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Carl Schmitt's 'Hamlet oder Hekuba' and the question of a philosophy of history

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CHAPTER 2
HAMLET ODER HEKUBA'S INTERNAL SOURCES

Introduction

By acknowledging the importance of *Political Romanticism* (1921), I develop in this chapter a thorough analysis of Schmitt's conception of political life as existential seriousness. His dismissal of romanticism foreshadows his later rejection of disciplinary scopes at the moment of studying the historical core of *Hamlet*. A methodological breakdown of *Political Romanticism*'s main thesis shed light, then, in several statements that the reader will find in *Hamlet oder Hekuba*. Schmitt's idea of an internal methodological flaw in the main contemporary disciplines that had delve into the significance and intricacies of Shakespeare's drama—that is, that their conceptual a priori is rooted in liberalism, whether its manifestation comes as romanticism, sociology, psychology or art theory—find in *Political Romanticism* its very first version. After having accounted the monograph of 1921, then I proceed to offer a point-by-point examination of *Hamlet oder Hekuba*'s theoretical structure.

2.1 The Importance of *Political Romanticism*

Most of Schmitt's published works—monographs, essays, correspondence, notebooks, and posthumous diaries—belong to Duncker & Humblot. This Berlin-based publishing house was founded in 1798 by Heinrich Frölich. In 1809 it was purchased by Carl Duncker and Peter Humblot, just a few months before Frölich's death. They continued and expanded their initial publishing ventures—mostly literature and philosophy—and later added political science and law studies to their portfolio.[122] Schmitt's PR[123] was the beginning of a long, fruitful relationship not only with Duncker & Humblot but also with Ludwig Feuchtwanger—his editor until 1933 and "one of the most important Jewish intellectuals of

122. Norbert Simon (hrsg.), *Duncker & Humblot. Verlagsbibliographie 1798-1945* (Duncker & Humblot: Berlin, 1998), 11ss.
123. Page references to the German edition will be given in footnotes, while the page references of the English translation will be given in parenthesis. Any modification of these translations will be given in footnotes.

the Weimar Republic."[124] *Politische Romantik* was Schmitt's "first major monograph" (84). It is a three-chapter examination of "the structure of the Romantic spirit."[125] It is quite ironic, however, that a book that dealt with the spiritual beginning of an "individualistically disintegrated society"[126] was published under the very same firm whose first owner, Heinrich Frölich, was no other than the editor of the six-issue legendary *Athenäum*, the intellectual house organ of Novalis, Schleiermacher, and the Schlegel brothers: basically, the birth of Romanticism. This was the topic treated in *Political Romanticism*.

Schmitt's well-known thesis states the following:

> Romanticism is subjectified occasionalism because an occasional relationship to the world is essential to it. Instead of God, however, the romantic subject occupies the central position and makes the world and everything that occurs in it into a mere occasion. (18)

As is easily recognizable, the central concept here is "occasion." However, to grasp what an occasion is and how it can be treated creatively in all its many facets, it is first necessary to comprehend the concept of "world." While a critique of subjectivity can be fulfilled by formal, philosophical means—just as Hegel did by negatively acknowledging Novalis's unthinkable power of consciousness and creativity[127]—, an inquiry into the spiritual phenomenon that is invariably dependent on the very substance of the world necessarily must address metaphysical, historical, and political sources in order to distinguish between different forms and types of "Romanticism." Moreover, by establishing the "spiritual structure" of such phenomenon, Schmitt explicitly values Romanticism as a mutation or at least as a momentous shift from its original sphere of faith to other realms. To consider "the world as an occasion" presupposes a renunciation to any commitment within the "world." Thus, "the world" can be anything and nothing at the same time. One day it is "the Middle Ages," another day, it is "the feudal aristocracy, and feudal castles" (9). Romanticism and its

124. Mehring 2014, 84.
125. Schmitt 1998, 62.
126. Schmitt 1998, 20.
127. See Siep 2014, 198.

agent, "the Romantic," find themselves within the world without really being "in the world." Externality becomes virtual. The Romantic enters nowhere and leaves everywhere:

> The possibility of a real political revolution in which he could personally take part did not occur to him. Regardless of whether his phraseology was revolutionary or reactionary, belligerent or pacifist, pagan or Christian, he was never resolved to leave the world of his impressionistic experience and change anything that occurred in commonplace reality. (99–100)

It was binary or bust. In his 1924 *Vorwort,* Schmitt named these dichotomies "the objective oppositions and distinctions."[128] They are "profound and mysterious only as long as they are taken[129] with objective seriousness in the domain to which the romanticized object belongs." It is important to note how five years after *Politische Romantik*, Schmitt still insists on the epistemic value of what is "objective"—namely, deduced. Moreover, the distinctions that Schmitt dismisses are the following—"good and evil, friend and enemy, Christ and Antichrist" (16). But this is hardly objective. In fact, it is objectively moral—or, in the case of the dichotomy "friend and enemy," meta-moral. However, the point is clear. The Romantics display their images and "tumultuous polychromy" in a dynamic, self-destructive, and unpredictable mental playground, where almost everything is serious except seriousness. Romanticism is the play of the game. While Schmitt aims for a "third possibility", the structure of his analysis remains binary.

PR aims to analyze "the spiritual structure" on which all these astonishing possibilities are able to exist:

> As for every genuine explanation, here too the metaphysical formula is the best touchstone.[130] Every moment is based, first of all, on a specific characteristic attitude toward the world; and second, on a specific idea, even if it is not always conscious, of an ultimate authority, an absolute center. The romantic attitude is most clearly characterized by means of a singular concept, that of the *occasio*. […] It acquires its real significance, however, by means of an opposition. It negates the concept of

128. Schmitt 1986, 17 (translation modified).
129. Translation modified.
130. Translation modified.

> *causa*, in other words, the force of a calculable causality, and thus also every binding norm. (16)

This is the approach and method of the book on early romanticism. In his 1924 prologue, Schmitt reviews the different and often contradictory scopes that have been used to study Romanticism. Just like in *Hamlet oder Hekuba*, historicism, psychology, and even politics miss the mark when it comes to capturing the core of this phenomenon. Schmitt thus offers a classification, a typology, a study of the "concrete" aspect of Romanticism. And what could be more concrete than the life and events of a Romantic; namely, Adam Müller? Müller is the exemplum. The final opposition is between a carefree, genius life and the juridical aspect of existence—that which Schmitt calls "every binding norm" (17). But this is just the formal dimension. Even more profound is the distinction between facing existence in its inner seriousness and, on the contrary, degrading the very institutional foundations of the epoch by calling out its murkiness and infirmity, to finally escape through an endless kaleidoscope of possibilities unable to ground themselves in reality. The vitriolic march of Romanticism put seriousness to the side. Its "real significance" is to be revealed in non-Romantic terms. Schmitt offers a descriptive approach by proving the main features of Romanticism—its phenomenal themes—in his portrayal of Adam Müller. He possessed "an insignificant and questionable personality," his life was of a "vital incongruity," he even was a "fraud," merely a "poor rabbit," "a wretched sub-Romantic legend" (21). Schmitt, finally, aimed "to give an objective answer to a question that is seriously intended" (21). He who grounds reality in real life is no Romantic by definition. The aesthetic outlook championed by Romanticism is linked with "the relation of the fantastical, and also […] the relation of intoxication or the dream, the relation of the adventure, the fairy tale, and the magical game" (19).

Already in *Political Romanticism*, it seems that the unveiling of a phenomenon by studying its concreteness can be achieved only by juxtaposing "the spiritual core" against the "concrete life," just as happened with James I, who became Hamlet through his likeness with Shakespeare's artistic creation. Schmitt states:

> This romantic productivity also treats all traditional art forms as a mere occasion. Thus even though it repeatedly seeks a concrete point of departure, it must alienate itself from every form, just as it does from concrete reality. The remote—in other

> words, that which is spatially or temporally absent—is not easily destroyed or negated, either by the consistency of actual reality or by a norm that ordains compliance in the here and now. (19–20)

If life as such is concreteness—gravity, blood, bones, and death—how can productivity detach itself from reality? An occasion is not an exception but another aspect of concrete life itself, which is produced, imagined, reproduced, re-imagined, destroyed, and renewed once again only to consolidate a new face of reality and a new world of realities. There is no *occasio* that does not belong to concrete life. The problem is, to Schmitt's unfair interpretation, that the significance of such actions is measured according to its political impact. In this sense, was Schmitt's approach historically biased? Unorthodoxy does not equate with Romanticism. And although "subjectified occasionalism" might sound like a cutting-edge formula, is it historically adequate? Schmitt's typology considers that the many approaches to the critique of Romanticism—the mercurial diplomat Gentz, the Hegelians, especially Arnold Ruge and Karl Marx, etc.—failed at "capturing their contradictory and multifaceted enemy by means of a succinct concept" (25). Thus, a conceptual scope alone cannot achieve an exhaustive reconstruction of Romanticism. *Political Romanticism* is by turns revisionist, taxonomical, philosophical, and typological. This is a great combination that, however, does not often endure. Schmitt argues why a conceptual approach is insufficient:

