begrenzung der Ausdrucksmittel der Schattenfiguren' nennt. Deren partielle Unbestimmtheit und Leere überträgt sich in das darunterliegende, assoziative Medium der Schattenbilder."

being silhouette films rather than shadow films in terms of production practice, the author's exploration of the silhouette turned into a shadow image by the spectator's imagination might allow new interpretations of Reiniger's work.¹⁵

New light is also shed on some of Lotte Reiniger's films of the 1930s. Those years in the life of the animation artist have not been fully researched so far. Through a range of archival material, Tashi Petter offers a detailed reconstruction and analysis of the artist's time in Britain during that period. The letters to patron and publisher Bryher and one of Reiniger's famous *Geschenkbücher* (gift books) – *Alphabet for Bryher* – *Christmas 1935* (1935) – serve as a guide. The facts and contexts emerging from the original material introduce a variety of aspects: On the one hand, Petter's analysis shows Reiniger's time in London as a period of "fame and success"¹⁶. Even more, "her multifarious promotional activities (exhibitions, talks, interviews, articles) and appearances in the press surely rivalled the media attention devoted to her male contemporaries at the time"¹⁷. This positive reception of Reiniger in Britain was strongly enabled by a network of women including, for example, Olwen Vaughan from the London Film Institute Society and Elsie Cohen, the manager of the Academy Cinema in London, who supported her integration into British interwar film culture. During that period in London, Reiniger continued the development of her aesthetic style, which she engaged with since the 1920s. Reiniger's intention to establish her work as a brand, also building on her public image in Britain and negotiating further her integration into British culture, is particularly evident in the analysis of *THE KING'S BREAKFAST* (UK 1936), which Petter located in the vaults of the British Film Institute. Indeed, the reconstruction of Reiniger's work and life during the 1930s in London introduces her also as a business woman, an aspect in the animator's image which has been little considered and, if at all, mostly seen in negative terms looking at the difficulties to promote *THE ADVENTURES OF PRINCE ACHMED* with Fox in America.¹⁸ On the other hand,

15 Ibid., 110, 144.

16 See this collection Petter, 154.

17 Ibid., 184.

18 Shandley, Robert. "Zur Rezeption der Filme Lotte Reinigers." *Lotte Reiniger im Kontext der europäischen Medienavantgarde*, edited by Evamarie Blattner and Dorothee Kimmich, Tübingen, Universitätsstadt Tübingen, 2011, 90–98.