CHAPTER 1
HAMLET ODER HEKUBA'S GENESIS

Introduction

Carl Schmitt's *Hamlet oder Hekuba* (1956) is commonly referred to as a "little book" [*Büchlein*]. Indeed, it comprises no more than sixty-six pages—seventy-two, if we consider the sixth edition, revised and augmented.[27] The digest-size book's contents are divided into eight brief sections, two of which are appendixes. The aforementioned sixth edition adds the until recently unpublished 1956 conference entitled "What have I done?" ["Was habe ich getan?"], a private dissertation held in Peter Diederichs' home, one of the sons of the famous publisher Eugen Diederichs, given before his host and some other guests[28]. This monograph on *Hamlet* posits a particular thesis: Shakespeare's play was elevated into a myth as history—a concrete "piece of time"—intruded in it, enhancing its autonomous power and converting the play into a mythical entity. *Hamlet* is thus understood to be a political affair representing the events that surrounded the days of James I and Mary Stuart. This interpretation leads, in turn, to the following two sub-hypotheses: (1) the "taboo of the Queen"; namely, Mary Stuart's infamous remarriage, and (2) the "Hamletization of the avenger"; i.e., the never-ending intellectual procrastination of the prince. The first sub-hypothesis performs as a "historical parallel", an idea that Schmitt took up from Lilian Winstanley and then extended it according to his own reflections on the jurisprudential meaning of such a taboo. Schmitt points out the power of the concept of "play" [*Spiel*] by comparing the abiding status of drama, both serious and real. The conjunction of these elements made *Hamlet* so historically rich that it turned into a "modern myth." Thus, tragedy—according to Schmitt—flawlessly addresses history, just as history enables and drives higher art.

Despite its brevity, Schmitt's *Büchlein* is truly a powder keg of a monograph. In fact, as I aim to demonstrate in the following analysis, *Hamlet oder Hekuba* is at once a political manifesto, a curious, enticing exercise of self-interpretation, and a witty and dead-serious portrayal of a post-war world. While *Hamlet* could be seen as another mask plucked by

27. The first edition of *Hamlet or Hecuba* is, indeed, seventy-two pages long.
28. See chapter 5 (5.1).

Schmitt from literature's[29] hall of fame, the melancholic prince avidly channels Schmitt's intellectual elements into a fitting endeavor. Schmitt's 1956 study of Shakespeare dwells on both esoteric and exoteric dimensions. Its thesis on "parallels", "allusions", and "intrusions", aim at demonstrating how modern history mirrors itself not in the reflection of classic tragedy, but in the delay of concrete actions. In the following chapters, I will closely read and analyze the sources and theses used and presented by Schmitt. My goal is to elucidate the structure, method, and vocabulary of *Hamlet oder Hekuba*. I will now offer a full-fledged account of it.

1.1 A possible system of reading *Hamlet oder Hekuba*

It is important to mention that, despite being published in the mid-fifties—that is, amidst a fair amount of essays and monographs where Schmitt, on the one hand, continued the topics that he had first raised in the 1940s (international law, the concept of *nomos*, Hobbes's political theory, etc.), and, on the other, began to address the new crop of German intellectuals (Karl Löwith, Eric Voegelin, Reinhart Kosselleck)—the monograph on *Hamle*t was slowly put together upon a *geistigen Weg* (spiritual path) on which the main themes mentioned above—tragedy and history—are discussed by recurring to esoteric, non-academic sources. This viewpoint will distinguish Schmitt's writings from the beginning of the fifties onward. For example, at the very beginning of his essay on *Hamlet*, Schmitt makes the following warning:

> The following pages discuss the taboo of a queen and the figure of the avenger. This discussion leads into the question of the true origins of the tragic action, the question of the source of the tragic, which I can only locate in a historical reality.[30]

So far, so good. The theses are presented; namely, the unspoken principle that guides the drama toward history (the "taboo of a queen") and the unseen growth of subjectivity due to an utter avoidance of duty (the status of the "avenger"). Nonetheless, from these theses, one cannot simply be drawn to "the question of the origin of the tragic action" or "the source of

29. See Jiang 2017, 66–91; Mehring 2016, 142–143; Höfele 2022.
30. Schmitt 2009b, 5.

the tragic"; that is, the nexus between these theses and "historical reality" is not immediately logical. It can be considered necessary only if the following hypothesis is considered to be suitable; that is, the normative aspect of the "historical reality" regarding the topic of the tragedy. Otherwise, one could easily posit a more fitting alternative to the case—just as Gadamer did in his critique of *Hamlet oder Hekuba* in one of the appendixes of *Truth and Method*;[31] for instance, the autonomous yet spontaneous—and, therefore, incomplete and not omniscient—quality of every work of art or artistic expression with regard to its time. But it seems that history determines the lifetime of the artwork.

However, it is precisely from this normative dimension enabled by "historical reality" that I will elaborate a reconstruction in both analytical and interpretative terms—and I will do so, to put it in Schmittian terms, by addressing the esoteric and exoteric dimensions of *Hamlet oder Hekuba*. Normative here refers to the centripetal force of historical situations. In order to establish a clear distinction—but also a degree of inner cooperation—between these dimensions, I will first present a thorough analysis of the monograph on *Hamlet*. Second, I aim to prove the connection between Schmitt's essay and other texts he has published. Establishing this connection would allow us to grasp the unsystematic yet coherent development of Schmitt's thought in his late work. Conversely, I also want to show how this material was strongly connected to the "spiritual path" followed by Schmitt in his later years. Finally, I will posit that the "historical reality" thesis is praised as "objective" by Schmitt only because it is through this objectivity that he detaches himself and his interpretation of *Hamlet* from any kind of Romanticism. Politics is better understood onstage.

1.2 The Sources

1.2.1 Walter Benjamin's *Der Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*

Just after the quoted statement regarding the method chosen for his analysis of *Hamlet*, Schmitt mentions three books that he considers to be apt for both the Shakespeare "lover" and the "expert." I will commence with the last one: Walter Benjamin's *Der Ursprung des*

31. Gadamer 2004, 498–500.

deutschen Trauerspiels (1928).[32] It needs to be stated that, however much Schmitt stresses how this and the other two investigations provided him with "valuable information," Benjamin's book can hardly be considered apt for those uninitiated in Shakespeare. Even if we were to accept Schmitt's view, the extent of the theoretical impact of Benjamin's *The Origin of the German Trauerspiel* on *Hamlet oder Hekuba* remains unclear. Nonetheless, I shall now quote a long excerpt from the extremely uncanny *Erkenntniskritische Vorrede*:

> If the task of the philosopher is to practice the descriptive exposition of the world of ideas, such that the empirical world enters of itself into the world of ideas and dissolves in it, then the philosopher attains the elevated midpoint between scientist and artist. The latter devises a diminutive image of the idea-world and precisely thereby—because he renders it as figurative—devises an ultimate image in each present. The scientist predisposes the world to dispersion in the realm of ideas by dividing it up from within by means of concepts. (8)

Benjamin distinguishes the "descriptive exposition" provided by the philosopher from the scientist's "predisposition" of the world. This distinction is intended to be both a critique and a defense of the problem of "presentation" [*Darstellung*] in philosophy—much like Hegel's gesture in the preface of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*,[33] although from a more phenomenological-Husserlian perspective. While I cannot fully address the philosophical core of Benjamin's *Epistemo-Critical Foreword* and its impact on Schmitt's reflection on *Hamlet*, this quotation proves its epistemic kinship with Schmitt's notion of "intrusion." The cold work of the scientist presupposes an immediate affinity between the chosen subject of study and its content. This affinity is no other than the supposed coherence between concepts and ideas—which explains why the term *Wahrheit* appears as often as it does in the preface. However, Benjamin demands a keen, phenomenological approach that serves as a "revelation that does justice" to the "truth." This is the reason why I included the above quotation by Benjamin; it is precisely the artist who can devise "an ultimate image in each present." When Benjamin posits the theme of "justice" [*Ob Wahrheit dem Schönen gerecht zu werden vermag?*] regarding the truth, he consciously addresses the normative aspect that the work of

32. Benjamin 2019, 134–142. Page references are given in parentheses in the text.
33. Hegel 2018, 6–7.

art—or, according to him, the artist—engages from its privileged interpretation of its context (Benjamin's "each present" [*des Wirklichen*]). This is strikingly familiar to Schmitt's considerations on how the "intrusion into time" is to be seen within its "historical reality." Hence, in both Benjamin and Schmitt, the artist positively accesses the authentic core of a context by crafting a genuine image of his present. The normative aspect of tragedy is granted not by its ruling concepts but by the adequate viewpoint where ideas reveal themselves in their chaotic yet organic unity. This explains Benjamin's well-known sentence:

> Ideas are to things as constellations to stars. This is to say, first of all: they are neither their concepts nor their laws. They do not serve the knowledge of phenomena, and in no way can the latter be the criterion determining the existence of ideas. Rather, the meaning of phenomena for ideas is exhausted in their conceptual elements. […] Ideas are eternal constellations […]. (10)

What is the relation between this quotation and Schmitt's thesis on "intrusion" and, more specifically, his statement about Benjamin's book being highly *wertvolle*? First, because ideas—following Benjamin—hold a superior status when compared with the interpretations achieved by way of concepts. "[I]deas are the objective virtual arrangement of phenomena," states Benjamin following Kant. This means that in order to achieve the epistemic community sought by concepts, the philosopher must address the phenomena—the content of which is not ideas, however—"as their representation." The German *Trauerspiel—Hamlet* included, according to Benjamin—is meant to be grasped in its nature as an idea:

> The idea is something linguistic and, indeed, in the essence of the word, it is in each case that moment in which the word is symbol. (13)

If I am bringing up these almost undecipherable considerations, it is in order to expose Schmitt's baffling treatment of Benjamin's views in his considerations on *Hamlet*. What I am suggesting is that, if Schmitt had meant to consider *The Origin of the German Trauerspiel* in all seriousness, he evidently would have started by connecting these initial remarks. Indeed, Benjamin's views are connected to his interpretation of history through the epistemic potential of tragedy—given its ability to explain history by way of a non-historical

approach—and, thus, so too is Benjamin's conception of art as a beacon of comprehension. However, Schmitt mentions Benjamin on only two occasions; the first is found at the very beginning of *Hamlet or Hecuba*, when he mentions the "three books"; his second and final mention of Benjamin takes the form of an allusion to the last chapter of Benjamin's post-doctoral thesis on the German *Trauerspiel*. I will not extend my analysis of Benjamin further. The aforementioned excerpts are sufficient enough to take issue with Schmitt's claims that this investigation was one of the crucial materials for *Hamlet oder Hekuba*. However, Schmitt's appraisal for Benjamin is guided by a specific interest that is hard to detect in his published material—in fact, only by studying his unpublished documents can one fully appreciate that Schmitt quoted Benjamin's work precisely in order to gain visibility in the democratic context that arose within the German academy after World War II. Also, Benjamin is not mentioned in Schmitt's 1957 conference in Aachen. The key references to fully understand the "Hamlet-myth" were some other authors, like Goethe, Schlegel, Hermann Türck, Julius Bab, etc.

1.2.2 John Dover Wilson's *What Happens In Hamlet*

The second book recommended by Schmitt is John Dover Wilson's *What Happens in* Hamlet (1935–[51]).[34] Granted, because this is by far the most quoted author in *Hamlet oder Hekuba*. Although Dover Wilson's *What Happens in* Hamlet—along with his lifelong work devoted to the Bard—is still considered a classic for its global mapping out of Shakespeare's most famous drama, its place in Schmitt's own study is, again, not completely clear. Schmitt relies on Dover Wilson for two reasons. The first and quite obvious point is that Dover Wilson highlighted Shakespeare's historical context and the importance of the figure of James I (278). However, the second reason—unclearly linked with the first one—is Dover Wilson's critique of Salvador de Madariaga's interpretation of *Hamlet*—subsequently quoted by Schmitt in the following section. Rallying against "Señor de Madariaga," Dover Wilson argues that:

34. Dover Wilson 2003, 321–326 at 5. Page references are given in parentheses in the text.

> [t]he foregoing conclusions, for example, rest upon a number of broad historical and political generalizations which, coming from so eminent a publicist, are not for me a mere commentator to question, but which an Englishman, who has read a little in the literature of Shakespeare's time, finds somewhat perplexing. (322)

One might ask: What conclusions are those? It bears recalling that de Madariaga's main thesis was that *Hamlet* could never be grasped following the approach of a "modern Englishman," for "[t]he era of Shakespeare is the era of Spain" (vii). De Madariaga aimed to prove that *Hamlet* was a "philosophical" portrayal of Cesare Borgia (327). Dover Wilson, on the contrary, provided a stylized critique of de Madariaga's vitriolic analysis. And just after laying bare de Madariaga's rhapsodic approach and interpretation, he concludes:

> This is to read *Hamlet* like a book, a historical monograph, or a personal record such as the *Autobiography* of Benvenuto Cellini, instead of being, as it was and is, an elaborate work of dramatic art, written for an acting company in London at the beginning of the seventeenth century. (328)

What is at stake for Dover Wilson is precisely the artistic genius of Shakespeare and the autonomous feature of this "work of dramatic art." In de Madariaga's case, *Hamlet* represents a work of art in which modern understandings of the play are inevitably skewed, while historical—and Hispanic—approaches catch the spiritual significance of Shakespeare's virtuous, moral, and deeply Catholic characters. The main problem with this type of identification is that it leaves the door open for a progressive asymmetry of, on the one hand, the cognitive potential of the work of art, and, on the other, the false impressions that an era might have of it. Following this perspective, Dover Wilson impressively warns of the dangers posed by de Madariaga's approach:

> […] while from among the various "psychological spines" offered by the critics, each age selects the one which corresponds best with the human type most in the popular eye. Thus it was left to the period of Hitler to reveal Hamlet as a ruthless paranoiac. Such in effect is Señor de Madariaga's solution; for though he speaks of the Spaniard Cesare Borgia, not the Austrian Adolf Hitler, the two men belong to the same type;

> and I hazard the guess that but for the paperhanger of Vienna the eminent publicist from Spain would never have taken to redecorating Hamlet's soul. (325)

However, it will be this kind of assimilation that Schmitt will outstrip with his thesis on "intrusion." Schmitt positively addresses the critique of Dover Wilson, but neither approves nor rejects Madariaga's claim. He merely mentions how this critique "demonstrates" the "unfathomability" of "the secret of Hamlet" (19). How, then, does he dismiss de Madariaga's thesis while simultaneously acknowledging its epistemic potential (something quite Hegelian)?[35] Schmitt stresses the value of Dover Wilson's exposition on the "three different views on ghosts and ghostly apparitions"[36] and then goes on to ask if, in not addressing the relationship between Hamlet and James I, Dover Wilson had not himself fallen prey to the aforementioned taboo. It must be noticed that it is by means of the thesis "of the taboo," in conjunction with the "Hamletization of the avenger," that Schmitt will craft his concept of "intrusion." De Madariaga missed the point in his interpretation of *Hamlet* by not addressing this very *Zusammenhang* in its profoundness; instead, he merely scratched the historical surface of the "modern myth" by the limited means of historical description and literary comparisons. Schmitt's "intrusions," on the contrary, develop the normative aspect of a crucial event—the "concrete situation"—by stressing how history fuels tragedy to the point of turning a "work of dramatic art" into a myth. Thus, de Madariaga's intuition is now recast into a new interpretation, now sufficiently broadened to include Dover Wilson's warning about seeing Hamlet through the popular, tormented eyes of a war-time public.