> Therefore, nothing is achieved when the romantic is paraphrased as a mystical-expansive impulse, a longing for what is higher, an admixture of naiveté and reflection, the domination of the unconscious, or in a similar way—not to mention the self-definitions of romanticism. (30)

Schmitt shores up his study by concentrating on the theoretical failures that the "expansive" approaches were built on. From this perspective, the Swiss jurist Karl Ludwig von Haller is akin to Müller and, thus, a Romantic; but, then again, he is the contrary of a Romantic, just like Adam Müller was. Therefore, Schmitt's assertion that "[b]efore we ascertain the structure of political Romanticism on the basis of spiritual-historical and systematic relationships, however, the praxis of a political Romantic must be shown by means of an

example."[131] While he addressed that Romantics also possess and carry on in "concrete situations," the reader now may skeptically ask if maybe the Romantic can find herself in a concrete situation that, nevertheless, it is not authentic. Schmitt stresses the importance of "the actual conductor of the political Romantic who is given an opportunity" (37). Schmitt studies the cases of Friedrich Schlegel and Josef Anton von Pilat: the former was the editor and "war correspondent" of "the *Österreichische Zeitung* and of the *Österreichischer Beobachter*." Schlegel was succeeded by the German publicist Pilat (1782–1865). Schlegel and Pilat, along with Gentz and Adam Müller, were trustees of Metternich. Schmitt limits himself to quoting from the letters of the leaders of all of these "political Romantics." This is enough for him to address how their time in politics was insignificant, a string of futile exercises. The reader may thus consider it prudent to ask: Are the letters by those chiefs a definitive proof on which to properly gauge the political significance of "Romanticism" as such? Schmitt—referring to Schelgel—answers:

> Nevertheless, where we are to consider the historical impact of the political personality, it has to be noted that whereas most of his political contemporaries had virtually no other immediate impression of his personality beyond that of corpulence, as a politician he was not taken seriously at all. (39)

Schmitt's argument continues to lack weight. How can the irrelevance of Schlegel's work as an "editor and war correspondent" have a bearing on an entire movement or a "historical-spiritual" phenomenon? Moreover, the wave of politics held little sway over the lives of Schlegel and Müller. It seems that the "political" is authentically present only at the bureaucratic offices where chiefs, chancellors, and princes subtly reject the metaphysical gridlocks of those "Romantic" clerks. This is quite amusing if one compares it with one of Schmitt's most well-known maxims; namely, "[t]he distinction of friend and enemy denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation."[132] Therefore, the "political Romantic" reached low levels of political participation. But what if this was intentional? Friedrich August Wolf—the German classicist who coined the discipline and concept of "philology"—remarked in a note that Schlegel was "a man who

131. Schmitt 1986, 39 (translation modified).
132. Schmitt 2007a, 27.

wants to go beyond 'assured success.'"[133] Perhaps the "political" arena was not his intended sphere of activity after all. At the same time, Pilat was awarded a third-class Cross of the Order of the Red Eagle and, in 1831, was recognized as a member of the Austrian nobility. Is the global upheaval caused by the Romantic—which is the problem that Schmitt wholeheartedly tackled in his considerations on romanticism—just vain political outcry? While Schmitt unfolds a very detailed analysis of Müller's biography—his life in Dresden, his crooked actions in the Tyrol "as an aide-de-cape and journalistic attaché," and, finally, his conversion to Catholicism—he suddenly forgets that Müller's constant bureaucratic reshufflings do not apply to the cases of Schlegel and Pilat. Scholars have recognized the political potential of Schlegel: for instance, his concept of "urbanity"[134] or his notion of "irony," which turned out to be widely used. It is not hard to figure out that the "political Romantic" simply stands for the non-political. Moreover, the inauthenticity of Romanticism extends not only to the political sphere but also to the spiritual—the poles which Schmitt specifically considers serious realms of thought. This explains Schmitt's remark about how "Catholicism is not something Romantic":

> Regardless of how often the Catholic Church was the object of romantic interest, and regardless of how often it also knew how to make use of romantic tendencies, the church itself was never the subject and bearer of a romanticism, no more than this was the case for any other world power. (50)

The expression in *Hamlet oder Hekuba* that depicted reality as "the mute rock upon which the play founders, sending the foam of genuine tragedy rushing to the surface"[135] must be comprehended as the attestation of Schmitt's thesis regarding Catholicism as the ultimate limit of Romanticism. In both cases, the image of the "rock" stresses the "concreteness" of reality as such. At the end of the first chapter of *Politische Romantik*, Schmitt states that "the Catholic Church turned out to be the rock on which Romantic vanity […] was shattered." However, if one is to approach this metaphor literally, the truth is that only a concrete object

133. Quoted in Hessling 2014, 37.
134. See Breuer 2014, 131–132; Breuer 2015, 60–75.
135. Schmitt 2009b, 45.

can be "broken" [*zerbrach*][136] against a rock. While Schmitt establishes an opposition between the "concrete"—the rock; that is, reality (the Catholic Church)—and the non-concrete—the "tumultuous" waves of the sea; namely, Romanticism or the free creation of tragedy and drama—this typology does not and cannot endure. Likewise, the metaphor does not belong to Schmitt—nor does he claim that it does. It is a classic locus of Stoicism established by Marcus Aurelius (121–180 AD). In his 49th meditation, he states:

> To be like the rock that the waves keep crashing over. It stands unmoved and the raging of the sea falls still around it.[137]

The rock [*der Felsen*] that Schmitt refers to is a manifestation of the callousness of reality as such. The shape, color, intensity, texture, or frequency of the wave does not matter: It will inevitably succumb against the relentless rock. However, for Marcus Aurelius, the image of the rock was not supposed to describe a dismal crashing against an impervious opponent performing a stable, everlasting role. The Roman emperor followed in the footsteps of Seneca (4 BC–65 AD), who compared the life of the sage with that of a rock. I quote at length from the *Letters on Ethics: To Lucilius*:

> I do not put the sage in a separate class from the rest of humankind, and neither do I eliminate pain and grief from him as if he were some sort of rock, not susceptible to any feeling. I keep in mind that he is made up of parts. One is nonrational, and it is this that experiences the biting, the burning, the pain. The other part is rational; it is this that holds unshakable opinions and that is fearless and unconquerable. In this latter resides the highest good of humankind.[138]

The "rock" of Stoicism is not simply a metaphor. It is rather a task, a state of mind that has to be achieved by the sage with increasing lore and loving fairness. This rock is a two-fold entity, part non-rational, part rational. This means that the non-rational part is passive; it only "experiences the biting, the burning, the pain." The other is active—it can be fine-tuned

136. Schmitt 1998, 61.
137. Marcus Aurelius 2002, 48.
138. Seneca 2015, 220.

throughout the life of the sage. It becomes stronger—it is "fearless and unconquerable." Seneca finds in this part "the highest good [*cum vero perfectum*...] of humanity." "Humankind" [*hominum*] is *humanitas*, a concept first used by Cicero in opposition to *inmanitas* (the barbarians), which meant the combination of "the traditional virtues of the past with a new refinement of intellect and manner."[139] The rock of Stoicism is intertwined with humankind. By contrast, Schmitt's *rupe* is pure unawareness. It is a fact, a neutral object which stands for nothing. The two parts mentioned by Seneca are merged in a single mineral, deaf to external yearnings and mute regarding all positions, contents, or decisions. What was for Stoicism a genuine depiction of the turmoil of existence and the inevitability of grief and despair—namely, the image of the dualism which characterizes the meaningful yet fortunate life of the sage—is now for Schmitt the landscape on which an opposition simply takes place. Schmitt's metaphor of the "mute rock" is the expression par excellence of the institutional aspect of life—or at least what can be controlled within its chaos. By "institution" Schmitt means—at least from *Der Wert des Staat und die Bedeutung des Einzelnen* onward[140]—the state but also the church as the most important historical institution—the Church *mediates* the traffic between "reality and ideas and concepts"[141]. Therefore, the "Romantic" wave beats against the institutional rock only to disappear in vain. But the metaphor of the concrete is ironically still too abstract. The dualism celebrated by the Stoics develops into a narrow typology where a complex phenomenon is analyzed in terms of legitimation. The "political Romantic" existence was indeed paradigmatic. However, to classify its agents according to a typology whereby the "utmost degree" of reality is to be found in the unsubstantial clerks who never had access to the folders with which moguls, kings, and queens orchestrated the politics of their "concrete situation," might be a fair accepted examination that it is, nonetheless, historically biased. Even if the reader is willing to accept the contemporary interpretation of Romanticism by going back to its metaphysical roots—the "two major transformations that together form an interesting countermovement"; namely, "the

139. See Vasaly 1993, 183: "The word implies, first, the possession of a broad literary education, including familiarity with and enjoyment of poetry, as well as knowledge—although not a specialist's knowledge—of history and philosophy. *Humanitas* describes a quality of spirit as well, perhaps expressed in its most attractive aspect in the peroration of the *Pro Roscio*, where Cicero pleads eloquently for the return of the tolerance, pity, and humanity that had once existed in public life."
140. Schmitt 2014e, 127. It is in this monograph that Schmitt first establishes the distinction between the concrete and the non-concrete (or abstraction).
141 I thank to Hugo Herrera for this observation.

Copernican planetary system" and "the philosophy of Descartes"—and thus the branding of the Romantic movement as a specific kind of opposition to "eighteenth-century rationalism" (53), it is not so easy to concede the following:

> The origin of romantic irony lies in this suspension of every decision, and especially in the vestige of rationalism that it reserves for itself in spite of its thoroughly irrational bearing, the origin of this clear criterion that immediately makes the difference from mysticism evident, since there is no ironic mysticism. (56)

The "political Romantic" merely languishes in his "concrete situation" by escaping to infinity by various means. The "political Romantic" is at most do-nothing functionary. This is the lesson that Schmitt holds as universal while pointing out Adam Müller's regrettable mischievousness. Schmitt nevertheless insists. He proposes a new, more essential opposition: namely, "the Romantic conflict between possibility and reality" (65). The Romantic "reversed" this relationship, something that "also signifies a reversal philosophically" (66). The concrete becomes limited; ergo, something false. This new model now "is fused with the opposition of the infinite and the finite, the intuitive and discursive" (67). If Schmitt was too hasty in dismissing the positive contributions of psychology and sociology when he attempted to grasp "a definition of political Romanticism" (51), now he is quite optimistic in thinking that the Romantic phenomenon behaved according to the terms of his oppositional typology. Schmitt classifies the Romantic as the one who served "the two new demiurges, humanity and history" (67). How much more abstract can Schmitt's thesis get? According to this view, the use of typology leads only to revisionism, while a sociological approach would take the reader to a more specific and "concrete" explanation of Romanticism.[142] Schmitt's analysis, after having highlighted the highest expression of the demiurge of "humanity"—

142. Just like Michael Mann did in the second volume of his classic *The Sources of Social Power: The Rise of Classes and Nation-States, 1760–1914* (1993[2012]), 230–238 at 6–7: "The 'national' identities of these ideologists [Mann refers to the German Romantics] were ostensibly apolitical, yet they carried varied political implications. They imbibed Enlightenment advocacy of reason, education, and literacy to modernize, usually with liberal political implications. But other ideological currents had conservative implications […]. German Romantics saw progress carried less by the individual than by the community, the *Volk*." And later: "All of this might have mattered little. Central European protonationalism concerned small groups of intelligentsia, mostly loyal to their rulers, busying themselves with abstruse forms of knowledge." The "two demiurges" here are adequately replaced by a genuine historical analysis of the social aspects of cultural and political change in eighteenth-century Germany.

namely, children, the "undetermined children" (Novalis), "the happiest state […], [the] eternally unrealized, possibility"—proceeds to analyze the spiritual character of Romanticism:

> The romantic does not escape into nothingness. On the contrary, he seeks a concrete reality, but it is a reality that does not disturb and negate him. […] Its terrible decision—eternal bliss or eternal damnation—turns all the fits of romanticism into an absurd trifle. Finally, the romantic world is not utopian either. […] He has a reality that he can play out today. He does not want to be bothered with the task of a concrete realization. (71)

Reading this paragraph, it seems curious to suggest, for instance, that *Athenäum* simply aimed to "play out" reality, rejecting "a concrete realization." At the same time, it is natural to view the aforementioned "absurd trifle" as related to Müller and his lack of verve for politics. Up to now, it seems that the Romantic was an eighteenth-century Zerco. The reader who is familiar with German Romanticism might picture these men as slack-jawed honorary members of some political organization, who busy themselves with minutiae of various kinds while they walk unscathed toward an unapproachable and, therefore, perfect reality. This is crucial, the bottomless distance between the Romantic and his decision. "Romantic irony is essentially the intellectual expedient of the subject that keeps its distance from objectivity" (72). It seems that the devil finds work for Romantic hands. At this point, Schmitt's typology is perfectly accurate; his description of the main agents of this short-lived cultural phenomenon, simply flawless. Whether the subject is Müller's incapacity to define anything—x "is nothing other than…"—or Novalis' never-ending exchangeable realities, Schmitt never fails to provide a correct formal description of Romanticism. "Everything real is only an occasion," as we read apropos of "this Romantic productivity" (84). Schmitt now develops a general sketch of the word "occasio." This is a philosophical concept—one may conceive of it as a reaction, in view of the development of Schmitt's analysis—opposed to the concept of "causa." Schmitt analyzes the "structure of political Romanticism," which is logically linked to a specific metaphysical standpoint. It is not hard to see that the main objection here is the "ocassio's" lack of normativity and its free setting rooted in God's

supreme occasion: the world. The connection between Romanticism as an exotic knee-jerk reaction to rationalism is historically postulated in the following terms by Schmitt:

> […] we see the justification of the view that the discussion of the structure of the romantic spirit began with Descartes, who was led from the argument that I am[143] because I think—from the inference from thought to being—to the distinction between internal and external, soul and body, *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. This resulted in the logical and metaphysical difficulties of bringing the two into interaction with one another and of explaining the mutual interaction of soul and body. (85–86)

That "interaction" was not explained by the philosophy of "occasionalism." "This distinctiveness rests on the consideration that the 'occasionalist' does not clear up a dualism, but rather lets it stand" (87). Consequently, Romanticism sought not to set aside these "difficulties" or obstacles but regarded them as part of a "higher third." Schmitt acknowledges the philosophy of Schelling—along with that of Fichte—as major clarifying elements[144] when it comes to tackling the mile-wide metaphysics of the "*höhern Dritten.*"[145] The philosophy of "occasionalism," according to Schmitt, was at its best a source of traffic between unfinished and non-concrete "realities." Suddenly, "Romanticism" is over. The intellectual phenomenon which took over from "occasionalism," producing an array of possibilities regarding life—"true" life (92)—ended up merging with the *Biedermeier* epoch. But Schmitt's rather biased brand of revisionism does not quite match his talent for establishing that typology which opposed "occasio" to "causa"; "Romanticism," to "concreteness" (the church, the state, the different articulations of seriousness where real

143. Schmitt 1986, 94 (translation modified).
144. However, this was already pointed out by Heinrich Heine's classic critique of Romanticism, *The Romantic School* (1836), which was also an in-your-face critique of Madame de Staël's quasi-ethnological portrait of Germany's early eighteenth-century intellectual milieu *De l'Allemagne* (1813). See Heine 1986, 16–17: "A lot of nonsense is talked about the influence of Fichte's idealistic philosophy and Schelling's nature philosophy on the Romantic School, even to the extent of maintaining that it had its origin in these philosophies. But I find, at most, the influence of a few fragments of Fichte's and Schelling's ideas and no influence whatsoever or a philosophy. Mr. Schelling, who was then teaching in Jena, did however, exercise a strong personal influence on the Romantic School: he is a bit of a poet—a fact not known in France—and they say he is still uncertain as to whether he should publish his collected philosophical doctrines in poetic or even metrical form." Schmitt's highly biased examination on the "personalities" of the Romantics is firmly based on the same bias that the reader finds in Heine's depiction of Schlegel and Schelling.
145. Schmitt 1998, 98.

tragedy emerges from). The cadence of the "Romantics" could not establish an ethics. Their project simply petered out. Fichte's "I" did not provide an answer to the question: "[W]hat does human activity consist in?" (94). Fichte's answer was merely a *Gemütsbewegung*,[146] a dynamic affection. The competence between reasonable options and decisions is "bent out of shape" [*umgebogen… ist*] by Romanticism. Here the reader may detect the bias behind Schmitt's revisionism: in his quest to justify his typology, Schmitt equated Adam Müller's life with Novalis's *Pollen* or Schlegel's letters on physiognomy. But when Schmitt aims to prove the connection between Malebranche's philosophy of "occasio" and the metaphysical thought of Romanticism, the inner complexities and considerable distinctions of this cultural phenomenon are severely reduced. Müller and Schlegel are made out to be the heirs of the godly philosophy of Descartes and the Catholic interpretation of Malebranche. The metaphysical origin of Romanticism finds its perfect application in those non-Hegelian, quasi-Schellingian, half-Fichtian,[147] emotion-fueled, reality-defining thinkers who were known to "romanticize" with unflinching creativity any object, only to start over again and again. Schmitt refers to them as "spiritual revolutionaries,"[148] but are we really to believe that Romanticism as such can be grasped solely by way of Müller's philosophical contributions or Schlegel's work as an "editor" without also taking into account the politics of the early eighteenth century? The Romantics even found an "order," "which of course limited itself to the region of the aesthetic" (97). A constant stream of "new worlds" portrayed their "occasionalism." Even God or the French Revolution were considered "occasions." Schmitt argues that this was possible because the Romantics always restrained themselves to the "spiritual" aspect of life; namely, "aesthetics." Schmitt next unfolds the taxonomical aspect of his analysis:

> The "antithetical" structure of manifestations of romanticism has a twofold basis, one formal and other material. Words, concepts, and images are formally grouped under

146. Schmitt 1986, 102.
147. See de Pascale 2017, 346: "For example, Fichte was not only an inspirer, but also an actual teacher, at Jena, of both Novalis and Friedrich von Schlegel, both of whom (the former in particular) started their course of studies with philosophy. Later, in their early political publications, they showed how close they had remained to their master on some of his favourite themes of investigation."
148. Schmitt 1986, 105.