1.2.3. Lilian Winstanley's *Hamlet and the Scottish Succession*

Finally, the first book that Schmitt claims is crucial for *Hamlet oder Hekuba*: Lilian Winstanley's *Hamlet and the Scottish Succession: Being an Examination of the Relations of the Play of* Hamlet *to the Scottish Succession and the Essex Conspiracy*[37] (1921).[38] It is probably Winstanley's investigation on the historical connection between Shakespeare's

35. Hegel 2018, 16.
36. Schmitt 2009b, 28.
37. Page references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.
38. Schmitt's daughter, Anima, translated the book into German in 1952. See Winstanley 1952, 7–25. Schmitt's preface to the German edition is clearly the overture to *Hamlet oder Hekuba*.

tragedy and the political events surrounding the creation of *Hamlet* that made Schmitt consider establishing the "intrusion" thesis that fully articulates his book on *Hamlet*. But, then again, we face a blurry landscape when attempting to account for the impact of Winstanley's book on Schmitt's. I will anticipate that the critical notion common to both books is the concept of "history." Here are the very first words of Winstanley's *Hamlet and the Scottish Succession*:

> It is the purpose of the following essay to study the play of *Hamlet* from a somewhat fresh point of view by endeavoring to show its relation or possible relation to contemporary history. (1)

While for those readers whose knowledge of *Hamlet* ends with Fortinbras's seer-like last words or even for those familiar with Shakespeare Winstanley's statement may present a compelling point of view, the truth is that—following Schmitt's knowledgeable awareness of Winstanley's critiques—for some European scholars this whole "relation to contemporary history" was fanciful at best. Schmitt mentions "[o]ne well-known Anglicist in Zürich" who tried to "destroy the disruptive book once and for all."[39] Schmitt himself then mocks this critique and dismisses it. For both Winstanley and Schmitt, the core of *Hamlet* lied precisely in the strength of the relation between history and tragedy. However, while for him this connection was far from linear and far closer to an unrepeatable formula whose elements were able to renew the everlasting power of the myth, for Winstanley, the link between history and tragedy was the common theme of a strong, undeniable comparison:

> Is it probable that Shakespeare selected his material and chose his plot largely that his play might appeal to interests then paramount in the minds of his audience? (14)

So asks Winstanley after establishing an array of similitudes between Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *The Merchant of Venice* and respectively setting them against the historical context of sixteenth-century Scotland and the trial of Roderigo Lopez—a Jewish citizen who "attempted

39. The "well-known Anglicist in Zürich" is Bernhard Fehrn, who acridly dismissed Winstanley's all-too historicist thesis on Hamlet "being" James I. See Fehrn 1924, 1–15 at 7–8. According to Fehrn, Winstanley's far-fetched hypothesis is based on an erroneous equivalence between the work of art and that which attains, through the "artistic symbolic," an eternal-like status of "truth."

to murder the queen and Don Antonio: Lopez was executed in 1594" (11). Here is another difference between Schmitt's approach to *Hamlet* and Winstanley's: while for her, most of Shakespeare's dramas were subject to a "relation or a possible relation to contemporary history," according to Schmitt, on the contrary, only *Hamlet* surpasses the condition of historical sketch and reaches the "mythical" dimension of tragedy. According to this perspective, *Hamlet* is an exception. Although Schmitt does not mention this word, he was so fond of it in either his *Hamlet* essay or in the prologue of Winstanley's book German translation, that one easily can think of *Hamlet* as an exception to this view: an "intrusion" is certainly neither a formula, nor a genre. Despite how much Schmitt positively assimilates Winstanley's investigation, his claim of the historical strength of *Hamlet* being surpassed by the play's mythical dimension evidently were not sustained by Winstanley's expansive analogies. Schmitt did take sides with her when it came to the psychological scope given to the play by "modern criticism." Winstanley asks: "Are we justified in interpreting Shakespeare, as completely as we do, from a modern psychological standpoint? (22). Naturally, we are not, for "Shakespeare's greatest characters are not predominantly psychological, in our sense of the term […]." Her approach, subsequently, must address both the differences between sixteenth-century psychology and the current concept of it and "a careful study of the history of the time." Winstanley sums up her investigation as follows:

> Shakespeare wrote his plays for a definite audience at a definite point of time. […] It should, therefore, be possible to discover with more or less accuracy what the plays would mean for their intended audience, and we cannot be sure that we comprehend them fully until we study the point of view of this audience. (31)

And so Winstanley proceeds to list in detail the "political situation at the exact moment *Hamlet* was written" (44). It is worth mentioning the similarities one can, in fact, establish between her concepts and Schmitt's notions. "Definite point of time" does indeed point to the same local phenomenon that Schmitt, at the beginning of *Hamlet oder Hekuba*, refers to as the *geschichtlichen Wirklichkeit* of *Hamlet*. Also, for both Winstanley and Schmitt, the focal point is how Shakespeare—who wrote and created in service of the "Elizabethan audience"—brought to life an unwashed, raw piece of dramatic work. This tragedy thus demands an organic comprehension. In sum, for both Schmitt and Winstanley, "modern

criticism's" fragmentary and partial approach to the play should be corrected by establishing a link between the political events of the early sixteenth century and Shakespeare's earthly yet supreme talent for correctly portraying and mirroring James I and Mary Stuart. *Hamlet* was a tragedy because times were tragic.

But is this truly so?

To posit an authentic comprehension of a tragedy—perhaps *the* tragedy—by way of a historical method so profoundly based on "topicality"[40] certainly entails serious difficulties, especially when it comes to pondering questions that go beyond Shakespeare's status as a creator. The second obstacle is connected with the fact that any historical context can potentially be scrutinized by studying the cultural artifacts produced within the frame of its time. It would only take a thorough survey of the correspondences between a number of well-heeled individuals, but also books, notes, and popular themes, and then a further comparison between these and a drama or play—say, a tragedy of early modernity—to outdo any other approach that aims to decipher the core of a historical work. Furthermore, such a thesis would seemingly call for a strange notion of history; namely, a linear, causal time where events move forward, going from left to right. This kind of historicism could only prove that history rules everything. How then, despite their methodological differences, does Schmitt make use of Winstanley's investigation?

1.3 The Method

After reviewing these three books, Schmitt establishes his own approach:

> Whoever has thought long enough about Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and its many interpretations is familiar with the unfathomable depths of this topic. He sees that many tracks lead into these depths but only a few lead out again. Whoever, in addition—like myself—arrives at the conclusion that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has something to do with historical King James, the son of Mary Stuart, runs into many taboos as well as the risk of additional misreadings. (5)

40. See Kurland 1994, 292–3.

"He or she" being clearly Winstanley or Schmitt. Likewise, characterizing *Hamlet* as a topic whose "unfathomable depths" [*die Abrgründigkeit des Themas*] invariably entails a misleading number of interpretations is a gesture of sheer rhetoric. According to this dramatic conception, an examination so aware of, first, the inner difficulties of *Hamlet* and second, the kinship between King James and Hamlet, immediately rises above any other approach—be it psychological, sociological, aesthetic, etc. This is one of the reasons that made *Hamlet* such an interesting topic for Schmitt in the fifties: the risk of conjuring current taboos by unmasking the themes on which these very taboos were established. Winstanley posited a similar yet very different view:

> My method will be to compare the play with the *Amleth* story on the one side and the historical details on the other, and to show that the action of the play far more closely agrees with that of history than with that of the saga, and also that the main problems of the play are not the problems of the saga but are certainly of the history. (49)

What differentiates Winstanley's interpretations from Schmitt's is the performative aspect of their approaches. While for the former, these comparisons did not involve any kind of "risks," for the latter, an interpretation of this type was not only to be seen as atypical but exceptional. Its dangerousness lay in proving the uncomfortable similitude between Elsinore's bloody secrecy and modern Germany—and maybe all of Europe. *Hamlet* was the starting point of an unphased schlep that was visible by very few minds. If, in Winstanley's position, *Hamlet* was to be comprehended by history, according to Schmitt, history was meant to be accessed through *Hamlet*[41]. Winstanley's approach was deeply entrenched in historicism. Schmitt's method established a new threshold: from history to tragedy. While Winstanley reconstructs a déjà vu, Schmitt's reminds us that the play embodies, in fact, a déjà vécu. Schmitt summarizes this idea as follows in his *Vorbemerkung*:

> I could easily help my cause by citing the statement of a very well-known English author, who writes: "About any one so great as Shakespeare, it is probable that we can never be right; and if we can never be right, it is better that we should from time

41 See *Introduction*, 9-10.

> to time change our ways of being wrong." […] I would like to ask the reader for a few moments of his attention, presuming that the topic of *Hamlet* is dear to his heart. And this is something that I may be permitted to presume, as otherwise he would not have opened this book and read this preface. (5–6)

This is indeed a strange way to end a preface. First, quoting T. S. Eliot's essay *Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca* (1927)[42] can turn out to be a double-edged sword, especially when attempting an analytical reconstruction of the sources and Schmitt's use of them for his views on *Hamlet*. While this assertion sums up the immense number of modern interpretations on Shakespeare, Eliot's aim was no other than to detach himself from those scholars who made Shakespeare out to be a "fatigued, retired Anglo-Indian, messianic, ferocious" author. Eliot's humble interpretation is focused on how Shakespeare used the cultural material available in his time—just like did Dante with "the system of St. Thomas"—namely, Stoicism, Machiavelli, and Montaigne, to create, "from his own emotions," a colossal work of art. The creation of *Hamlet*, for instance, should be grasped as the brilliant process of an individual who did not think, but rather used and felt the "greatest emotional intensity of his time." As can be seen, this kind of approach severely differs from that of Schmitt. Whereas Schmitt—via Winstanley—acknowledges the work of Shakespeare as a process perfectly synchronized with both the political circumstances of Mary Stuart and James I and the passions of the Elizabethan audience, Eliot merely sees *Hamlet*'s unique combination of simplicity and brilliance as the organic unity created by Shakespeare within the bloody context of the sixteenth century. Moreover, the distance between these two approaches—which can be mistaken for affinity if Schmitt's 1956 book preface is read naively—is even more blatant in Eliot's *Hamlet and His Problems* (1919). Here are the very first lines of this essay:

> Few critics have ever admitted that *Hamlet* the play is the primary problem, and Hamlet the character only secondary. And Hamlet the character has had an especial temptation for that most dangerous type of critic: the critic with a mind which is naturally of the creative order, but which through some weakness in creative power exercises itself in criticism indeed. […] Such a mind had Goethe, who made of Hamlet a Werther; and such had Coleridge, who made of Hamlet a Coleridge. (141)

42. Eliot 1999, 126–140. Page references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

The play being the "primary problem" naturally means that Shakespeare did not create his classic hero from an individualistic standpoint. The character is not the core of the play: on the contrary, *Hamlet* abounds in centers—or, using Schmitt's vocabulary, *Hamlet* is a *pluriversum* and not a dramatic unity as such.[43] And while Schmitt certainly did not feel tempted to turn Hamlet the character into a Schmitt—although he did so with *Othello* and some other like-minded figures—his approach bluntly differs, again, from that of Eliot. The American poet ponders:

> It is not merely the 'guilt of a mother' that cannot be handled as Shakespeare handled the suspicion of Othello, the infatuation of Antony, or the pride of Coriolanus. The subject might conceivably have expanded into a tragedy like these, intelligible, self-complete, in the sunlight. *Hamlet*, like the sonnets, is full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art. (144)

Eliot's well-known statement that *Hamlet* "is most certainly an artistic failure" finds its significance in this quote. Shakespeare cannot be seen as a genius gifted by the gods with "the eye doth see the heavens opening," of which Schiller sings in *Das Lied von der Glocke*.[44] Likewise, the so-called taboo postulated by Schmitt as half of the spiritual kernel that transmogrifies *Hamlet* into a "modern myth" is nowhere to be found in Eliot's article. The "guilt of a mother" is just another element that expresses the human excess at which Shakespeare excelled, addressing it vigorously in all its murky unconsciousness. To ascertain that "the taboo of a queen" and the "person of the avenger" were an unseen reflection of the political turmoil of a "historical reality" and then include these elements in a thesis which posits that they were scattered throughout a peerless dramatic work might appear as an enticing yet far-fetched thesis for Eliot. However, Schmitt's thesis on "the intrusion of time into play" should still be considered seriously for the following reasons. First, Eliot stresses the limits of modern interpretations regarding an incomplete work of art from the sixteenth century. One cannot simply address the character Hamlet as a conscious, pioneering agent of whatever feature the modern discipline of contemporary criticism wants to pin on him.