> the aesthetic perspective of contrast. […] The romantic wants to do nothing except experience and paraphrase his experience in an emotionally impressive fashion. (100)

The so-called "structure of Romanticism" reveals its core; that is, "morality." The perpetually flummoxed Romantic devolves into a stressed agent who is unable to achieve anything "practically." Externality becomes forbidden. It is curious that Schmitt focused so keenly on this hyper-awareness of the "Romantic"—and on his incapacity to participate "in the moral sense" in the "material" realm—but ignored, on the contrary, that "Romanticism" was the first sign of stress of the modern epoch. To posit such a statement does not necessarily imply embracing a sociological or psychological standpoint. Do not the cases and production of Schlegel, Novalis, Solger, Tieck, Müller, or even the suicide of Kleist demonstrate that *Gemütsbewegung* was, indeed, a swamp of stimuli greater than the social capacity of any individual? In any case, Schmitt points out that the "Romantic" endeavor was at most a "transcription" [*der Umschreibung*][149] of the agent's experience; perhaps the true testimony of how the agents listed above marshaled their astonishing emotions. The Romantics were lost wanderers who dwelled in the threshold of life. To be an eighteenth-century pedestrian, a citizen, required an act of self-relinquishing, this is, to bow [*zu verzichten*] to the "superior irony." By re-absorbing their experiences, the "Romantics" developed a technique: their "arguments and inferences become the reverberating figures of his emotional states of affirmation and denial, emotional states that […] revolve around themselves 'in sublime[150] circles'" (101). This technique is brought to the fore in Schmitt's typology. Schmitt offers a logical framework gleaned from "the essays of Friedrich Schlegel and Adam Müller." "The vital" is a positive feature; the negative is, naturally, "death." Schmitt's analysis aptly unpacks the hitherto unconquered material counterpart of the "Romantic production." PR now turns to compare the work of art as such with the artistic achievements of Romanticism. Music was the object into which Romanticism claimed to have delved furthest. Nonetheless, this identification with music—although the style of Romanticism was the "lyric"—happened to be too expansive. The abstract nature of music was another "occasion" for Romanticism to nourish its experiences "into associations without any further object" (105).

149. Schmitt 1986, 107.
150. Translation modified.

A melody can conflate a whole world of emotions. The artistic debris of Romanticism remain scattered and lacking any chance to achieve unity. Romanticism was the immaterialized organization of chaos. The second chapter of *Political Romanticism* ends as follows:

> Lacking all social and intellectual stability, they succumbed to every powerful complex in their vicinity that made a claim to be taken as true reality. […] They characterized and criticized. As romantics, however, they attempted to achieve the productivity of the genial subject in precisely this fashion. […] Entire worlds seem to be conquered. (106–107)

Thus, Schmitt resumes his analysis of the most passive of all "Romantic" subjects. Was he an agent at least once? Schmitt seems to attribute little importance to the impact that "Romanticism" had on his own epoch. While he recognizes that "they provided a stimulus for great poets and scholars," this assertion ends without any kind of insight (107). This view would have the reader believe that Romanticism amounted to an ungraspable epiphany. The Romantics were the lost dwellers of inconclusive thresholds. The "conquering of worlds" was a sign of their production, their "ocassionalist, subjectified production." Production led to fragments, fragments meant life, life led to infinity, but infinity only led to demise. The "genial subject" became his own scrivener: his transcriptions, however, were largely crossed out.

2.2 Schmitt's historical critique of Romanticism

I will now present a schematic analysis of Schmitt's essay on romanticism last chapter, which is devoted to the "production" of Adam Müller. After doing this, I will offer an alternative to Schmitt's thesis on "Romanticism." I posit that this phenomenon was far from an irrational spiritual movement in which a posse of writers, philosophers, translators, and poets was defeated by their own political aspirations. This alternative will show how Schmit''s typology—reality (concreteness, institutions, seriousness) vs. creation (drama, tragedy, play)—is active in his book of 1956, to the point that it acts as the theoretical framework for the analysis of *Hamlet*.

Schmitt puts forward a historical synthesis of Europe's intellectual assimilation of the French Revolution from 1796 until the spiritual closure of the event in 1810. He portrays the political approaches of the counter-revolutionaries; namely, Edmund Burke (1729–1797), Louis de Bonald (1754–1840), and Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821). The German "Romantics," however, merely indulged in approving or disapproving the historical event, even retrospectively—Schlegel being one such case, according to Schmitt, in his *Die Signatur des Zeitalters*. "This survey of the development of political ideas among the Romantics shows that the Romantic sense of the world and life can be combined with the most diverse political circumstances and with antithetical philosophical theories" (115). This statement is strikingly akin to that power of representation that so distinguished the Catholic Church in *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* (1923). But, then again, to adapt to any situation is merely to be able to merge with any content without establishing any further direction except for the initial instance of sympathy or rejection of this or that event. By contrast, the Catholic Church does provide meaning and guidance: It is normative in the highest sense.[151] The morass of Romanticism complicated access to the much-fancied political power sought by intellectual diplomats—some theological, others ultramontane—who were eager to leave their mark on European history.[152] According to Schmitt, Germany did not elaborate a political philosophy like that of the counter-revolutionaries. Schmitt acknowledges Schelling's *Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums* (1803), an essay written "under the influence of Hegel and after the dissociation from Fichte," as the milestone of German political philosophy.[153] "The state *is* in the idea" (113). However, once again, something is missing: love. This philosophy's "one defect" was, according to

151. Schmitt 2008b, 12: "Traditionalists, mystical, and Romantic tendencies made many converts. Today, as far as I can judge, Catholics are profoundly dissatisfied with established apologetics, which appear to many as sophistry and forms without content. But all this misses the essential point, because it identifies rationalism with the thinking of the natural sciences and overlooks the fact that Catholic argumentation is based on a particular mode of thinking whose method of proof is a specific juridical logic and whose focus of interests is the normative guidance of human social life."

152. See Peter 2003, 196: "Romanticism wanted to have a political effect; yet, at the same time, it rejected politics. As long as politics and morality in regard to the French Revolution could be thought of as one and the same; that is, as long as it was possible to believe that the moralization of politics had become a revolutionary reality in France, Schlegel, Görres, and others identified themselves with political events."

153. It is hard not to think, however, of Fichte's remark in the draft of a letter to Jens Baggessen, a Danish poet, in April/May 1795. See Fichte 1970, 298: in it, the *Wissenschaftslehre* is depicted as "the first system of freedom. Just like this nation [Fichte refers to France] freed man from external chains, my system liberated him from the yoke of the thing-in-itself, from outside influences and its first principle, by placing him as an autonomous being."

Schleiermacher, its "loveless wisdom" (113). The "Romantic" version of the state—taken from Adam Müller's most prominent lectures and essays and Schlegel's late monographs—is the object scrutinized by Schmitt in his detailed examination. PR now carries out a hermeneutic exercise. The indirect uses of de Maistre or Bonald's concepts are carefully studied by Schmitt. The "Romantic" understanding of the French Revolution is paradigmatic for Schmitt. At one point in time, it was considered wrong, a "mere abject slavery"; at another, Burke's thoughts on revolution are "revolutionary." Schmitt insists:

> Any relationship to a legal or moral judgment would be incongruous here, and every norm would seem to be antiromantic tyranny. A legal or a moral decision would be senseless and it would inevitably destroy romanticism. This is why the romantic is not in a position to deliberately take sides and make a decision. (124)

A "legal or moral judgment" implies the acknowledgment of "legitimacy." But this was an "unromantic category." To adopt a political position, one needs to abandon the sphere of aesthetics first. At least, that is how the moral compass of reality worked for Schmitt. However, there was "no political productivity in the Romantic." The Romantic theories on the state—which went from agrarian considerations to far-fetched reflections on money—were stillborn subjects. Schmitt wrote countless pages on the writings, letters, affairs, and speeches of Adam Müller. Any reader would be forgiven for thinking that Schmitt's book was, in fact, entitled *Adam Müller*: *Rise and Fall*. Schmitt considers Müller "a more pure type of the political Romantic," because "to a higher degree than Schlegel or the other Romantics"—but who are those "other Romantics" at this point?—"he had a specific talent that even made the technique of political romanticizing plain to him" (132). Schmitt's analysis of Müller is philological. Schmitt focuses on Müller's weak and predictable oppositions but also on his use of "superlatives." The study ends with the concept of "conversation" developed by the Romantic thinker. Müller undoubtedly coined extravagant ideas but never achieved conceptual clarity. Schmitt adds: "There is no substantive or conceptual discussion that extricates his account from the empty rounds of these affirmations and negations" (143). The next paragraphs do not build on what Schmitt had previously said about "Romanticism" or Adam Müller. The aim is merely to justify the preceding typology. The definitions of "political Romanticism" abound. Schmitt even offers a subtle distinction

between the attributive adjectives in the noun phrases "*political* Romantic" and "*Romantic* political." If Müller is an example of the former, for Schmitt, the latter is embodied by Karl Ludwig Sand, who killed Kotzebue while he still "retained the unromantic capacity for psychic innervation," and by Don Quixote, "[t]he immortal type of this politics of romantically construed opportunities" (147). The difference between the Cervantes archetype and the cases of Schlegel or Müller—one is certainly baffled at this comparison—is that Don Quixote does "not withdraw aesthetically into his own subjectivity" (148). It was Don Quixote's decision; it mattered little to him if "external reality" was an illusion. Don Quixote's endeavors put him in constant danger. But even "the Spanish nobleman often approximates a subjectivistic occasionalism" (148).