43. Schmitt 2015a, 51.
44. Schiller 1992, 56–68. The English translation quoted is Marianna Wertz's. See Wertz 2005.

Hamlet the play represents Shakespeare's greatest use of the material of his own life. Second, when Schmitt discusses his notion of "intrusion," he is addressing the shared value that *Hamlet* represents for us. Even when he concurs with Winstanley's historical approach, his insistence on the uniqueness of this myth-making play in comparison with other dramatic creations—say, those of Schiller or Grillparzer—hinges on the spiritual community opened up by *Hamlet*. This community—namely, an intergenerational public that is able to feel represented by Shakespeare's work, notwithstanding the four centuries that separates the play from its twentieth-century spectators—asks not for the interpretation but for the signification of *Hamlet*. Schmitt, as both an interpreter and a member of this public, aims to uncover the historical significance that structures *Hamlet* and not, on the contrary, to enhance the play by way of a novel interpretation. There is a distance between Eliot and Schmitt for the simple reason that the poet stresses the interpretative aspect of *Hamlet*, while Schmitt analyzes the significant—or juridical—dimension of the play. That is why the latter presumes that *Hamlet* "is a topic dear" to the reader's "heart." This "closeness" is the spiritual community that comes to life after a dramatic play reaches a mythical status—or so we are told by Schmitt. Although the modern critics of *Hamlet* could outwardly be seen as vying for the correct approach when it comes to the ultimate, definitive analysis of Shakespeare's tragedy, Schmitt is more interested in objectively retracing the momentous emergence of a play that transformed a finite historical stage into theater overflowing with myth. Schmitt obviously does not come to terms with those Shakespeare scholars that set the standard for reading *Hamlet*. Moreover, he scathingly ends the preface of *Hamlet oder Hekuba* by stating that the reader "otherwise […] would not have opened this book and read this preface." If the book on *Hamlet* is an airtight monograph on the historical input that electrified *Hamlet* for the centuries, the expression "this preface" should be read in the broadest sense of the term; that is, both as the *Vorbemerkung* to a little book dedicated to Shakespeare's tragedy par excellence and as a preface dedicated to the fate of a death-ravaged Europe. While the conception of history upheld by Schmitt might be seen as inevitable, like some meta-historical Markov chain charging future events with the significance of past and crucial situations that ultimately remain beyond the diminished minds of the present, his uneasy approach to *Hamlet* is to reveal the current coordinates of Europe and their recasting within the plot lines of past turmoil and historical events.

1.4 Introduction to *Hamlet oder Hekuba*

Schmitt asserts that "[t]he drama *Hamlet*, *Prince of Denmark* has been the subject of an endless number of interpretations."[45] That is a first. However, Schmitt endeavors to remind readers that his essay is not just another interpretation. He says that "[t]he mournfully dressed, melancholy prince has become in the end a primal image of the human condition" [… *ist schließlich zu einem Urbild menschlicher Problematik geworden*]. A "primal image" is an endless source of identification. *Hamlet* is a universal figure, close at hand, primed for any play. Considering this context, Schmitt goes on to say:

> The symbolic force of this figure has produced an authentic myth that finds its justification in a process of inexhaustible transformation. The eighteenth-century poets of the German *Sturm und Drang*—Lessing, Herder, Goethe—began this process by making their own myth out of Hamlet. […] In the first third of our own twentieth century, the founder of the psychoanalytic school, Sigmund Freud, put forth the assertion that every neurotic is either an Oedipus or a Hamlet, depending on whether his neurosis is fixated on the father or the mother.

This is almost identical to the considerations made by Eliot almost 40 years before *Hamlet oder Hekuba*. Nonetheless, Eliot did not believe that critics could find the myth in *Hamlet* following an individualistic approach. Schmitt's use of adjectives—*Hamlet* is an "abyss," "a primal image of the human condition," a myth that has suffered "inexhaustible transformation"—might convince the reader that his is an isolated, groundbreaking viewpoint. The truth is that, at least in the very first paragraphs of his monograph, Schmitt describes *Hamlet* in the same dispassionate fashion as Eliot—drawing the line precisely with his boldly revisionist vocabulary. He mentions that "[f]rom such an excess of psychological interpretation, an inescapable labyrinth has been created." Now Schmitt let himself be guided by the same anti-psychologism as Winstanley. This approach was replaced, after World War I, with a "strictly historical approach." Without naming him, Schmitt is referring here to Dover Wilson. And then he concludes:

---

45. Schmitt 2009b, 7.

> Shakespeare was now above all a dramatist of the Elizabethan age, his plays written for his London public. We will have more to say about this.

This is the exact moment of departure of Schmitt's approach from that of both Winstanley and Eliot. Considering the character of Hamlet an endless vessel, capable of carrying any psychological content, would be playing with that "stick with two ends that one can turn round and round" that Schmitt indirectly quotes from Dostoevsky.

1.4.1 On Freud's *Dostoevsky and Parricide*

In fact, this is a paraphrase of Sigmund Freud's essay *Dostoevsky and Parricide* [1927–8].[46] Freud detects "in the rich personality of Dostoevsky [f]our facets: the creative artist, the neurotic, the moralist and the sinner." Freud proceeds to shed light on the figure of Dostoevsky through a psychoanalytical account of the Russian writer's epilepsy. Freud posits that this was a symptom of his inner affliction; namely, his "strong innate bisexual disposition" that "becomes one of the preconditions or reinforcements of neurosis." The expression of this condition was, according to Freud, Dostoevsky's "latent homosexuality." The writer retains himself. This explains "the repression of the hatred of the father" and its lingering manifestation in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879–80). Freud asserts:

> But what has been said so far does not exhaust the consequences of the repression of the hatred of the father in the Oedipus complex. There is something fresh to be added: namely that in spite of everything the identification with the father finally makes a permanent place for itself in the ego. It is received into the ego, but establishes itself there as a separate agency in contrast to the rest of the content of the ego. We then give it the name of super-ego and ascribe to it, the inheritor of the parental influence, the most important functions. (242)

It is not difficult to see how Freud's thesis on Dostoevsky could hold as long as the "identification with the father finally makes a permanent place in the ego." This identification

46. Freud 1997, 234–55. Page references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

entails a productive dimension. The "ego becomes masochistic," while the super-ego "has become sadistic." This asymmetry enables the relation between ego and super-ego to become dynamic. Hence, the figure of the father foreshadows the increase in the sadistic element by intensifying the prevalence of the masochistic aspect. In other words, the ego achieves its representation in a foreign yet kindred presence. Representation, then, must be reproduced in a different realm. Freud states:

> To sum up, the relation between the subject and his father-object, while retaining its content, has been transformed into a relation between the ego and the super-ego—a new setting on a fresh stage [*eine Neuinszenierung auf einer zweiten Bühne*]. (243–244)

What could be seen as a mere boutade aimed at the modern interpretative trends of *Hamlet* provides, in fact, a considerable hermeneutic insight into the esoteric architecture of *Hamlet oder Hekuba*. There are three reasons for this. First, that in *Dostoevsky and Parricide*—which Freud himself considered a "trivial essay" that was "written reluctantly"[47]—even the psychoanalytical approach must surrender to the vocabulary of theater. Just as Freud posited that the ego of Dostoevsky accepted his political imprisonment in Siberia "as a substitute for the punishment he deserved for his sin against his real father"—for the sadistic super-ego rules the "mental economy" that the ego must blindly satisfy and pay—so too the psychoanalytical approach has to establish a new identification outside its own ego. This odd feature of the "complex of Oedipus" can be understood through Freud's caveat:

> Everyone who is familiar with the complicated transformation of meaning undergone by hysterical symptoms will understand that no attempt can be made here to follow out the meaning of Dostoevsky's attacks beyond this beginning. (245)

It is not for a moment my intention to turn Freud against his own thesis. To do so would only confirm his quotation from Dostoevsky regarding the "stick with two ends," which so incisively depicts psychology. On the contrary, I argue that Freud's use of the image of the

47. The quotations are taken from a letter Freud sent to Theodor Reik apropos of the stinging review written by his Austrian student. Both the review and the letter were published in 1929 in the *Imago* journal. See Reik 1940, 158–76 and 73–4.

theater—quite significant if one notes how the expression *die Bühne* is used just once—must be considered crucial. That the ego—finite and limited by a greater economy—undergoes a "transformation of meaning" on "a fresh stage" bluntly means that the ego's history (here, the guilt of Dostoevsky "for his sin against his real father") inevitably crushes against its "new setting": in Dostoevsky's case, "his attitude towards the authority of the state and towards belief in God." These attitudes developed that "guilt" in his works, the most important of them being *The Brothers Karamazov*. Freud sums up the dynamic between the spheres of "the authority of the State" and "belief in God" in the following terms:

> In the first of these he ended up with complete submission to his Little Father, the Tsar, who had once performed with him in *reality* the comedy of killing which his attacks had so often represented in *play*. Here penitence gained the upper hand. (…) If on the whole he did not achieve freedom and became a reactionary, that was because the filial guilt, which is present in human beings generally and on which religious feeling is built […]. (245–246)

By now, it should be obvious why I am quoting these excerpts from *Dostoevsky and Parricide*. I consider that Schmitt mentions this essay precisely due to the similitude between Freud's model of the Oedipus complex and his notion of "intrusions." That the ego transports itself onto a "stage" is more than significant when it comes to Schmitt's quoting Freud's quote from Dostoevsky. For both thinkers, a "transformation of meaning"—in Freud's terms—or an "intrusion of time"—following Schmitt—necessarily implies a creative, theatrical expression. Dostoevsky's "guilt" could then, by escaping to its manifestation in the ego's own finite setting, be "represented as *play*." Freud means by "play" the actions of Dostoevsky as a die-hard gambler—and yet the autonomous aspect of "play" is also implied in this kind of agency.

The second reason why I believe that Freud's *Dostoevsky and Parricide* had an important impact on *Hamlet oder Hekuba* is the article's reference to *Hamlet*. After determining Dostoevsky's "intellectual inhibition due to his neurosis," Freud asserts:

> I can scarcely be owing to chance that three of the masterpieces of the literature of all time—the *Oedipus Rex* of Sophocles, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and Dostoevsky's

> *The Brothers Karamazov*—should all deal with the same subject, parricide. In all three, moreover, the motive for the deed, sexual rivalry for a woman, is laid bare. (246)

Freud does not state that these "three masterpieces" possess a common core: parricide. On the contrary, while Sophocles represented how Oedipus committed "the frightful deed unwittingly," only to "then realize after [that there was] blood-relationship,"[48] or Shakespeare depicted Elsinore in line with the obscure rumors about Mary Stuart's actions, or the fact that Dostoevsky masterly elaborated how a desired woman led both a father and his son to enter the eternal fire—significantly, in all three tragedies the bloody rivalry "of a woman" takes center stage. While I cannot tackle Freud's view regarding Sophocles and Dostoevsky, I will focus on his remarks about *Hamlet*.

Freud states:

> In the English play the presentation is more indirect; the hero does not commit the crime himself; it is carried out by someone else, for whom it is not parricide. The forbidden motive of sexual rivalry for the woman does not need, therefore, to be disguised. Moreover, we see the hero's Oedipus complex, as it were, in a reflected light, by learning the effect upon him of the other's crime. (246–247)

It is somehow amusing that Freud considers Hamlet's indirect "learning" by way of the crime committed by King Claudius and not, on the contrary, the evident "guilt" that he felt after Ophelia's suicide—a much more concrete guilt, for it recalls the sexual assault that she suffered at Hamlet's hands.[49] At Ophelia's burial, the tormented prince exclaims:

> I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers
> Could not, with all their quantity of love,
> Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her?[50]

48. *Poetics*, IIII, 43, 32–3.
49. The following account of Ophelia's rape is based on Bonnefoy 2015, 82–99.
50. 5.1.66–8. Text references are to act, scene, and line of this edition.

Too little, too late. Ophelia and Hamlet's affair was a poisoned one. And although she sings of how everything was promised to her in the day of love—"To-morrow is Saint Valentine's day, / all in the morning betime, / And I a maid at your window, / To be your Valentine"[51]–. Ophelia's heart was first plundered by Hamlet's vicious actions. Just after Polonius bids goodbye to Reynaldo, Ophelia enters:

> My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,
> Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced;
> Not hat upon his head; his stockings foul'd,
> Ungarter'd, and down-gyved to his ancle;
> Pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each other;
> And with a look so piteous in purport
> As if he had been loosed out of hell
> To speak of horrors, he comes before me.[52]

The reader may infer that this pathetic image of Hamlet is related to the shock provoked by the sudden appearance of the Ghost. However, fast-forwarding to the scene between Queen Gertrude and Ophelia, the pain-induced ditties sung by Ophelia are eerily related to that "doublet all unbraced" she mentioned to Polonius: "Larded with sweet flowers / Which bewept to the grave did go / With true-love showers."[53] The musical death-wish of Ophelia sings of a physical infatuation that destroyed a stillborn "true-love." And the last hours of her existence are now devoted to collecting flowers, each one of them mourning the mangled shreds of her soul:

> There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray, love, remember; and there is pansies, that's for thoughts.[54]

51. 4.5.47–50.
52. 2.1.78–85.
53. 4.5.37–39.
54. 4.5.175–176.

Laertes's momentum impedes him from fully addressing the hidden content of Ophelia's other-worldly instructions: "A document in madness, thoughts and remembrance fitted,"[55] he will retort with gripping awe. Moreover, the compelling demand for memory—the word "remembrance" is here twice repeated by both brothers: first as a last will, then as the unexpected lucidness of madness—is openly related with Hamlet. He needs to remember because the unguided force of his hesitation constantly replaces the sole moral task that he must fulfill with new, abstract affairs. Also, the frailty of the flower was first considered to be a feature of Hamlet, while Ophelia had earlier been described by her brother as "[a] violet in the youth of primy nature."[56] It is indeed an impeccable description of the prince: "[…] sweet, not lasting." Laertes pleas for "remembrance" as the primal protection for his sister—"Farewell, Ophelia; and remember well / What I have said to you"—the sister then protects the sacred word of her brother under oath: "'Tis in my memory lock'd, / And you yourself shall keep the key of it."[57] But in *Hamlet*, the place of women is displaced, "out of joint." Memory, then, becomes the ultimate human resource for Ophelia. And although she will eventually be totally displaced, Hamlet is constantly misplaced. The value of repetition is a crucial element of all interactions with the prince: "Adieu, adieu! Hamlet, remember me," the Ghost urges Hamlet. "Hold, hold my heart […]" he goes on to say in ardent tones. And then: "O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain."[58] The unsung voice of the Ghost now becomes a motto for the prince: "Now to my word; / It is 'Adieu, adieu! remember me.'" As soon as the dead king leaves, both Marcellus and Horatio exclaim: "My lord, my lord." Just as King Hamlet acts within a two-fold sphere—both as a majestic, unresolved crime and as a ghost—everything inside *Hamlet* is in conflict with reflexivity. "Who's there," asks Bernardo: a dead body. Who is Bernardo? Nobody. And while everybody will be touched by Hamlet's overelaborate plans, our final bleak vision of Ophelia is cast aside and superseded by Queen Gertrude's guilty body.

If I am delaying the analysis of Schmitt's book with these considerations, it is for the following reason: I do not share Freud's interpretation of Hamlet's Oedipus complex being manifested "in a reflected light." On the contrary, I posit that the prince's guilt is, in fact,

55. 4.5.178.
56. 1.3.61.
57. 1.3.85–86.
58. 1.5.106.

related to his lustful attitude—and hubris—toward Ophelia. The considerable disadvantage of reading *Hamlet* according to this psychoanalytical approach lies in dismissing the prince's unstable agency. Although it deals with "the sexual rivalry for the woman," *Hamlet* loses strength as a play when interpreted from the psyche of its characters. I consider that while Schmitt shared and saw the similarities between the ego/super-ego dynamic and his notion of intrusion, the grave lack of historicity in Freud's analysis convinced Schmitt to dismiss any psychological viewpoint in his reading of *Hamlet*. This leads me to the third reason why Freud's *Dostoevsky and Parricide* was important for Schmitt. While "the taboo of the Queen" is one of Schmitt's strong theses, its relation with the taboo developed in Freud's essay is weak. The "indirect" parricide of King Hamlet, seen by Prince Hamlet in "a reflected light," is the expression of an inherent condition of the human psyche. By contrast, the "taboo" on which Schmitt bases his concept of "intrusion" is enhanced by politics. Its unspeakable content bends the future of the state—with Denmark mirroring the "Scottish Succession"—until this world crumbles to hell. If the taboo—parricide—is the guiding principle of those "three masterpieces of literature of all time," the taboo invoked by Schmitt demands that the political factor be taken into account. Moreover, this political attribute of the taboo developed in *Hamlet oder Hekuba* represents at the same time nothing more than a significant first step if the ensuing analysis does not account for the tragedy arising from politics. It is in the frame of this connection between politics and the taboo that Schmitt's approach is to be comprehended, including his decision to view *Hamlet* in the historical and tragic light of his own times. Those "three masterpieces" inwardly dealt with parricide: actually, they dealt with civil war.

1.4.2 Apropos Gerhard Hauptmann and the historical approach

In the second paragraph of the introduction to *Hamlet oder Hekuba*, Schmitt remarks that after "an excess of psychological interpretation" came "a strictly historical approach"—the reason no doubt being World War I. Without naming him, Schmitt is pointing to Eliot's essay—because the play is "full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art." That is how "[t]he traditional understanding of the strict unity of his characters and the artistic perfection of his works were destroyed," asserts

Schmitt.[59] However, between the psychological approach and the subsequent, violent return of Anglo-historicism, an unnoticed phenomenon took over Germany:

> From different, and often even opposing, sides, Hamlet continues even today to function as a living myth. I take here two examples as signs of this inexhaustible mutability. A renowned German poet, Gerhart Hauptmann, published a play in 1935 with the title *Hamlet in Wittenberg*. […] But in spite of the sometimes obscene romanticism, a historical connection cast its shadow across this sad play.

One has to suppose that those "opposing sides" are related to the fact that *Hamlet* was represented in Germany under the veil of "Romanticism." While I cannot, for now, address the importance and nuances of the play by Hauptmann[60]—a German Nobel laureate so obsessed with *Hamlet* that he even molded his autobiography around the Prince of Elsinore—especially considering that it was not the most idiosyncratic work created for "the German Stage,"[61] I will focus on Schmitt's expression "living myth" [*ein lebendiger Mythos*]. Fundamentally, Schmitt remarks that this myth "has not yet lost its power." I consider that this sentence anticipates Schmitt's notion of "intrusion" by proving how the "myth of Hamlet" comes to the fore in the first decades of the twentieth century in Germany. However, to demonstrate this, one needs to account for Schmitt's notions of "myth" and "Romanticism." I will now continue the analysis of Schmitt's *Einleitung* before tackling those two concepts.

Schmitt then provides another example of the "inexhaustible capacity of mutability" of *Hamlet*:

> The other example comes from an entirely different direction, not from the north but from the south. A world-renowned philosopher, Salvador de Madariaga, considers Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in a surprising new light in a 1948 book, *On Hamlet*. He makes him into an unscrupulous Renaissance man of action and violence, a Cesare Borgia.

59. Schmitt 2009b, 8.
60. See Höfele 2016, 228–229; see also Stirk 1937, 595–597.
61. See Hortmann 2009, 78–147. Pages references to this edition are given in parentheses.

It is rather misleading to read first that Hauptmann's play was "obscenely romantic" at times and then read that de Madariaga's book is "full of apt observations and uninhibited remarks." Hauptmann's *Hamlet in Wittenberg*—so we are told by the author himself—is a "humble homage" to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Hauptmann's states:

> His *Hamlet* has been endlessly reworked and revised for the theater in old and new times: something crucial in the nature of the theater business and industry. Here, it is not even a pious or impious—the latter are in the majority—editing, but a creation in the empty space. (460)

One of the essential elements in Hauptmann's play is the connection between Hamlet and his home city. This explains the importance of one of the main characters of the play, Philipp Melanchthon—professor at Wittenberg, one of the leaders of the Reformation, and intellectual sidekick to Luther. However, to label *Hamlet in Wittenberg* a Romantic work is only possible under a very narrow notion of "Romanticism." Whereas Schmitt sees a "historical connection" [*ein geschichtlicher Zusammenhang*], Hauptmann simply addresses the ongoing activity of theater as such. This is important because it means that one simply cannot criticize the rehashing of *Hamlet* from a standpoint other than that of theater. The very core of theater, then, is "mutability"—*Hamlet* being the most important yet not the only drama to immerse itself in the inevitable waves of change. The use and reuse, as well as the rehashing of old material, leads to the distinction between the masterpiece of a poet—Shakespeare, in this case—and the blank spaces available for further creations. Hauptmann set his "humble homage" precisely in the context of King Claudius's instruction to Hamlet not to return to Wittenberg.[62] Moreover, here lies the "historical connection" acknowledged by Schmitt. But, then again, just like Eliot went beyond the established interpretative bounds in his hair-splitting analysis of Hamlet, Hauptmann's self-indulgent preface to his *Hamlet in Wittenberg* invokes the autonomous nature of theater to justify his reprise of Shakespeare's medieval drama. Following Schmitt, one could likewise argue that this creative recasting obeys a superior power: namely, the mythical core that Shakespeare instilled in *Hamlet*.

---

62. 1.2.118–119.

To call Hauptmann's play "Romantic" and de Madariaga's *On Hamlet*[63] "apt" is misleading, for Schmitt approves of the Spanish scholar's historicism precisely because his interpretation shows both restraint and "creativity." On the contrary, Hauptmann can be considered the author of a romantic drama insofar as his interpretation does not address a key aspect; that is, the emergence of the "myth" of Hamlet from a "historical reality." To say that the prince of tears was a Cesare Borgia and that the whole spirit of this drama is "Spanish," as far-fetched as this thesis may seem—and surely it was for Dover Wilson—it nonetheless does address the "political" aspect of the play. De Madariaga asserts that:

> Now nations reach the apex of their power when the genius of the time is in harmony with their own genius; when, in other words, the age acts as a sounding board for their own peculiar note. The sixteenth century was the Spanish era because then the subject of the world's debate was man on a background of absolute values—God, evil, death, love, free will, and predestination; all preeminently Spanish themes. (viii)

This is a thesis à la Winstanley but restrained to the metaphysical spirit of "absolute values"—something "preeminently Spanish," according to de Madariaga. Here is where the Spanish writer and the German jurist agree: for both, the value of *Hamlet* lies in its capacity to mirror the sixteenth century; that is, its epoch. However, one can see how Schmitt's reading of de Madariaga was also sloppy. In the preface to the second edition of de Madariaga's *On Hamlet*, Schmitt sharply rebukes the English critics:

> Two ways were open: either to adopt the view that Shakespeare did not mean Hamlet to behave in a coherent way at all; or to seek a fresh interpretation of the characters and of the play. The first solution had behind it the authority of the "historical school" and of its leader, Professor Stoll. According to his way of thinking, Shakespeare's purpose is not to depict human character as such; but to contrive "situations." He was a theatre-man. (xii)

Does the word "situation" possess the same meaning for both de Madariaga and Schmitt? The Spanish writer elaborates further on the subject:

---

63. De Madariaga 2012, vii–xiii, 48–52 at 1. Pages references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

> The idea of reducing him [Shakespeare] to a mere deviser of cleverly contrived *situations* is typical of our mechanical age. It savors that *behaviourism* to which a modern school of psychology would reduce man, perhaps in the hope of manufacturing him by a chain-factory process. (xiii)

Evidently, there is quite a difference between de Madariaga's idea of "situation—namely, a one-dimensional portrayal of an epoch, unable to explain the "genius" of the poet through the "sounding board" of the present—and that of Schmitt. By contrast, for Schmitt, a "reality," a "concrete situation," is to be comprehended from its historical core, which is always a normative origin—thus his insistence on both "the taboo of the queen" and "the person of an avenger." De Madariaga fails to see the broad spiritual context in which *Hamlet* was created, and while he does use the same "historical method" that Schmitt borrowed from Winstanley—de Madariaga even goes as far as to state that "[t]he design of *Hamlet* is rich in parallel lines" (52)—he limits himself to pointing to a number of "transpositions" between the historical sources and Shakespeare's creation. But these transpositions are limited for de Madariaga to the attention span of Shakespeare, and thus any genuine interpretation of *Hamlet* must surpass the "situational" aspect of the play. That is why, for Schmitt, de Madariaga's thesis can be considered no more than "apt." Such an interpretation does not appreciate the unique phenomenon of a play that, mythical as it is, can self-mutate without losing its authentic significance. Herein lies the limited reach of de Madariaga's conception of "situation" and the motives behind the rebukes from those "English critics" who did not fail to note "that such an interpretation," remarked Schmitt, "might be more easily explained by impressions from the Hitler years rather from the Elizabethan age."

While it is customary for German scholars to quote Ferdinand Freiligrath's expression "Germany is Hamlet!" when dealing with Shakespeare's eponymous tragedy, Schmitt also touches on a broader sense of what *Hamlet* embraces:

> Interpretations and symbolizations of Hamlet are incidentally not limited to the psychology of the single human individual. Entire nations can also appear as Hamlet.

> Thus, in the nineteenth century, journalists of German liberalism like Börne and Gervinus recognized the tattered and fractured German people as Hamlet […].[64]

The natural question is, of course, which nations? Could a non-European nation be Hamlet as well? Schmitt does not provide any further analysis on the subject.[65] Regarding Ludwig Börne, his analysis of *Hamlet*[66] is particularly interesting for two reasons. The first, quite anecdotic, is that this German writer is confronted by Kierkegaard in the latter's *Stages on Life's Way*. The second is that Börne and Schmitt share a common vocabulary.

1.4.3 The meaning of Börne's analysis

The analysis of *Hamlet* given by Börne is quite amusing. He aims to tackle the play through its symbolism. For him, Hamlet the character is not important. Börne calls him the "no-thing," someone "worse than death," "the unborn." He correctly thinks that housing *Hamlet* in the North, far from England—Shakespeare's only play set outside his native land—is connected with Shakespeare's desire to create something in a healthy environment. Likewise, Börne highlights the positive features of King Claudius, greatly eclipsed by Prince Hamlet, "the only concave character whose rays diverge." His opinion of the Ghost is even more alluring. Börne asserts that "the most horrible thing of a spirit is that it emerges and speaks," for that which the Ghost says as the most terrible is, in fact, "childish" (98). It lacks all wisdom. The Ghost's awareness is the same as when he lived. Why? Because he seeks revenge through Prince Hamlet, that "concave" character "full of "mysticism" (94). He is no avenger, but a Fichtian par excellence:

> Hamlet is a holiday-man, totally incompatible with his daily grind. He mocks the vain conduct of men, and they reprove his idle idleness. […] Like a Fichtian, he thinks nothing but "I am," and does nothing but place his "I." (99)

64. Schmitt 2009b, 9.
65. See chapter 5 (5.7).
66. Börne 2013, 94–103. Pages references to this edition are given in parentheses.