The very same "parallelisms" and "analogies" that Schmitt so embraces in his investigation of Winstanley and, later, in his essay of 1956, are nonetheless criticized in 1921. "Whoever draws a parallel between a Roman emperor and a ruler of the nineteenth century makes out of each a figure whose lines are often determined more by the constant regard for mutual similarity, which remained to be demonstrated, than by substantive investigations" (148). Any object of the past becomes a potential element for "literary composition." Nonetheless, if those parallelisms are drawn out of "political interest," then the result is certainly non-Romantic. Schmitt provides a detailed discussion of David Friedrich Strauss's (1808–1874) *Julian the Apostate* (1847) to prove this point. He considers this German theologian's work to be non-Romantic—and therefore, analytical and historical; Strauss "wanted to refute [*wollte… widerlegen*] Wilhelm IV and his conservative and anti-liberal politics"[154] by satirizing his persona with that of Julian the Apostate (331[2]–363 AD), the short-lived Roman emperor and philosopher who was most known for storming Christianity. He considered that "his duty" was "to restore the ancient civilization—Hellenism, as he called it—and he thought he would be able to do so by reconstructing polytheism."[155] The conservative Wilhelm IV possessed striking similarities to Caesar. The very title of Strauss's satire anticipated his thesis: *The Romantic on the Throne of the Caesars*. Schmitt emphasizes Strauss's accurate analogies. He quotes at length the "detailed definition" of "Romanticism" offered by the German theologian because it is "the best summary (*die beste*

154. Schmitt 1986, 155 (translation modified).
155. See Negri 1905, 608.

Zussamenfassung] of the viewpoint of Romanticism" (151). The reader can easily see how this high praise is an expression of the kinship between Strauss's satire and Schmitt's analysis of "Romanticism"—both typological and concrete analogies are possible when a concrete situation finds its logic in the process occurred within another previously existing event. Strauss's thoughts on the persona and character of Julian the Apostate portrays the view commonly held in 1848 on "Romanticism." Once again, a definition of the "Romantic" is not achieved. An array of disparate elements distract Strauss and lead him to wrong conclusions. Therefore, Schmitt rectifies:

> German romanticism began as a youth movement, and as long as it was really blended with the philosophy of nature and with mysticism, it assumed a revolutionary posture. When it joined the political reaction, it embraced a strict, positive orthodoxy that rejected that elucidation of Christian ideas as "atheism" and a "fraud of the philosophy of nature." (153)

Strauss did not capture the "subjectified occasionalism" of "German Romanticism." As soon as those "Romantics grew older," the promise of the "new" established by Novalis turned into the opposite: the "old" became a token of the "authentic" (*das echt*). The opposition elaborated by Strauss in his analogies between Caesar and Wilhelm IV relies on an antithetical insufficiency; namely, "the new" vs. "the old," or "the political" vs. "the spiritual." "In spite of this, the state and society were the real object of the struggle" (153). Indeed, Strauss's definition of "Romanticism" stresses the importance of the analogies that were distorted by the turmoil of "the restoration": "The story of Julian is only the history of an unsuccessful cult reform and the inner mission of paganism" (154). It is important to note how Schmitt's typology—which the reader who reads these paragraphs attentively will find superior to that of Strauss—presupposes an epistemic minimum; that is, the existence of acknowledgeable "political units." "Christianity did not confront him [Julian the Apostate] as a political enemy" (155), rapidly asserts Schmitt. This is not explicitly posited, but even the impossible political life of "Romanticism" marked a tension with reality, creating those "oppositions" on which the "friend and enemy" criterion is based on. Julian the Apostate was a Caesar who aimed to philosophize politics and ended up distorting both Paganism and Christianity as effective political units. At most, he cemented a "counterreligion." His lobby-

driven politics cut him out as a proto-liberal. Nevertheless, he is no Romantic; therefore, the analogy becomes an unjustified juxtaposition of misunderstood historical events. The "Romantic" romanticizes. Julian was tolerant; Wilhelm IV, restrained; Jesus wept. So what? If the "occasional" element is not highlighted, even Strauss's analytical study cannot but fail. Schmitt writes in the *Schluß* of *Politische Romantik*:

> Every political activity—regardless of whether its content is merely the technique of conquest, the claim or the expansion of political power, or whether it rests on a legal or a moral decision—conflicts with the essentially aesthetic nature of the romantic. […] Because the concrete point around which the romantic novel develops is always merely occasional, everything can be romantic. (158)

If "everything can become Romantic" [*alles romantisch werden*],[156] then everything can be "deromanticized." The "occasio" is not negated but restored to its antithetical locus. However, this housing of "Romanticism" in the spiritual palace of eighteenth-century Germany is, let us repeat, biased. The *höhest Dritter* that distinguished the "Romantic" from the Ancient sophist was not the backdoor to that inaccessible reality into which "Romanticism" so strove to enter. The so-called "core of political Romanticism"—the "Romantic wants to be productive without becoming active"—is an immaculate definition of Adam Müller's political biography, but not of "Romanticism" as such. Schmitt overly relies on his typology, to the point of even letting loose one of those axiomatic sentences that he was so fond of: "Where political activity begins, political Romanticism ends […]" (160). Just as politics and the authentic work of art was out of bounds for the "Romantics"—no representation, political adherence, or bonding with concrete situations—so was the unflinching power of the myth. The reader may grasp here the theoretical connection between *Politische Romantik* and *Hamlet oder Hekuba*: in this 1919 monograph, the myth and the true work of art realize their true nature not because of the unseen creative power of the genius. On the contrary, they find their authenticity—what fuels them to become universal and elevate themselves through time—in the normative aspect through which they were created. The thesis already sketched in *Der Wert des Staates und die Bedeutung des Einzelnen*

156. Schmitt 1986, 164 (translation modified).

and then expanded and adapted in Schmitt's monographs devoted to the inner logic of legal science—*Gesetz und Urteil* and *On the Three Types*...—now becomes paradoxical. The individual—the reader may now know that this is the Schmittian byword for the "soon-to-be liberal"—finds her place and meaning in the godly work of the state. Schmitt concludes:

> Conceptually, the normal is unromantic because every norm destroys the occasional license of the romantic. […] As such, legal ideas are unromantic in the same way. […] There is a political romanticism in the same sense that there is a political lyric. (161)

The "Romantic" is the political driver's co-driver. He sees pavement where the road is not paved. His far-reaching gaze drifts back and forth from the earth to the cosmos and vice versa. He surely has ideas and observations regarding the speed and roads that the driver should take. Even if he sits behind a steering wheel, like anyone practicing for their driver's license, he is not in charge of the brakes, clutch, or accelerator. At most, he is granted a learner's license. The driver hits the gas. The co-driver retreats to the depths of his mind. He becomes a stressed passenger. The road and the map become a starting point for new roads and news maps. The driver sighs. The scene is a Romantic plight.

But, then again, and as I emphasized a few pages back, everything can be deromanticized too. The metaphor I just described depicts a classic prejudice toward Romanticism; namely, Hegel's paramount critique of Schlegel and the whole Romantic movement. A critique that, from a more historical-ontological standpoint, Schmitt develops further by way of his unfair typology. To say that Romanticism was "subjectified occasionalism" is equivalent to condemning through rationalism—in this case, a juridical-historical viewpoint—a historical expression that is rooted to the very core of modernity. Romanticism was an uncomfortable presence from the very beginning. However, it emerged from—and belongs to—the same household as rationalism.