Börne's analysis is certainly spot on, although quite harsh. And however much I would like to tackle this assimilation of Hamlet as a "Fichtian"—mainly because Börne is indirectly stressing the crucial connection between Romanticism and philosophy—I will instead focus on his non-psychological, non-historical interpretation of the play. Börne continues his depiction of the prince in the following terms:

> Hamlet is a philosopher of death, a night scholar. When the nights are dark, he stands indecisively, immobile; if they are bright, it is only at midnight, which shows him the shadow of the hour—he acts inadequately and goes mad in the deceptive light. Life is a tomb to him, the world a churchyard. That is why the churchyard is his world; there is his kingdom, there he is Master. (100–101)

At this point, it should be evident that Börne is advancing an interpretation that could be described as religious. The symbolism mentioned by Schmitt—the rays that "diverge" due to Hamlet's concavity, the "midnight hour" and its bleak lights, the "world as a churchyard," etc.—obeys a higher priority; namely, to reveal the ominous yet veiled theme that rules over the play:

> Much has been said about Shakespeare's irony. Perhaps I did not understand correctly what they meant by that; but I sought for vainness everywhere in vain. Irony is narrowness—or limitation. […] But in *Hamlet* I find irony, and not refreshing. The poet, who always instructs us so friendly, solves all our doubts, leaves us here in grave misgivings and worries. […] nature revolts against its creator and conquers […]. (101)

"Here" being the death of Prince Hamlet, who allegedly was born to "set right" an "out of joint" time.[67] Börne portrays him as a "blind horse on the wheel of fate" until "it falls and is subject to a poor beast, the lashes of its drivers!" The artistic elements of the play, coordinated by that pale "irony," are indeed wrong. However, just like Eliot here found the excess which marked *Hamlet* out as an "artistic failure," for Börne this supreme awkwardness—considering that Shakespeare was English and not, on the contrary, German, as Börne would

67. 1.5.189–190.

have thought if he hadn't known of the author's origin—is related to the combination of Shakespeare's genius and other elements that were always available; nature as such, eternity, good and evil, justice and injustice. Börne concludes:

> In vain our own heart warns us not to respect evil, because it is strong not spurn good, because it is weak; we believe our eyes more. We see that who tolerates much, has little lived, and we waver. *Hamlet* is a Christian Trauerspiel. (102)

While I cannot elaborate on Schmitt's mention of Börne's "liberalism,"[68] I will stress the expression "Christian Trauerspiel." This is something very interesting to think about, even more so if one ponders how Schmitt will tackle the creative limits of the "play" and its relation to the "seriousness of life"—an expression that is ironically used by Börne himself when he remarks that Shakespeare never mocks "life's ridiculous seriousness" [*des lebens lächerlichen Ernst*] (101). That ominous aspect of *Hamlet* represents the coming together of genius and the unavoidable Christian image of the world. Prince Hamlet could never be successful in "setting right" the damaged hourglass of time. His mission was stillborn. His desire was meant to decay. This is the not "refreshing" irony, according to Börne. And if one could then ask why Schmitt merely considered Börne to be a "journalist of German liberalism," the answer must be found in the very fact that for anyone who thinks of this tragedy as a brilliant work of mourning grounded in Christianity, the political aspect of *Hamlet* is naturally of little relevance. Either the hero falls at the cruel hand of destiny, or he simply dies in a wretched world, all his actions amounting to nothing but shadows in the sun, empty and insignificant. According to this perspective, the modern reader should grasp the "vainness" of politics—so one surmises from Börne's essay on *Hamlet*. To conclude, even if Schmitt considered the "Christian Trauerspiel" thesis as original, he surely must have rejected out of hand Börne's position regarding Hamlet's lame attempts to vanquish the tainted "churchyard" that was his world. The term "Christian Trauerspiel" implies that the autonomy of the play is inevitably affected by a colossal, unsurpassable system of beliefs that commands the times. On the contrary, *Hamlet,* as the guiding force of an "intrusion,"

68. See Chase 2000, 123–138.

aims at developing a "concrete situation" into a broader, more powerful meaning. This was, for Schmitt, the "myth" of this play.

1.4.4 On Gervinus' interpretation

Regarding Gervinus[69], the analysis becomes more complicated. Gervinus was a prominent historian and literary scholar. He managed to combine creative and powerfully these two disciplines in major works devoted to German history and the impact of literature—including Shakespeare—on it. Gervinus was a scholar of unmatched erudition. His knowledge of Shakespeare was impeccable—his interpretation tackles the whole sphere of Shakespeare's art, from the metrical to the historical. Nonetheless, I will concentrate on his thoughts on *Hamlet.*[70] Gervinus's commentary is valuable not only because it was labeled "liberal" by Schmitt, but more importantly because Gervinus established an analogy between the prince and Germany. Of course, Freiligrath has addressed this connection previously. However, to synchronize the political interests of a budding nation with the spiritual clockwork of an English tragedy implied something altogether different. Apropos of Shakespeare's use of available sources; namely, the Nordic "Amleth" by Saxo Grammaticus, Gervinus remarks:

> It is a text from true life, and therefore a mine of the profoundest wisdom; […] a work of such prophetic design, and of such anticipation of the growth of mind, that it has only been understood and appreciated after the lapse of nearly three centuries; a poem which has so influenced and entwined itself with our later German life, as no other poem even of our own age and nation could boast of having done, with the exception of Faust alone. (548–549)

There are evidently a number of themes in common with Schmitt's *Hamlet oder Hekuba*—"a text from true life," its "prophetic design," its true unveiling "after the lapse of nearly three centuries," the parallels with "later German life." This convergence can be explained because both political Gervinus and Schmitt grasp *Hamlet* by its spiritual significance, something that Börne's religious approach eventually canceled out. According to Gervinus, what the play

69. See Höfele 2021, 19.
70. Gervinus 1892, 548–582. Pages references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

demands is a global approach: "[L]et us once more clearly consider both; namely, the facts and the elucidations which the tragedy itself unfolds" (551). Gervinus drastically disagrees with the views held by Börne regarding the "honest" nature of King Claudius and Prince Hamlet's contrasting toxicity. The German historian considers the "ambition, thirst of power, and evil desires" of the assassin, married consequently to the Queen, who "surmises not the murder." The "Ghost" now "rises from the grave." The prince is "conjured." But then things become strange: the avenger delays his revenge; his claim for justice is taken over by his overelaborate "riddles." He soon forgets. His memory needs to be refreshed—and it is "two-months" later, calculates Gervinus—but that does not translate into a necessary call-to-action. Instead, he rejoices at his own artistry: the "Mousetrap." Gervinus's analysis follows the play act by act. But then something happens. The order in which these actions begin and end is no longer important. Gervinus ponders:

> Yet, however well this whole action and its inner connection are designed and accomplished, we feel in no play no more […]: that with Shakespeare the action is ever secondary, that it ever holds a subordinate place, and that the true point of unity in his works ever leads to the source of the actions, to the actor themselves, and to the hidden grounds from which their actions spring. […] Yet we take the deepest interest in this Hamlet—proof sufficient that the special charm lies in the character. (560–561)

According to Gervinus, Hamlet's mental ravings—along with his equally faulty prose and inaction—lead us to the "feeling" of being expelled from the play itself. Agency as a paramount feature of theater as such is banished. The main locus now is the "charm" of the character. He promotes nothing and yet promises everything. Gervinus reminds us how Goethe stated that Hamlet lacks "the external strength of the hero." One could agree with the German historian that both King Claudius and Queen Gertrude are afraid of Hamlet because they are constantly aware of the dangers that are precisely enabled by the prince's inner delay. While Hamlet waits for the proper time, everyone else becomes anxious: "A psychological circle," concludes Gervinus (495). This circle expands and becomes broader before finally reaching an international status. A ruthless call leads several nations to lose their wits:

> From this one source there springs among whole nations, as Montesquieu has observed—among the old Iberians and Indians for instance—the same mixture of mildness combined with exaggerated energy under provocation; the sensitiveness of their organization, which causes them to fear death; causes them to fear a thousand things still more than death, the same susceptibility leads them to flee from danger, and to scorn it when compelled to face it. Thus it is with Hamlet. (561)

This quotation brings us back to Schmitt's thesis on "intrusion," but also to his comprehension of history through *Hamlet*. The common ground between Gervinus's and Schmitt's thesis is crucial, for it allows one to understand that "mythical" feature that made Shakespeare's supreme tragedy so unique. Gervinus views *Hamlet* as a "source." Now not only the "Elizabethan public" but also "whole nations" are enthralled by the expansive "fear" that went "beyond the death" of Hamlet. It is quite a feature: Gervinus calls it "elasticity" (563). The historian analyses every detail of the prince. He even considers that Hamlet is more a comedy character than a tragic hero. He probably is just a victim caught in "the false culture of the age" (566). The character lacks unity because he embodies several dimensions. At this point, one can see why Schmitt thought the "liberal" Gervinus was worth mentioning in his introduction to *Hamlet or Hecuba*. He read *Hamlet* beyond psychology and even historicism. The play is a combination of individual acts of genius and historical and spiritual inspiration. A conjunction of elements is constantly swirling around in *Hamlet*. So, what is the gist of Gervinus's interpretation? Reflecting on the pioneering subjectivity of the prince, the historian states:

> Our modern sensibility is anticipated, as it were, by two centuries in *Hamlet*. The words, 'Alas, poor Yorick!' which Hamlet utters in the churchyard with bitter tears, in the superabundant emotion of his soul, have become a sort of fruitful source of those tender and gentle moods which in the last century spread like an epidemic in England and Germany. (574)

"Our modern sensibility" — (as Germans) once should add. The moods of the prince were amplified among nations because such an anticipation was not intended to be understood by Shakespeare's contemporaries. "The honor of being in advance of the age is in most cases

only equivocal," complements Gervinus. And although such asymmetry could be grasped as the "incapability of idealist enthusiasts to bear the actual"—this will resonate in Schmitt's *Politische Romantik* as I will demonstrate later—in the case of Shakespeare, "this advanced position" is to be held "as the token of a true and great superiority." This parallel between the play and Shakespeare as a master of anticipations—perhaps a seer—and Gervinus's native land is elaborated in the following terms:

> If Hamlet, as regards his sensibility, is an anticipation of the feeble generation of the last century, he is, as regards this bitterness of feeling, a type of our German race at the present day. […] We look upon the mirror of our present state as if this work had first been written in our day; the poet, like a living man, works for us and in us in the same way as he intended to do for his own age. (575)

Börne's unorthodox conclusion about *Hamlet* being a "Christian Trauerspiel"—namely, a work of art which is unparalleled due to its powerful surrounding themes, akin to the German spirit—is shared by Gervinus from a political standpoint. However, this must not be viewed as an edifying description. The ultimate moral value of this nation is "bitterness." And the very fact that that English poet could "anticipate" the exhausted ways of the "German race" serves as a historical beacon for those who are willing to take a glance at the withering "mirror of the present":

> A poem by one of our present political poets begins with the words, 'Hamlet is Germany.' And this declaration is no ingenious play of words or confused ideas […]. Just like Hamlet we lost delight in our existence, and fled from the real world to the kingdom of the ideal […]. Just so we grew skeptically embittered against the world, life, and mankind […], and with such a vocation for active service in the world, we indulged in a passive universal sorrow (*Weltschmerz*). (575–576)

Gervinus attempts to dismiss the positive aspect of Freiligrath's famous sentence. No intellectual bloom or "delight in existence" is to be found in Germany. Gervinus seems to also draw a line regarding the concreteness of life and the empty creativity of Romanticism, for the "kingdom of ideal" is an expression eerily similar to Hamlet's "churchyard" and his

everlasting eulogy "Alas, poor Yorick!" A feeling of revenge sweeps across Germany, which logically leads to that expansive yet personal ache sung by Jean Paul.[71] It is interesting to note how this conscious shift from an "active service in the world" to the unabated "skepticism" that Gervinus strongly stresses bears an undeniable resemblance with Börne's depiction of Prince Hamlet as the "no-thing." For both the historian and the political thinker, the slumber of a nation expresses the utter abdication of moral struggle; namely, responsibility. Germany chose "not to be." Thus, "Hamlet is Germany!" is the expression of a Romantic landscape caged in "sorrow." A tethered world where shackled passers-by do not find the adequate means to leave behind their own restraints was, indeed, a classic German theme. Freiligrath's words nourished Helmuth Plessner's characterization of Germany as a "delayed nation"[72] or even Ernst Jünger's critique of the German bourgeoisie in his epoch-defining *The Worker*,[73] in which he admonished the broken "magical unity of blood and spirit that makes the world irresistible." But Gervinus goes further—just as does Schmitt in *Glossarium*—and states that *Hamlet* indoctrinates "the whole race of mankind." Could the monologues of an "Elizabethan" theater piece be that corrosive? *Hamlet*, as we read in Gervinus's last considerations of the play, is the supreme backdrop of modernity's universal values:

> Thus, then this bloody conclusion is not the consequence of an aesthetic fault on the part of the poet, but of a moral fault on that of his *Hamlet*, a consequence which the sense of the whole play and the design of this character aim at from the first. (582)

Gervinus points to Fortinbras's dreadful expression, "This quarry cries on havoc."[74] The Norwegian prince immediately confirms the lowly triumph of death. But the bloodshed must necessarily lead to something better. Elsinore must be cleansed, and people should know that. Horatio demands that the corpses must "[h]igh on a stage be placed to the view; / [a]nd let me speak to the yet unknowing world / [h]ow these things came about."[75] The witness

71. See Beiser 2016, 1–4, 31–42.
72. See Plessner 2001, 36–45. The original title of this book first published in 1935 was *Das Schicksal deutschen Geistes im Ausgang seiner bürgerlichen Epoche*.
73. See Jünger 2017, 5–8.
74. 5.2.358.
75. 5.2.572–574.

becomes the spokesman of tragedy: the agent now communicates the "purposes mistook / [f]all'n on the inventor's reads."[76] Horatio needs to accomplish this urgently, "[e]ven while men's minds are wild."[77] He is now a middleman, the voice that chains the past to the uncertain future of Denmark. The landscape is covered with blood, and this means that "havoc" means failure—but what kind of failure? We now learn, through Gervinus, that this failure is plainly a moral one. Shakespeare placed himself at the floodgates of eighteenth-century Germany and eavesdropped on both national and international quarrels. Gervinus's interpretation, then, is—along with Börne's—superior. They comprehended *Hamlet* through their own "havoc"; namely, through their own "historical situation." And to grasp the "design" of the play from that standpoint necessarily means to take issue with a concrete, historical reality. And so they did.

1.5 Schmitt's psycho-political approach on the notion of myth

As I already proved Schmitt's assertion that both Gervinus and Börne "recognized the tattered and fractured German people," I will now tackle the introduction to *Hamlet oder Hekuba*. Once again, one reads Freiligrath's famous poem where Germany is Hamlet, a nation which, "procrastinating and dreaming," "cannot take the decision to act," Schmitt states. "The labyrinth becomes ever more impenetrable," reads the warning. As we learned from Gervinus and Börne, the correct starting point to analyze the play was to account for its historical dimension. *Hamlet* is a play that creates its own public by transcending time. This means that although Shakespeare's play does possess a strong historical theme, it travels beyond this sphere:

> Instead, transcending both alternatives, the question of the source of the tragic action as such arises as a question that, if left unanswered, would render incomprehensible the entire specificity of the *Hamlet* problem. […] What caused a play of the last years of the Elizabethan age to produce that rare case of a modern European myth?[78]

76. 5.1.378.
77. 5.1.387.
78. Schmitt 2009b, 10.