Schmitt wrote *Political Romanticism* with the intention of finally providing a concrete assessment of the Romantic movement. The previous attempts to do so were too close to psychology, sociology, or plain historicism. When Schmitt states that "[t]he elucidation of Romanticism, like that of every important situation of modern intellectual history, must begin with Descartes" (52), he is spot on regarding the authentic locus of this intellectual

phenomenon. Such a statement deeply resonates even in the socio-genesis of fascism developed by Lukács in *The Destruction of Reason* (1954), that, while critical to Schmitt, nevertheless expands his thesis:

> The ideology of extreme reaction first took shape intellectually on the right wing of romanticism, in very close conjunction with the most retrograde circles of *Juncker* reaction in Prussia. It received a powerful boost in that the democratic critical resistance opposing it, the democratic critical exposure of reactionary ideology in Germany, was far weaker than in any other country in the world. This even applied, save for the periods when Marx and Engels were exerting an immediate influence, to the German labour movement.[157]

Hegel's dictum against modern subjectivity; that is, "the hollow object which it generates to itself"[158] is expanded by Lúkacs—who was, likewise, strongly influenced by Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*[159]—and projected onto his own present: decadence.[160] This very same "hollow object" was detected in its ontological roots by Schmitt. However, to criticize Romanticism is to criticize modernity in other terms. Romanticism was almost pathologized from its very beginning. Schmitt's typology; that is, a detailed analysis that nevertheless reduces the inner complexities of an intellectual phenomenon to the biographies of Müller and Schlegel—the justification for this being the alleged epistemic power (perhaps the legitimacy?) of the exemplum—rabidly repeats Hegel's viewpoint, which was, indeed, biased as well. Schmitt's analysis in *Political Romanticism* is akin to writing a monograph that aims to capture the essence of twentieth-century democracies by analyzing the lives of Radovan Karadžcíc and Suharto. Why did Schmitt not once mention Thibaut (1772–1840), that German jurist whose passion for music and forests did not exclude his concrete contributions to legal science and jurisprudence—he was the Dean of Heidelberg University—nor mention his political life? Thibaut was a member of the Baden parliament. Schmitt also omits Friedrich Fröbel (1782–1852), the German pedagogue who coined not only the concept but the whole structure of the modern *kindergarten*. Fröbel's *The Education*

157. Lúkacs 1981, 718.
158. Hegel 2018, 380.
159. Lúkacs 1981, 754. See Bohrer 1989, 12.
160. Lúkacs 1981, 753–757 at 6.

of Man (1826) is evidently inspired by early Romanticism: his pioneering concept of *freiarbeit* is as Romantic as it gets. However, Fröbel was Christian. He was no "occasionalist." His concept of play—observed in and applied to children—unifies that which in Schmitt is opposed:

> By no means, however, do all the plays and occupation of boys at this age aim at the representation of things; on the contrary, many are predominantly mere practice and trials of strength, and many aim simply at display of strength. (…) For, while during the previous period of childhood the aim of play consisted simply in *activity* as such, its aim lies now in a *definite, conscious purpose*; it seeks *representation* as such, or the thing to be represented in activity.[161]

My intention here is not to provide counter-examples to Schmitt's 1921 essay on romanticism. To do so would be to mirror Schmitt's gesture of unfolding a typology that stresses the "intellectual" while justifying itself through revisionism, empirical yet selective facts, and a strong, ultimate opposition: concrete vs. non-concrete, although these two variables entail and dispose of values that are ultimately moral. Likewise, the importance of Hegel for Schmitt is not philosophical but normative (or juridical): it leads Schmitt toward a concrete comprehension of civil life that is simultaneously guided by the philosophical standpoint of a self-conscious Christian history. The reader will easily guess that Romanticism's never-ending lack of commitment was considered—for Hegel, Heine, and Schmitt—a failure at reality as such. Romanticism is everything but real. Through this entanglement of realism and politics, the critique of Romanticism developed into a normative guide to living the political present. That the "hollow soul" eventually becomes "evil" is something quite natural: "Each of these self-certain spirits has no other end than its pure self and has no other reality and existence other than just this pure self," states Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.[162] The epistemic shock wave unleashed by Hegel's philosophical prejudice against Romanticism influenced Schmitt's analysis of the subject.

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161. Froebel 2013, 112–113.
162. Hegel 2018, 388.

So far, I have shown the theoretical elements that eventually will sustain and cooperate with the thesis developed in *Hamlet oder Hekuba*. These are: (1) the opposition of the concrete and the non-concrete, a logic which encloses, on the one hand, the normative power of historical institutions (the church and the state), and, on the other, the non-serious—ergo, morally decayed—comprehensions of life; the rejection of political actions (the lifestyles of Romantics); (2) the normative aspect that rules history; namely, the parallelisms of concrete events that connect past and present: in PR, this is to be seen in Schmitt's appraisal of David Friedrich Strauss's critique of Romanticism and, of course, in his mapping out of the ontological sources of the Romantics; i.e., Descartes and Malebranche; (3) the failure of Romanticism at achieving anything endurable, as far as reality is concerned. The passive feature of Romanticism voided any chance, according to Schmitt, of producing a true, representative art. By contrast, Shakespeare aimed for and achieved authentic (historical) representation. This concept of representation also applies to Schmitt's 1956 thesis; namely, the "mythical" status of *Hamlet*—that is, the ultimate representation of modernity. By transforming the moral criticism put forward by Hegel and completing, almost a century later, an account of Romanticism based on his own interpretation of human agency as hyperrealism—that is, a dimension in which the existential nuances and distinctions of reality are reduced to simple, almost primitive oppositions—Schmitt now possessed an epistemic criterion resistant enough to analyze Shakespeare's drama through its inner political momentum. His stubborn insistence on choosing the correct approach—neither psychoanalytical, nor sociological nor historical—in order to establish a crystal-clear definition of the "core" of *Hamlet* was already sketched in *Political Romanticism*, where he distanced himself from not only the usual critiques of Romanticism—those of Hegel, Heine, Ruge, and David Friedrich Strauss—but also those of Nietzsche and, albeit with some positive remarks, Kierkegaard. So, when he asks in *Hamlet oder Hekuba*, "What is the action of the drama and who is the actor Hamlet, the hero of this drama?" he is already stating the representative power of *Hamlet*.

2.3 Taboo

The first paragraph of the second section of *Hamlet oder Hekuba*, which is entitled *Das Tabu der Königin*, is a paradigmatic example of Schmitt's style of analysis. In it, he makes four blunt statements regarding the dramatic core of *Hamlet*. These considerations are, nevertheless, quite tricky: the facts of the play are tangled with Schmitt's interpretations. That Hamlet 1) "is the son of a father who was murdered" and that 2) "the ghost of the murdered father appears and demands that the son avenge the murder"[163] are, sure enough, undeniable facts of the play. They are its starting elements. However, to say that 3) *Hamlet* opens with a "typical situation for a revenge drama" and that 4) Queen Gertrude, by marrying Claudius, "has legitimated the murder and the murderer," is to confuse a topical interpretation with a fact. Moreover, this argument is equivalent to saying: The dramatic core of *Hamlet* lies in the "legitimation" carried out by the "highly suspicious" Queen Gertrude. This core, according to Schmitt, is the immediate, brute force of history (Queen Mary Stuart and James I) intruding into the play of Shakespeare. Finally, we have learned from a long tradition of scholars[164] that *Hamlet*'s "opening" is by no means "typical." The play starts with futile characters who soon disappear as the secrecy and murky environment of Elsinore announces the fragile politics where dreadful actions took place. If I am making these remarks, it is only

163. Schmitt 2009b, 11.

164. Harold Bloom is exemplary. Bloom 1998, 383: "Hamlet appears too immense a consciousness for *Hamlet*, a revenge tragedy does not afford the scope for the leading Western representation of an intellectual. But *Hamlet* is scarcely the revenge tragedy that it only pretends to be"; Peter Alexander, in his still insightful *Hamlet: Father and Son* (1955, 142–143), has argued how the revenge theme is guided by the "union of opposites" of both king and prince. Likewise, Coppélia Kahn has impressively proved in her *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* the nuances within the problematic father-son relationship. Kahn 1981, 133: "So long as he can blame a woman's frailty for the indignity his father suffers, as the conventions of cuckoldry enable him to do, that image can be saved. But at the same tie, his concern with his mother's crime diverts him from revenge and inevitably reminds him of his father's weakness: King Hamlet, like the most ordinary cuckold, was hoodwinked by his own wife. Thus to the extent that Hamlet sees his father as a cuckold, his anxiety and propensity to delay revenge are increased by a paralyzing ambivalence." Even an authorized scholar like Edgar I. Fripp—in his *Shakespeare. Man and Artist*—has distinguished between the "typical revenge"—namely, Thomas Kyd's own version of Hamlet (which "Shakespeare knew it, possibly had acted in it, and he made it the basis of his matchless study of decadence of culture, disillusion, and paralysis")—and *Hamlet*, a revenge play where the main character and "[h]is feigned madness, and deception of Ophelia (in order to deceive others), and his chef-d'oeuvre, the Play, are his undoing. They betray him. […] His effective doings are on the impulse. […] And because he has a noble nature, disillusion is the more cruel—his father's murder, his mother's 'incestuous' marriage (for so it was regarded) with the murderer (a despicable creature, 'a king of shreds and patches'), the State of Denmark under such a ruler (drunken, and on the verge of revolution), and Ophelia's petty lying. His culture fails him, his manly strength, his popularity, and, chiefly, his good cheer" (Fripp 1938, 550–551). Bloom, Alexander, Kahn, and Fripp accord in acknowledging the different centers of *Hamlet*, no single one being more important than the other.

to stress the subtlety that allows Schmitt to base his thesis on intrusions, the first of these being the "taboo of the Queen."