It is important to mention that the "European myth" is considered a "case." Schmitt uses the expression *diesen seltenen Fall*: a unique, rare case. To describe *Hamlet* in these terms implies developing a normative comprehension of the play. Although one may frown at the fact that Shakespeare's had to wait until Schmitt's study to lose its "incomprehensibility," it is certainly a refreshing interpretation to think of *Hamlet* as a case—a finite and concrete creation—that became a myth. By extension, *Hamlet oder Hekuba* is thus a case study. Schmitt wants to focus on "the dramatic events of the play itself"—which can be seen as a hermeneutic gesture—in its "composition and structure." He conceives this through the Greek notion of "hypothesis,"[79] which resonates in the modern concept of "story."[80] Finally, the case study is described by way of two questions:

> Let us stick close to the matter as it presented in the play and ask: What is the action of the drama and who is the actor Hamlet, the hero of this drama? (10)

The "factual content" [*den Sachverhalt*] is the material already tackled by Winstanley. The historical index of the play is to be considered in its "effectivity"; namely, through its actions. This implies both the dynamic and static aspects of the drama. Finally, this phenomenological approach leads toward the identity of the core of *Hamlet*; that is, the main features and significance of Hamlet the character. This is the outline of Schmitt's plan. We are to deal not with an interpretation but a reading of *Hamlet* as *the* case of literature.

1.6 Schmitt's Preface to Lilian Winstanley's *Hamlet and the Scottish Succession*

Hamlet oder Hekuba was primarily composed after Schmitt wrote the preface to the book on *Hamlet* published by Winstanley in 1921 and translated and published in German in 1952. Apart from some mentions and references found in several of his monographs written during the twenties and some others in the mid-forties, Schmitt had not tackled art and literature explicitly since *Political Romanticism*. Did his views on this field evolve? And if they did, how so? In order to answer these questions, I will thoroughly analyze his prologue to

79. See chapter 3 (3.2).
80. See chapter 2 (2.1).

Winstanley's German version of her book[81] and then schematically address *Political Romanticism*'s main theses.

The prologue is heavily guided by the following idea: that Prince Hamlet represents James I, son of Mary Stuart and her husband:

> Shakespeare's *Hamlet* drama is grounded then in a direct relation to the times. It contains the kind of dramatization that results from participation in an immediate present. The full historical topicality of its place and time of origin lives in *Hamlet*. (164)

Up to now, there are no differences between this assertion and that of Winstanley regarding *Hamlet* being chained to the historical present—and the revolving politics—of the "Elizabethan" era. However, what the play does is secure "its place and time of origin" by withholding its significance through artistic means. Here Schmitt begins to further distance himself from Winstanley's thesis. His concept of "participation" will address the political aspect of the play that will go on to develop into a "myth." He continues:

> It is well known that a great Russian writer, Leo Tolstoy, fiercely criticized the foolishness of the action in Shakespeare's drama, but this brilliant Russian should have recognized that the utter foolishness in *Hamlet* is finally nothing other than the real historical event itself and that his criticism applies less to the drama than to world history.

Schmitt is referring to Tolstoy's *Shakespeare and the Drama.*[82] In this work, the Russian writer aimed to go against the grain of "the whole European world." In a way, he does. While I cannot focus here on Tolstoy's critiques, I would like to stress how Schmitt highlights the "historical event itself." One could ask, then: So what did Shakespeare do after all? Tolstoy

81. Pages references are given in parentheses.
82. Tolstoy 1906, 70–76 at 2–3. Schmitt's paraphrase is originally as following: "But Shakespeare, putting into Hamlet's mouth speeches which he himself wishes to express, and making him commit actions which are necessary to the author in order to produce scenic effects, destroys all that constitutes the character of Hamlet and of the legend. […] There is no possibility of finding any explanation whatever of Hamlet's actions or words, and therefore no possibility of attributing any character to him." It is important to say that one of the sources of Tolstoy's critique is Gervinus's previously mentioned essay.

views the play primarily as an artistic piece of work. Schmitt, on the contrary, argues that *Hamlet* belongs to two realms—history and tragedy. In this perspective, Andreas Höfele argues that Schmitt "is concerned with the tripartite causal connection between contemporary history, tragedy, and myth"[83]. This proves that such themes were already put forward in his 1952 prologue. What de Madariaga criticized in the second edition of his *On Hamlet*—namely, the elaboration of "situational" interpretations—is for Schmitt the starting point of a "concrete" analysis of a piece of work of the "Elizabethan era." In *Hamlet,* that particular moment in history "reappears." Does this mean that politics becomes universal only through art and not, on the contrary, through politics itself? It is too soon to answer the question. Nonetheless, the first paragraphs of Schmitt's prologue are pretty much the same as those of his 1956 *Vorbemerkung*. James I's father was murdered, and Mary Stuart married the murderer. This is a "tragic situation," notes Schmitt. That concrete event differs from that of Orestes because, according to "the general opinion of the English," "Hamlet went to extraordinary lengths to protect his mother" (165). This was the material that flooded Shakespeare's scrapbook. This historical reference gave rise to *Hamlet*. However, one could argue that such a poetic interpretation is overly linear:

> So, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* presents a mirror to, but by no means a mere reflection of, this historical reality. It is not a *roman à clef*, nor is it an old-fashioned form of what today would be called the weekly news. On the other hand, it is also not the case of a freely invented, free-floating fable. (165)

Via negationis at its best. The "mirroring" achieved in *Hamlet* is warped, then. Agreed. Likewise, the play is not a *roman à clef*, a nineteenth-century expression of that which today is commonly referred to as "based on a true story." However, many questions quickly come to mind, including: Was Shakespeare a realist poet? Are the characters in *Hamlet* first-hand representations of certain "Elizabethan" individuals? It seems that Schmitt's approach to literature—however insightful and deep—is quite traditional, for it presupposes a distinction between reality and fiction, which replicates, at the same time, the ongoing philosophical

83. Höfele 2021, 5.

quarrel between what is true and what is not.[84] His interpretation, however, offers a view of literature and reality as interwoven entities. One could ask: Does reality need a form of legitimacy other than history itself? I do not wish to distract myself with these enticing and difficult questions. The point is, all in all, quite clear: *Hamlet* dwells somewhere between human artistry and historical events. Shakespeare did not invent the plot and secrecy regarding the circumstances of Mary Stuart and James I, nor did he pull the dramatical structure of the play out of nowhere. Then what did he really do? This tragedy is all about "convergence." At this point, one could suppose that maybe *Hamlet* was just a "happy accident" after all. This meeting between a "concrete" historical agenda and the fumbling development of a tragedy set close to "doomsday"[85] was certainly one of a kind. Shakespeare grasped his present. He was, "unlike the spectators of Ancient Greek tragedy," contemporary to the individuals that were to become his characters. While Aeschylus's *Persians* did manage to link the drama to the contemporary campaign of Xerxes, he and his followers "were not sitting in Greece in the seats of the theater." The *Amleth* of Saxo Grammaticus, Shakespeare's company, the "stage in London," and the impious actions taking place in the inner circle of Mary Stuart, all of these references were translucently available in both the drama and the reality of early-seventeenth-century England. Shakespeare's drama can be considered as "historical" because its dynamic directly "affected" the "fathers and grandfathers" of actors and spectators. *Hamlet*, Schmitt continues, "presents extreme simultaneity"; "the convergence of the theatrical with the historical present" (165). But this

84. I consider that the most eminent modern contributions regarding this problematic connection are those made by Heidegger in his *Parmenides* seminar (1942–1943, published in 1981) and Vaihinger's *The Philosophy of As If* (1911). See Heidegger 1998, 152: "It could then be objected that this is to hale poetry in an unauthorized way before the court of philosophy. If philosophy and poetry were simply two different human occupations, existing each in itself and distinct by their very essence, then what we have been saying could be condemned as nonsense. But what if the essence of thinking and the essence of poetizing were to receive again their originary entitlements!". See also Vaihinger 2009, 27: "There is another variety of fiction important for science which I call *tropic* fictions; they may also be called *symbolic* or *analogical*. They are closely related to poetic similes as well as to the myth. In these fictions, the mechanism of thinking is as follows: A new intuition is apperceived by an ideational construct in which there is a similar relationship, an analogous proportion to that existing in the observed series of perceptions. In such cases, relationships constitute the apperceiving power. This is also the formal origin of poetry." It is quite significant that Heidegger ends this seminar by analyzing Rilke's *Duino Elegies* just as Vaihinger dedicated the last chapter of his book to Nietzsche's posthumous writings apropos of the concept of "mythology." What Heidegger means by the expression "originary entitlements" points in the same direction of Vahinger's conception of fiction as a "regulative" notion. Moreover, these two views are strongly akin to Schmitt's thesis on "intrusion" and his analysis of *Hamlet* from a concrete situation: i.e., the normative—serious—aspect which is enhanced in the play until reaching the status of a myth.

85. 2.2.241.

convergence can be questioned, as—according to Stephen Greenblatt—"even when he came closer to the world, (…) Shakespeare carefully kept at least a full century between himself and the events he depicted"[86]. On the contrary, Schmitt barely kept a safe distance between himself and the events he reflected. He knew that the fact that Hamlet was a "mythical for the present" was not in any case a positive signal.

In the 1952 prologue, Schmitt analyzes *Hamlet*'s very own lie detector—"The Mousetrap." He gives some sociological yet general insights into the theatrical "atmosphere around 1600." These assertions are identical to those that the reader can find in his rapid analysis of *Das Spiel im Spiel* in the monograph on *Hamlet*. In those years, everyone felt that they were actors, "all the world was a stage." The theater even acted as a stimulus to politics, although in *Hamlet*, "we see the first symptoms of this weakening" (166). However, the civil status of Shakespeare's play is clearly differed by that French phenomenon that Schmitt called the "peculiar triumvirate of continental society"; namely, how "people and society" were "policed" in "the continental state": "[P]olitics, the police, and *politesse*"; "[a]ll three combined to transform the barbaric events, the bloody actions of drama in Shakespeare's time, into brilliant intrigue or topics for educational problems" (166). Schmitt dwells no further on this topic,[87] which he abandons in *Hamlet oder Hekuba*. But *Hamlet* is raw, "Shakespeare's drama was still much a brutal, elementary play, a severe play, not yet "political" in the sense that the word held at that time, rather still very barbaric" (166). Schmitt overemphasizes this organic, brute feature of *Hamlet*. He was no Schiller. Schmitt quotes the *Homage of the Arts*,[88] the last piece of theater created by the German poet, first performed on 12 November 1804 in Weimar. This brief work was to honor the marriage of Maria Paulowna—a Russian princess—and Charles Frederick, Grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach. *Die Huldigung der Kïunste* tells the story of a farming family that holds a festival to receive their new queen. The event brings together the Seven Arts while the family plant a tree. The Genius suddenly appears and plays the role of a messenger, allowing the youth

86. Greenblatt 2018, 5.
87. See Assmann 2014, 94: "In the eighteenth century, pedagogy, cultivation of the self (*Bildung*), biographical development and human formation moved to the forefront of literary production, giving rise to the *Bildungsroman*. The genre got underway with *Telémaque* (1699) by François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon. The novel *The Travels of Cyrus* (1727) by Chevalier Andrew Michael Ramsay, who soon after was to play a leading role in the Masonic Grand Lodge that formed in Paris, adhered to this model."
88. See Alt 2004, 586–591 at 9.

and their parents—along with the maiden—to communicate with the Seven Goddesses. The maiden is none other than Princess Maria Paulowna, who also was the sister of Tsar Alexander I—their father was murdered in 1801, and his son was subsequently enthroned. Thus, Schmitt quotes[89] the speech of Drama, the two-faced goddess. Schmitt remarks how the public of Schiller's plays "viewed world history as world theater and delight in its tragedy for their self-edification" (167). From this perspective, Schmitt brings to light the verses of Drama, for he aims to prove how Shakespeare's public did not yet participate in "the realm of human innocence." So we read in *Homage of the Arts*:

> The mask of Janus have I in my keeping –
> On one side sorrow, on the other joy;
> For man must alternate 'twixt bliss and weeping,
> And with the dark is mixed a light alloy.
> In all its deeps profound, its dizzy heights,
> Life's tale before thine eyes I can unroll,
> And make thee turn, richer for these great sights,
> Into the peaceful silence of thy soul.
> Who the whole world in one wide view surveys,
> In this own heart no civil strife dismays.

Schmitt quotes lines 4–8. In the fifth line, Drama states that she can combine the severe, the extremely serious [*dem Ernste*] with jest [*der Scherz*]. Drama grants spiritual wealth to whoever can envision the "great play of the world" [*das große Spiel der Welt gesehen*]. Thus, Schmitt points to these lines as a beautiful yet inoffensive message to the educated public of early-eighteenth-century Germany. These spectators are quite far from the raucous audience that was contemporary to the events included in Shakespeare's drama, for this audience more or less directly participated in the actions represented in *Hamlet*. However, it would be the words from Schiller's lines– expressed through *Der Schauspielkunst*—that will be revamped by way of the notions of "play" and "seriousness" studied in Schmitt's thesis on *Hamlet*.

89. The English version of Schmitt's prologue uses Brooks's translation of *Die Huldigung der Künste* (see Brooks 1847, 1–16 at 4–5). In the following, I will guide myself by P. Coleman's version of *Homage of the Arts* (see Francke 1913, 366–376 at 5).

Moreover, Schmitt should have quoted not Drama but the vigorous speech of Poetry. Once again, in *Homage to the Arts*, Schiller writes:

> Through farthest space I fly on soaring pinion;
> I know no limits; naught disputes my rule
> Or bids me stay. I hold supreme dominion
> O'er realms of thought – the Word my winged tool.[90]

Poetry speaks after *Die Malerei*; *ut pictura poesis*. The Goddess communicates her limitless dominion [... *kein Band... keine Schranke*]. If Drama oscillates over the surface of all emotions, Poetry rules the space where both the most serious and funny elements emerge. Indeed, the power of this Goddess displays mastery over both telluric and aerial dimensions [(*w*)]*as sich bewegt im Himmel und auf Erden*]. Finally, she states that her godly tool is the Word [(*u*)]*nd mein gefügelt Werkzeug ist das Wort*]. If one accepts this broad, stylized distinction made by Schiller in his *Homage of the Arts*, the following problem arises: is *Hamlet* a work of Poetry or Drama? What is the realm in which his tragedy—or, perhaps, tragedy as such—is crafted? While I cannot offer at this moment a partial although convincing answer to this question, I can anticipate the following: Shakespeare's tragedy is inseparable from theater. This is important because Schmitt's idea of "intrusion" will eventually face its final test by answering if said concept is taken from *Hamlet*, the written play, or *Hamlet*, the everlasting play which continues to conquer the stage to this day. If by "intrusion" Schmitt meant the former, his study of *Hamlet* would fall under the traditional—and confusing—banner of tragedy as an event that is unrelated to theater—a common misinterpretation that does not distinguish between "the tragic" as a feature of existence and "tragedy" as an independent, artistic apparatus. On the contrary, if Schmitt meant instead the former, then *Hamlet or Hecuba* could be considered an intelligent interpretation of the power of theater and its use of poetry.

Schmitt declares that "Shakespeare's great drama drew on the theatricalization of contemporary events for its poetic impulse, but much more for its very essence as modern drama." This is somehow odd, because it mainly addresses both aforementioned dimensions.

---

90. Francke 1913, 374.

Schmitt explains that if in *Hamlet* we find a "play within the play," it is only because the work is a "theater within the theater." It is the theater of life: life's theater. Schmitt's "situational" approach comes to the fore in his 1952 prologue. He uses the information provided by Winstanley[91] in the prologue to the translation of her book (167–8). The "real events" that were "acquainted by a poet, by actors," and by the audience in London were "the immediate historical present for the poet, actors, and audience." Schmitt broods over this convergence several times during the 1952 prologue and his 1956 monograph. He envisions the possibility of a contemporary German play that could have represented the political catastrophe that the "death in 1889 of the crown prince Rudolf von Habsburg and the 'Tragedy of Mayerling' would have had for the Viennese public, or the significance of the Röhm affair for a Berlin public in the year 1934" (168). Unlike in *Hamlet oder Hekuba*, here Schmitt presents two examples of what an "intrusion" could have been for his contemporaries. But this cannot be an intrusion: at most, it is a formula—even a genre, just like the strongly denied *roman à clef*. Avoiding this interpretation—namely, *Hamlet* as an artwork grounded in "topicality"—Schmitt soon offers examples devoid of any hint of naïveté:

> My claim here is not that sheer topicality makes great art. It is quite certain, though, that this sort of urgent historical presence and engagement is essential to Shakespeare's drama, because it was not written for some neutral or foreign audience. It was also not written for posterity, rather for his contemporaries, namely, as theater within the theater of their own historical present. (168)

Schmitt here stresses what *Hamlet* is not. Thus, this is not a claim. Such a negative approach establishes a safe distance from "topicality"—although Schiller will be mentioned again later in Schmitt's prologue. One could then think that Schmitt's argument loses weight. Nonetheless, the repeated dismissal of classic artistic attributes finally takes the form of a

91. Winstanley 1921, 50–56 at 5: "Now, does it not look as if Shakespeare were combining in one most powerful and dramatic scene these three attempts all associated with Mary Queen of Scots: the poison in the ear from the reputed murder of Francis II, the loathsomeness and vileness of the unhappy victim from the first attempt on Darnley, and the body of the victim found in the garden with the actual murder of Darnley? Why not? All these three attempts had already been associated together, one strengthening another, by the queen's accusers, and a dramatic poet very naturally desires to make his play as intense and moving as he can. The association, like the Darnley ghost, is already there. Why not use it?"

compelling argument for even the most skeptical reader. Schmitt will state again the unprecedented historical energy released in "The Mousetrap." The effectiveness of such a device is possible only there "where the reality of contemporary life itself is perceived as theater, as theater of the first degree, and where the theater itself is therefore essentially theater of the second degree, theater within the theater of life." This assertion requires further explanation, which I will endeavor to give.

To perceive "something" as reality necessarily requires that we know that it is only one perception among many others. The relation between perception and reality is a strong, constituent aspect of human knowledge. For the moment, I cannot go over the obvious resonance of this metaphysical vocabulary largely taken from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*;[92] instead, I will only limit myself to the temporal feature of "perceiving" reality as "something"; namely, to the self-consciousness that is needed to make further distinctions between what *is* and what *seems to be*. My claim here is that to assert that the "contemporary life" of sixteenth-century England was perceived as "theater" is a far-fetched thesis. However, to state that this perception possesses a "first-degree" quality is to establish that there is a social kinship between that "contemporary life" and its representation in "theater." Thus, when Schmitt points out that theater is at the same time a "theater within the theater of life"—namely, a "second-degree" phenomenon—he is positing its capacity to identify "contemporary life" with its own reality. This type of kinship is now artistic, enabling a strong connection between social life and arts—theater, in this case. Although the reader might be inclined to naturally think that Schmitt's claim here is merely a supposition—an extension of Winstanley's "topicality"—the description repeatedly held by Schmitt hinges on the concordance between the social milieu of the play and its very content. Schmitt considers that this phenomenon "lead to an intensification and not to a dissolution of the

92. See Kant 1968 A 264–5/B 320–1: "If reality is represented only through the pure understanding (*realitas noumenon*), then no opposition between realities can be thought, i.e., a relation such that when they are bound together in one subject they cancel out their consequences, as in 3 – 3 = O.[a,101] Realities in appearance (*realities phaenomenon*), on the same subject, one can partly or wholly destroy the consequence of the other, like two moving forces in the same straight line that either push or pull a point in opposed directions, or also like an enjoyment that balances the scale against a pain." This "no opposition" is the validity of reality for both cases. Such status does not narrow down the various sensations that are entangled between "realities in appearance" and "realities in negation." The example provided by Kant (3 – 3 = O…) stresses the different degrees on which realities—and the traffic of sensations—are perceived. The contribution of Kant lies in how understanding can cognize *a priori* the quantitative differences in degrees without altering the identity of such qualities. Thus, Kant seeks "the phenomenal reality" and not "reality" as such.

theater." The "double mirroring" of *Hamlet* implies not the comprehension of life as theater but the comprehension of theater as life. The only path that does not lead away from this kind of interpretation is the recognition of the key element of Schmitt's analysis: the power of theater.

Was that "Elizabethan" audience and those London-based spectators thrilled and daunted by Shakespeare's play? Schmitt now focuses on the actor's obeisance to the plasticity required by the play. The Shakespearean actor is certainly not the exciting juxtaposition of "the mask and the actor" depicted in Alexandre Dumas's *Kean* (1836).[93] Schmitt posits the following:

> In contrast, the play within the play in the second act of *Hamlet* is no play behind the scenes—on the contrary, it is the real play itself repeated *before* the curtains, similar to Velázquez paintings where we see that the painted scene is represented again in a painted mirror. The staged reality is itself identically reproduced and put on stage. This presupposes that the theater stands in extreme proximity to the historical present. (168–169)

The keyword in this quotation is, of course, "repeated." Repetition is a feature itself in *Hamlet*—as I have pointed out previously. Its most well-known expression appears in one of the dialogues between the prince and Polonius, when the former answers the latter's affable enough yet cynic question: "What do you read, my Lord?" with the stinging retort: "Words, words, words."[94] While it is hard to know if this is just plain chicanery or a genuine insight, it is not far-fetched to assume the crucial importance of repetition in Shakespeare's work. Later, in the third act, Hamlet and Polonius will again repeat themselves over and over. Before the haphazard assassination of Ophelia's father, Hamlet exclaims: "Mother, mother, mother!"[95] while Polonius's cry for help when he is about to die is: "What, ho! help, help,

93. Dumas's *Kean, ou Désordre et Génie* is a five-act theater piece that depicts the life of the British actor Edmund Kean (1787–1833), a former acrobat who later became known as one of the most acclaimed—and scandalous—Shakespeare interpreters of the nineteenth-century. Kean's intense and morally dubious life was for his contemporaries heavily linked with his performance on stage. His own personality made him closer to Iago than Hamlet.
94. 2.2.194–195.
95. 3.4.4.

help!"[96] Every character in *Hamlet* is affected by this rule of repetition. Just when the prince jumps into Ophelia's grave, Queen Gertrude exclaims: "Hamlet, Hamlet!"[97] The prince even inconsolably sings the pains of Denmark using the ancient figures of the *aiodós* and the *rhapsöidós*:[98]

> An earnest conjuration from the king,
> As England was his faithful tributary,
> As love between them like the palm might flourish,
> As peace should stiff her wheaten garland wear
> And stand a comma 'tween their amities,
> And many such-like 'As' of great charge […].[99]

The value of repetition in *Hamlet* affects every situation. The characters are often juxtaposed against a second, negative presence that reflects an unknown inner theme of their lives. By glorifying names and insisting on different matters—like the chorus that cries in unison, "Treason, treason!"[100] after the prince stabs King Claudius, or the polite Danes, who, in the midst of a political rebellion and demanding that Laertes be named king, meekly answer: "We will, we will"[101] to Laertes's command that they leave—the constant evocation of repetition establishes an episodic upheaval within the vocabulary of *Hamlet*. Schmitt's much-emphasized "play within the play" emerges, then, as the grand design of the iterative theme present in the whole play. Nevertheless, its similarity with *Las Meninas* (1656)—or even Velázquez's late work *Arachne* (1659)—is limited in scope to the formal dimension. This means that the so-called "extreme proximity to the historical present" is, contrary to what Schmitt stated, subservient to Shakespeare's disjointed placement of "the play within the play." Schmitt stresses how the "staged reality is identically reproduced and put on stage"

---

96. 3.4.23.
97. 5.1.262.
98. Gregory Nagy has impressively studied the Indo-European history of poetics. In his *opus maius Greek Mythology and Poetics* (1990), he analyzes the formal differences between the *aiodós*—a poet-like singer established in a local community—and the *rhapsöidós*—the oral poet who recites Hellenic tradition at large. See Nagy 2018, 39–47 at 1: "An oral poet in a traditional society does not 'make things up,' since his function is to re-create the inherited values of those for whom he composes/performs."
99. 5.2.39–44.
100. 5.2.317.
101. 4.5.113.

(169). I, for one, emphasize the use of repetition in *Hamlet* as a method of dislocation and refraction. The common ground shared between the "play" and "reality"—discussed at length by Schmitt—is irrevocably torn to pieces as the play develops. *Hamlet* is a grim stage where words are stripped of their original significance, moving its characters to woeful and often distorted conclusions. Even old age offers no clarity or epiphanic truths, but blunt despair: "O good Horatio, what a wounded name, / [t]hings standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!"[102] No lessons but lesions: "The rest is silence."[103]

Schmitt considers that "[t]he secret of the *Hamlet* drama is the immediate, self-evident proximity to the historical present of its time of origin." The play rapidly dwells on the immediacy of the present. The story of a murdered king, of his torpor-struck son, and the dubious morals displayed by the queen, the new king, and all the other characters—except Laertes—represents the meeting of reality with itself. *Hamlet* is a "singularity," Schmitt states. Its "mythic power" arises from an all-too accessible present. Once again, the play is compared with "antique tragedy." Schmitt denies that "Prince Hamlet-James" is "Orestes" and "Queen Mary Stuart-Gertrude" is "Clytemnestra." He correctly stresses that *Hamlet* is chained to the theater. The "myth," as such, was sired onstage. Once and again, Schmitt tackles "the play within the play." Now he considers it "a consummate experiment, one that is directed, namely, toward the question of whether a core of historical actuality has the power to produce a new myth in this way, by means of the theater" (170). Schmitt welcomes Winstanley's book with zest and marked enthusiasm. He highlights the "evidence" of her investigation:

> The mists of fantastic interpretation dissipate, the scintillation of psychological possibilities ends. One sees the granite rock of a singular historical truth materialize, and the figure of a real king with a concrete fate begins to take shape. (170)

The expression "granite rock" [*der stumme felsen*] will be again recovered in *Hamlet oder Hekuba* apropos of "the incompatibility of the tragic with free invention."[104] In the prologue to Winstanley's book German translation, it is used as the reader's encounter with the crystal-

---

102. 5.2.338–339.
103. 5.2.352.
104. Schmitt 2009b, 38.

clear reality of *Hamlet*. The comparison becomes an unbiased identification. However, the important term in this quote is "fate." To link "the figure of a real king" with the coming into shape of a "concrete fate" presupposes an underlying comprehension of history from a tragic standpoint. This conditioned assimilation of history is very similar to the use of the following two terms in his prologue to Winstanley's book:

> At the core of Shakespeare's drama is the fact that the originary image [*Urbild*] for Hamlet is the concrete history of King James I […]. The situation of James I and the situation of Hamlet are identical in this core. The historical presence is the drama's primal phenomenon [*Urphänomen*], the essence of the great drama *Hamlet*. (170)

Schmitt then goes on to reflect on an aesthetic dimension. The notion of *Urbild*—Schmitt also uses the term *Abbild*—belongs to the classic vocabulary of Western philosophy.[105] It most probably comes from Plato's *Cratylus*,[106] where Socrates bases every human activity[107] on the existence of a primal image or archetype: "Further, primary names may be compared to paintings, and in paintings it's possible to present all the appropriate colors and shapes, or not to present them all,"[108] states the philosopher. An "originary image," then, is the ultimate and primal expression of that which is aimed to be created and perfected. Prince Hamlet is no mere copy but a creation —according to Plato's standards. Shakespeare's creation links back to a previously identified public persona; hence there is a bond of identity between the two figures. The theater storms the public sphere by recreating it. This "presence," states

105. See Regenbogen & Meyer 2013, 1–2.
106. *Cratylus* 432a-c: "Socrates: Suppose some god didn't just represent your color and shape the way painters do, but made all the inner parts like yours, with the same warmth and softness, and put motion, soul, and wisdom like yours into them—in a word, suppose he made a duplicate of everything you have and put it beside you. Would there then be two Cratyluses or Cratylus and an image of Cratylus? / Cratylus: It seems to me, Socrates, that there would be Cratyluses. / Socrates: So don't you see that we must look for some other kind of correctness in images and in the names we've been discussing, and not insist that if a detail is added to an image or omitted from it, it's no longer an image at all. Or haven't you noticed how far images are from having the same features as the things of which they are images? / Cratylus: Yes, I have."
107. *Cratylus* 389c.
108. The German translation reads as follows: "Jede sinnliche, also auch jede lautliche Nachahumg eines Seienden ist wie jedes Abbild seinem Urbild nicht angemessen […]." Both *Abbild* and *Urbild* translates Plato's *schemata*.