Schmitt now asks about the "participation" of Queen Gertrude in the assassination of King Hamlet. He wants to elucidate if the queen was an active or, on the contrary, a passive agent in relation to the death of the king. A fifth question, now related to the son, is raised: "[W]hat should a son do if he wants to avenge his murdered father but, in the process, comes up against his own mother, now the wife of the murderer?" (11). Nevertheless, and without being explicit about the nature of this inquiry, such an approach belongs to the sphere of deontology. Should the mother have killed Claudius? Should she be considered a victim or an accomplice? What should Prince Hamlet do in the face of these kinds of actions? By placing his analysis in the very center of deontological ethics, Schmitt links the normative aspect of the starting elements of the "opening of this tragedy" with the historical events that reenter through the convoluted eyes of the "Elizabethan audience." When it comes to Prince Hamlet, Schmitt recalls how ancient tragedy and Nordic legend allow "for only two possibilities," which are: or the prince acts like Orestes and crushes Claudius, or he joins forces with his mother to kill the murderer. This "duty of vengeance" [*der Pflicht zur Rache*] cannot be fulfilled in a third way. In this perspective, the much-criticized "higher third" of *Politische Romantik* reappears here almost forty years later. "Even today, one would have to say that there is no third way and the mother cannot remain neutral, provided that one takes seriously the son's commitment to revenge and fully accepts the mother as a human person," asserts Schmitt (12). Put otherwise: Prince Hamlet's delay exposes the necessity of a decision, not the prevalence of indecisiveness. These "two possibilities" prove for good that *Hamlet* is a myth because it is not Romantic in nature and that Romanticism is not a myth insofar as it champions an unrealistic third possibility.

However, the questions brought up by Schmitt are "carefully avoided throughout the drama" and remain "unanswered" (12). This does not prevent Schmitt from studying the implications of Queen Gertrude's probable responsibility in the king's death. Schmitt reminds us once again of John Dover Wilson's book, only to say how even such an interpretation cannot be considered "indisputable." Not only Dover Wilson, but a good many "scholars have analyzed all the hints and clues in the play" (13). Schmitt quotes dialogues from the third act in order to illustrate the complex debate about the obvious role of Queen

Gertrude as the murderer. Two German Shakespeare scholars are mentioned by the jurist, "my friend," recalls Schmitt, Albrecht Erich Günther (1893–1942) and "the legal philosopher and historian Josef Kohler."[165] Schmitt switches viewpoint once again, for he does not forget that *Hamlet* became a myth on stage; therefore, "the audience member who follows the play," he asserts, "has no time to engage in psychological, philological, and legal-historical investigations." But was the "Elizabethan audience" as skeptical about these disciplines as Schmitt was? There can be no definitive answer to the question of Queen Gertrude's "participation" in King Hamlet's murder. Even the deontological approach cannot come to terms with this "intentional obscurity." This moral blank space is the setting where Schmitt will establish his interpretation of the "taboo of the Queen."

Schmitt carries out a philological account of the three versions of *Hamlet*; that is, the two Quartos (1603, 1604–1605) and the Folio (1623). He reminds us how in the first Quarto, "one finds a scene (4.6), from which one could conclude that the mother was privy to the revenge plan and was allied with her son against her second husband."[166] Is this important for *Hamlet*? From a philological standpoint, perhaps. The crucial aspect of the three versions is that "the revenge of the son begins with an oddly restricted assignment" [*mit einem merkwürdig eingeschränkten Rache-Auftrag*] (14). This curiosity is, of course, the fact that Prince Hamlet judges his mother's actions—such is the strange mission announced by the Ghost. Schmitt highlights this core aspect of *Hamlet*, to the point of unnecessarily repeating that one must "leave aside here all explanations that refer to patriarchy or matriarchy using a legal-historical approach or to father and mother complexes using a psychoanalytical perspective"; that is, neither Kohler's nor Freud's approaches are suitable for this matter. This core is precisely that which is "enshrouded and evaded": the "taboo." According to the 1956 monograph, Shakespeare "simply respects" this "taboo." Does this mean that taboos cannot be surpassed? Schmitt nods: not even "The Mousetrap" could determine if Queen Gertrude was guilty or not. Leaving such a matter in the shadows was not a sign of the Bard's

165. Kohler 1883, 225: "Und so tritt denn auch im Hamlet das Mutterrecht auf, furchtbar, gewaltig, wie die Erdgöttin, deren Töchter die Erinnyen sind. Hamlet soll kein Orestes sein: diesen furchtbaren Schritt, wo Unsittlichkeit in Sittlichekit, Unrecht in Recht sich verkehrt, diesen furchtbaren Sprung über den Abgrund des bodenlosen Unrechts, unter welchem eine ganze Hölle gähnt, diese unerhört kühne That des Orestes soll Hamlet nicht vollbringen." The "ethical-juridical conflict" of the blood revenge that Hamlet must fulfill, which is "permissible" and "morally necessary," is analyzed by Schmitt in the very same terms of Kohler. *Hamlet oder Hekuba* is theoretically indebted to this investigation.
166. Schmitt 2009b, 13.

"sympathetic feeling for women," especially considering that "Shakespeare is otherwise very direct and open to the point of brutality in these things" (15). Schmitt distinguishes the Shakespearean ladies from Goethe's "Princess Leonore or Iphigenia"[167] and Schiller's "Theklas or Berthas."[168] Queen Gertrude, by contrast, is a dark lady. Her guilt cannot be proved, nor her innocence. This, according to Schmitt, "proves that a concretely determined inhibition and concern prevails here, a genuine taboo" (16). The obscurity onto which no philological, psychoanalytical, historical, sociological, or philosophical light can be shed is taken by Schmitt as a taboo: "It concerns Mary, Queen of Scots," he claims (16). Suddenly, Schmitt adopts Lilian Winstanley's approach, but only to readapt it to a normative schema. By schema, one needs to understand the concrete location and time of a specific event; in this case, "the time and place of the origin and initial performance of Shakespeare's play, during the years 1600–1603 in London" (17). However, Schmitt is no specialist in the history and literature of that era. General statements of the cultural behavior of sixteenth-century England are given in order to prove "the problem of royal succession." "Shakespeare and his troupe […] pinned their hopes on James, the son of Mary Stuart, as the future heir apparent" (17). But their suffered banishment, just like the Earl of Southampton, "a Catholic, was sentenced to death but not executed" (17). Schmitt sees a hint of these events in "the opening of the player's scene." Even if this is so, the reader still cannot support the argument of the intrusion of the "taboo of the queen." *Hamlet oder Hekuba* provides abundant information—taken from Winstanley's investigation—about the aftermath of Mary Stuart's death in 1603: "Shakespeare's troupe was permitted to perform again in London and before the court" (18).

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167. Schmitt refers to the play *Torquato Tasso* (1790), where Leonore Sanvitale and the princess are both enamored of the Italian poet Tasso. These two characters are, despite their obvious conflict, quite passive regarding the political environment that surrounds them (the kingdom of the Duke of Ferrara in the sixteenth century), and *Iphigenia in Tauris* (1779), a rewriting of Euripides's tragedy *Iphigenia en Taurois*. In Goethe's version, Iphigenia is a priestess in Tauris, where she serves the goddess Diana out of gratefulness for being rescued from Agamemnon, her father, when he offered her in sacrifice. Iphigenia longs for Greece. The coming of her brother Orestes—although his identity is only later revealed—and her cousin Pylades convince her to escape. The subsequent actions—the plan to steal the statue of Diana, the fight with Toas, deceiving the king—converge in a peaceful goodbye, leaving behind the struggle and revenge that assailed Agamemnon's kin. Both Leonore and Iphigenia are described in positive, gentle terms by Goethe.

168. Thekla is the daughter of Wallenstein. She is in love with Max Piccolomini, son of Octavio, one of the agents who will commit treason against the main character. *Wallenstein*'s trilogy (1799) is perhaps the dramatic landmark of German literature for Schmitt. Thekla is an introverted young woman, respectful of her father but also trapped in her love for Max. This tension explodes when she escapes to the already deceased Max; Bertha von Bruneck is a female character from *William Tell* (1804), the penultimate play of Schiller. Bertha is an intelligent and cautious character. Her actions and words convince Ulrich von Rudenz, the nephew of the baron Werner von Attinghausen, to ally himself with the Confederate party.

Schmitt writes a paragraph on the succession of James I and his affection for his mother; he also mentions the *Basilikon Doron* (1599) in order to show how he even "admonishes his son […] to always hold the memory of this queen in honor."