Schmitt, is an *Urphänomen*;[109] namely, it is so as due to its dependence on an archetypical image—based on a concrete image of a "historical reality."

The essence of the phenomenon birthed on the stage corresponds to the image of a Queen and a set of impious actions carried out by a murderer. This dreadful aftermath lived and experienced by that "Elizabethan audience" is now reproduced onstage. The "person of an avenger," the character of Hamlet, is literally thrust onto center stage.

Schmitt adds that "this primal image of historical actuality" must not "dissolve into mere Romanticism and subjective occasionalism." Both expressions were introduced by Schmitt in *Political Romanticism*[110]. Much of his 1952 prologue and *Hamlet oder Hekuba* depends, as I will prove further, on this thesis previously written by Schmitt. The "myth" of *Hamlet* depends on its use of a historical image. Maximum politics yields maximum results. Schmitt paraphrases Hölderlin's *Andenken*[111] (1803) when he reminds us that "[p]oets create that which endures"; at the same time, he also relies on Aristotle's difference between "lyric," "epic," and "tragic" poetry. *Hamlet* is no mere "poetic" creation; nor is it an epic, lyric, or tragic theater piece. Although these elements are amazingly displayed in Shakespeare's work—Schmitt reminds us of the character of Falstaff from *Henry IV* and his kinship with Cervantes's Don Quixote—they do not compare with the poetic force of *Hamlet* the drama and its portrayal of "contemporary life." The staging of that "historical reality" is not, thus, mere creation: it is organic. Put differently, *Hamlet* expresses the connection between life and creation.

The 1952 prologue's arguments are—with the exception of his mention of *Politische Romantik* or his proposal that *Hamlet* stands as a myth—resoundingly indulgent with Winstanley's book. James I did not "defend his right on the field of historical action"—such as Hamlet delayed his revenge and did not claim his right to the throne of Denmark. The parallels that Schmitt mentions are the same as Winstanley's. At this point, the reader may wonder what exactly Shakespeare contributed to his play. Did he create a compelling

109. This expression was coined by Goethe in his *Theory of Colors* (1810) as a crucial, holistic element on which Goethe's idea of nature could stand for both a wider and visceral representation of nature's wholeness. See Goethe 1970, 3–6, 18–20.
110. See Schmitt 1986, 17–19 at 8.
111. Hölderlin 2005, 352–353.

masterpiece or merely recreate a ubiquitous image and stress certain historical elements along the way? Schmitt highlights once again the "tragic situation." I quote this point in full:

> In the hands of a great poet, this sort of disguising—with sagas, novellas, and histories—actually heightens the identity it makes use of, preserving its immediacy in a dialectic through the very act of veiling that identity—that is, the poet's application of this insulating layer actually prevents the fire of real life from simply consuming itself. (172)

It is not easy to be told first that *Hamlet* resoundingly echoes an archetype only to then be told that Shakespeare scoffed at "the historical" King James I's inactivity by projecting this very lack of initiative onto a foot-dragging laggard who happens to be a prince whose father—a king—has been assassinated. *À perte de vue*, Schmitt's prologue covers the history of philosophy from Plato to Hegel. The expression "the fire of real life simply consuming itself" is both primitive and dramatic. Was Shakespeare also a *feuerspucker*? Prince Hamlet is "the insulating layer" because he gravitates toward his own unbearable mission by avoiding what in "contemporary life" ought to be fulfilled—"the divine right of kings," as Schmitt assures.

Once again, Schmitt reminds to the reader that the cases of Mary Stuart and James I are not just content that is taken from history books and then gently worked into a drama piece like some sort of "raw material." The examples provided by Schmitt are Schiller's *Mary Stuart* (1800),[112] *The Maid of Orleans* (1801),[113] and *Demetrius* (1804-5, premiered in 1857).[114] He is right to do so because these three works are, indeed, historical dramas as such. He then uses once again the expressions *Urbild* and *Abbild* in his comparison of "Shakesperean and Schillerian drama." The German poet, despite his tremendous historical knowledge and intellectual genius, was unable "to capture the temporal and spatial immediacy of his own unique historical moment." He applied philosophy and drama for a better good; namely, "ethics." This is why "none of Schiller's figures attained mythic stature" (173). Neither his characters nor the stylized plight that they portrayed became "enduring

112. Schiller 2008, 9–148.
113. Schiller 2008, 149–278.
114. Schiller 2005, 245–412. See chapter 3 (3.8).

mythic figures" (173). Schiller mastered his plays by *Abbild*; that is, he imitated a present and built upon it a new, edifying posterity. Shakespeare pierced through the centuries via the divine process of *Urbild*; namely, he crafted a myth by capturing his own present through the public means of theater. He mythicized his present by theatricalizing the very present as an event. But this distinction seems somewhat narrow and unstable. Is it not up to the audience to unravel the wild chronology of theater and its events? Schmitt adds:

> Perhaps Schiller's captivating criminals—especially the false Demetrius—are still candidates for the mythic sphere, if somehow a new image of Schiller manages to establish itself and break out of the crusted layers of paint repeatedly applied in the course of the last century to the portrait we have of Schiller. (173)

It is quite interesting to notice how Schiller eventually entered the "mythical sphere" by creating a villain. Indeed, Demetrius was a deceiver.[115] The faux Russian tsar convinced the Polish *Reichstag* of his kinship with Ivan IV. Demetrius now acts as an ally of Poland in the mission of defeating Boris Godunov. Demetrius is encouraged by Marina, his fiancée. Then all hell breaks loose: Boris Godunov kills himself by drinking poison. Demetrius reigns for few days until he realizes that his claim to the throne is a façade: He had been tricked by Godunov's opponents. And when he forces his mother to prove his alleged kinship with the deceased king, she does not recognize Demetrius as her son. This is all we know, for *Demetrius* was never finished, and we only have the fragments of what this play might have been. However, it is not difficult to see why Schmitt's attention was drawn to Schiller's unfinished work. Demetrius's power is illegitimate. He convinced the people that he was the murdered son of Ivan IV, an assassination planned and perpetrated by Boris Godunov. He achieved power—total power—by seducing those around him. He was no one and suddenly became *the* one. But then he falls in disgrace, for his legitimacy crumbles around him. The deceiver can play with the truth precisely because he is not the true king. "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved," wrote Paul in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians. This entanglement of seduction, power, and legitimacy was tackled twice by Schmitt: First,

115. See chapter 5 (5.3-4).

in *Legality and Legitimacy*,[116] and then in his *Glossarium*[117], where he retrospectively acknowledged the power of that book written in 1933. All in all, Schiller's immaculate "portrait" might be altered when readers learn to fully appreciate the importance of his *Demetrius*; that is, when readers fully recognize the mythic stature of Schiller's disguised outcast. A key contribution to this kind of awareness, Schmitt suggests, can be found in Max Kommerell's work;[118] Schmitt then rapidly covers how Kleist and Grillparzer also cultivated this historical soil with their peculiar dramatic tools. The important thing, Schmitt concludes, is to distinguish that "antique tragedy is grounded in myth" while, on the contrary, "Shakespeare's great drama has its origin in its own unique time." Shakespeare touched his time. By contrast, Schiller, in general, but also Kleist and Grillparzer, were touched by their times.

The next example given by Schmitt is awkwardly local. He mentions Kaspar Hauser, that confused, enigmatic kid who suddenly appears in "Nuremberg's town square," carrying a letter that read: "My name is Kaspar Hauser, and I want to be a cavalryman." Schmitt notes how this "peculiar event" triggered the imagination of "historians and jurists, pedagogues and journalists" (174). The names of Paul Verlaine, Stefan George, Richard Dehmel, and Georg Trakl are quickly mentioned in the 1952 prologue. Schmitt aims to demonstrate how poets are able to take an event or situation and rip it brilliantly from history's grip. Plain historicism—namely, formal documentation—would have reduced that lost kid's story to nothing more than a curious anecdote. Nonetheless, the force of this myth does not come from poets as such—they just enhance a "historical singularity" (174). Regarding the mythical, Schmitt conveys how poetry decodes an encrypted historical message and lifts it onto a higher, public yet irrational sphere. Without explicitly covering the subject, he offers a taxonomy of creation: Achilles's deeds were sung by Homer, Kaspar Hauser's singularity was put into verse "by lyric poets." None of them belonged to the stage. Achilles needed to appear close to other mortals, even though he was the son of a goddess; otherwise, he would have been just another character on the stage and not a hero per se. Kaspar Hauser did not have such an origin, but within the theater, he would have likewise appeared dull, his dark persona progressively thrust into the light of understanding. On the contrary, King James I

116. Schmitt 2012e, 32–37 at 6.
117. Schmitt 2015e, 47–54, 137, 155 ff.
118. See chapter 5 (5.4).

was presented to himself and to the London-based audience by a dramatist who knew more about fate and revenge. Culture needs to change and mutate, and so too does myth. This uninterrupted flux offers multiple reflections through which all manner of readers and interpreters can see themselves or their own present-day reality. Schmitt recalls once again Freiligrath's oft-cited line, just to repeat that, beyond these inevitable waves of change, *Hamlet* "succeeded in preserving within the drama itself the real core of its origin, realizing the play of history in the stage" (175). It is worth mentioning that at this point, just as will happen in *Hamlet oder Hekuba*, Schmitt does not see the possibility of new investigations arising that will change the image that we have of Mary Stuart and King James, thereby also changing the "real core" that lies at the heart of Shakespeare's intentions. Schmitt does recognize how Winstanley's work devoted to Shakespeare cracked open an unknown theme in historical investigations—the label *comparative literature* was not yet developed in Germany by 1952. Schmitt brings to the fore nearly a dozen of *Hamlet*'s nineteenth-century interpreters just to admit that the trend of "contemporary-historical connections" was far from new.[119] However, Winstanley's investigation—and thus, also Schmitt's—"has now provided the decisive turn" (176). Schmitt acridly rejects the opinion of one "well-known Anglicist in Zürich," who "in 1924" aimed "to destroy the disruptive book once and for all" (176). Schmitt heavily mocks the aforementioned critic: "Today we find the life, the fate, and especially the sentiments of the ill-fated king less boring than that overbearing Anglicist of 1924, who unlike the ill-fated James unfortunately has no Shakespeare to put him on stage in the alienated form appropriate to his time" (176). The critic in question, Bernard Fehr, did

119. Schmitt stresses how Karl Silberschlag's *Shakespeare's Hamlet, Sources and Political Connections* (1877) "requires special mention," for he—a German scholar who published several works on Ancient Greek philosophy—had already accounted for the parallelisms that could be drawn between *Hamlet* and Shakespeare's sixteenth-century political and historical context. Schmitt questions those "critics" that "have invoked" Silberschlag's essay "in order to cast doubt on the originality of Lilian Winstanley's thesis." See Silberschlag 1877, 278: "Die Anspielungen in unserer Tragödie haben unserer Ansicht nach Ihren Grund vorzugsweise darin, dass es Shakespeare ein Bedürfniss war, Charaktere und Begebenheiten des wirklichen Lebens, welche ihn selbst lebhaft angeregt und viel beschäftigt hatten, poetisch darzustellen." Although this does recall Winstanley's thesis, it is actually Silberschlag's, who at the very beginning of his essay calls for a shift from the aesthetic interpretations of *Hamlet* toward historical ones: "Unter historischer Kritik verstehen wir die Kritik, welche die Entstehung der Dichtung betrachtet, also die Quellen, welchen der Dichter benutzt hat und die Beziehungen auf bestimmte Ereignisse oder Personen, welche sich in der Dichtung finden" (Silberschlag 1877, 269). This means, according to Schmitt, that Silberschlag's reading remains tied to the descriptive historical level, while Winstanley, on the contrary, went beyond this dimension by taking into account concrete political events.

not see the sociological potential of Winstanley's thesis[120]. On the contrary, Augustus Ralli, a Shakespearean scholar who wrote *A History of Shakespearean Criticism* in 1932, did comprehend Winstanley's—and, logically, Schmitt's prologue and later 1956 investigation. He "concluded […] that the light thus cast on the historical events of Shakespeare's time is like the fire stolen by Prometheus" (177). Of course, the positive reviews of Winstanley's work—which Schmitt naturally took to extend to his own—ignored the simple fact that history, a concrete situation, needs to be first aestheticized in order to be mythicized.[121] Schmitt continues Ralli's depiction of *Prometheus* by asserting that "the great dramatist found it in the historical present of his time." His prologue ends as follows:

> With the help of Lilian Winstanley's book, we become aware of this important process, extricating ourselves from the morass of academic controversies. We begin to grasp a crucial event of our European history: the birth of the Hamlet myth in a play of contemporary-historical presence. (177)

The reader may ask herself now if Schmitt's indulgent tone in this preface was not intended to achieve something bigger and personal; namely, Schmitt's lending substance to his own thesis on "the capture of contemporary life"—which later in *Hamlet oder Hekuba* would become the idea of "intrusion"—by heralding an all-too narrow and expansive thesis on *Hamlet*. At this point, one could think that Schmitt confused the realms of real-life and creation by thinking of *Hamlet* and its current impact on the culture of the modern era as an event that took place in the "historical reality of James I and Mary Stuart" (18). Was the death of King James that decisive for Europe? By considering that event a "taboo," his interpretation distances itself from "the morass of academic controversies" and transforms him into a veritable taboo-buster. Moreover, the core of the foreword of Winstanley's investigation is not directly related to Shakespeare and his critics. It draws primarily on the thesis already established in PR. In order to prove this, I will now tackle the main theoretical

120. Bernard Fehr's critique was severe, as it practically severed Winstaley's central thesis: "'Die Verfasserin'", writes Fehr, "glaubt heute fest an die Wirlichkeit ihrer Entdeckungen. Wenn sie nach Jahren in aller Ruhe ihr Buch wieder liest, wird sie zur Einsicht kommen, daß sie einst mit Peter Pan nach *Neverland* geflogen war", quoted in Höfele 2021, 4.
121. See Höfele 2016, 259: "But in order to explain Hamlet, Schmitt, like Winstanley, must first Hamletize James. In his account, James becomes a tragic character, but also with those that would befall his doomed progeny in the course of the seventeenth century."

elements in PR and show how the biased and disguised reception of Winstanley's thesis can be found in Schmitt's take on "the myth of Hamlet."