The "taboo of the Queen" describes a son's succession during years of "utmost tension" in England. The political circumstances from 1600 to 1603 were complex: a queen who managed to accumulate an impressive "political power" did not want to address the question of her heir. Although her son, James I, was never acknowledged by Mary Stuart as the next king. Uncertainty and secrecy fueled probable scenarios of turmoil and civil war. That which was forbidden from being pronounced in public was captured by the genius of Shakespeare. Mary Stuart married Earl Bothwell, who had murdered Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, in 1566. Guilt and innocence became the dimensions between which the persona of the queen oscillated, just like Queen Gertrude. This blank space was not filled but lurked in the background of *Hamlet*:

> A terrible historical reality shimmers through the masks and costumes of the stage play, a reality which remains untouched by any philological, philosophical, or aesthetic interpretation, however subtle it might be.[169]

2.3 Revenge

In the third section of Schmitt's book, the quarrel against those much-criticized approaches to *Hamlet* intensifies to the point of separating the two interpretative dimensions that the reader must choose between in order to grasp this tragedy from its true, authentic core. Schmitt now informs of "a second, still more powerful intrusion: the transformation [*Abbiegung*; literally, the *deviation*] of the figure of the avenger into a reflective, self-conscious melancholic" (19). Just like the first paragraph of the second section, here too the reader encounters more expansive statements, now targeted at "Hamlet's strange inactivity." The reason, according to Schmitt, that we fail to thoroughly comprehend the prince as such is the presupposition that he merely is "a state figure, a mask, and not a historical hero" (19). Schmitt quotes three different, eminent Shakespeare experts—Robert Bridges, Keats, and,

169. Schmitt 2009b, 18.

again, John Dover Wilson—just to prove how even these great interpreters missed the point when it came to offering a convincing answer to the natural question about the prince's well-known "inactivity." They cannot provide a solid argument on the topic precisely because their knowledge and interpretative skills dwell within the subjective dimension:

> The astonishing transformation of the typical avenger, the deformation and refraction in the character of the hero of the revenge drama, this entirely surprising turn toward weakness caused by reflection, only becomes comprehensible in the context of the historical situation of 1600–03, and through the central figure of these years, King James.[170]

The "context of the historical situation of 1600–03" is, needless to say, the objective and, thus, the authentic dimension where the reader can correctly grasp the full significance of Hamlet's "inactivity." However, to draw a parallelism between the prince and King James is different, Schmitt suggests, than simply identifying the former as the "copy" of the latter. On the contrary: the autonomous space of the theater was surpassed by "a piece of historical reality" (20). This imposition is, just like the "taboo of the Queen," a normative event. Yes, any event is "normative" as long as actions are oriented by it. However, by "normative event," one needs to understand the duration of such normativity; that is, an event that goes beyond immediacy and, due to its force, manages to stand still in time. The reader must not forget that the power of intrusion relies on its normativity; its core is not history as such, but the consistency—namely, the density or different layers—of a concrete event. "However, for an insightful interpretation of *Hamlet*," Schmitt ponders, "it becomes necessary to distinguish several degrees and kinds of historical influences" (22). But to prove this would be a titanic, endless endeavor. To attempt to disentangle the multiple cross-references in *Hamlet* is to indirectly claim that the merely allusive elements found in Shakespeare's oeuvre must be strongly differentiated from their historical kernel. Schmitt distinguished "three […] mere *allusions* in *Hamlet*." These are examples of real sixteenth-century events. For instance, in the "third allusion," he analyzes the renowned "to be or not to be" soliloquy in order to stress that "[t]his phrase is missing from the Second Quarto because James was sharply sensitive

170. Schmitt 2009b, 22.

about this point." Allusions are merely indicative elements. However, there appears another kind of reference in *Hamlet*. Schmitt names them "true *mirorrings* [*Spiegelungen*]": "Here, a contemporary event or figure appears in the drama as in a mirror and determines a picture there in its lines and colors" (23). According to Schmitt, who partially follows Dover Wilson, this mirroring is found in the "figure" of the Earl of Essex:

> Thus, features of the character and fate of the Earl of Essex wove themselves into the image otherwise determined by James. This is not unnatural because such stage plays form a kind of "dream-frame" [*Traumrahmen*], as Egon Vietta has noted.[171]

The reader will note how the concepts and expressions coined and reused by Schmitt multiply as he gets closer to his main argument; that is, the justification of his "intrusion" thesis. However, the nature of such ideas is not as objective as in the early statements that claimed to offer the true interpretation of *Hamlet*. To say that the juxtaposition so characteristic of dreams, where "people and realities merge […], events and situations are interwoven in a dream-like way on stage" is to assert a number of aesthetic intentions that neither the Shakespeare expert nor the dilettante can properly demonstrate. Suddenly, aesthetics become politics:

> The dying Hamlet names Fortinbras as his successor and gives him his voice, his *dying voice* (5.2.354). This has an obviously political implication that functions as an acclamation *before* the accession of James to the throne in 1603 and as an act of homage to James *after* the accession, and was also understood as such. (24).

The "implication" is obvious as long the reader is willing to grant the "historical influences" an epistemic status with regard to the "concrete" elements that charged both *Hamlet* and Hamlet the character with a mythical vigor unlike anything seen in other plays. The interpretation of *Hamlet* elaborated by Schmitt attempts to supersede the subjective dimension on which sociology, psychology, jurisprudence, and, finally, aesthetics had based their interpretations of *Hamlet*. Finally, there appears a "third" type of "historical influence"

171. Schmitt 2009b, 24.

[*Einwirkungen*], of the "highest kind" (25). "These are the structurally determining, genuine *intrusions* "[*Einbrüche*]" (25). From a philological viewpoint, the reader may detect how important it is for Schmitt to highlight the status of unity that "intrusions" and historical influences possess. They are not random signs or casual representations of persons and events, but genuine "pieces" of history—"concrete events"—that managed to burst into Shakespeare's most famous play. "They cannot be common and ordinary, but their consequences are that much stronger and deeper," Schmitt declares (25).

Schmitt posits that two "intrusions" are present in *Hamlet*. These two pieces of reality elevated the play from a mere artistic creation into a myth. The "historical influences" establish that there exists a hierarchy of elements that belong to reality, only to later be entangled, interwoven, juxtaposed, mirrored, reflected, and refracted onstage. But "intrusions" are active agents of history that channel the momentum of concrete—and decisive—events:

> The distortion that differentiates the Hamlet of this drama from all other avenger figures and that is otherwise inexplicable, even through reference to the fate and character of the Earl of Essex—in short, the Hamletization of the avenger—finds a suitable explanation only here, in James.[172]

Schmitt considers that it is in tragedy—and perhaps exclusively in it—that history manifests its decisive core. Classic German plays like those of Goethe or Schiller do not offer the proper space for "intrusions." While they do abound in allusions and references, their connection to the present is either too far from a "concrete" event, or their dramatic kernel is meant to cause satisfaction. They are plays that edify their public. However, the reader could ask: Why, then, did Shakespeare not create another tragedy like *Hamlet*? Schmitt includes a footnote about the importance of allusions and symbols. He commends once again Winstanley's life's work and even Benjamin's book on the German *Trauerspiel*. At this point, the Schmitt scholar will note how another previous method is present in his interpretation of *Hamlet*; namely, his study of Hobbes. I cannot but mention this minor observation regarding Schmitt's monograph on Hobbes: the study of allusions and references between history and literature

172. Schmitt 2009b, 25–26.

was more than just a mere thought that occurred to Schmitt during his exploration of *Hamlet* through Winstanley. Just as in his early essay devoted to Theodor Däubler, where Schmitt found in the poet a clear example of the drab landscape of the twentieth century—a similar conclusion is present in *Dictatorship* concerning Wallenstein—in his takes on *Leviathan*, Schmitt posited his notion of "parallelisms" in order to identify Hobbes as the intellectual forefather of the "total state." Though not without its tongue-in-cheek nuances, the esoteric image of the *Leviathan* gave him the chance to do away with those customary, obvious historical allusions that were so popular in early-twentieth-century Germany[173] and move toward a superior, epistemic notion of references between history and tragedy. Karl Löwith's 1953 *Weltgeschichte und Heilsgeschehen. Die theologischen Voraussetzungen der Geschichtsphilosophie* had a major influence on Schmitt and his reflections on these issues.[174] All in all, it was in his *Leviathan* that Schmitt elaborated—and proved—the analysis which, starting with the study of allusions and references—"parallelisms"—finally was shaped into the concept of "intrusion." His highly introspective *Glossarium* is a vigorous testimony of this.

The transfigurative expression "Hamletization of the avenger" intentionally posits the normative bond—that is, a non-exclusive aesthetic bond—between creation and history. Once again, the reader could turn the argument upside down and retort: Is it not, on the contrary, to the Jamesification of Hamlet that we attest in *Hamlet oder Hekuba*? A more insightful question, however, would be: Is there another intention, besides the purely interpretive, behind Schmitt's insistence on the crucial aspect of this "third, higher" type of allusion? This question is not directed at the individual dimension of Schmitt the author, but rather at the global value that such a thesis may or may not provide. If, as previously stated, *Hamlet or Hecuba*'s "intrusions" are somehow Schmitt's final conceptual meditation on the topics of history and creation (that is, poetry, if the reader considers the original meaning of this word), and the conclusion of his long-standing study of crucial events that occurred in

173. See Mehring 2014, 349–350: "Historical parallels became the background against which authors would take critical positions at the times of political repression and censorship. However, the space for the direct expression of one's opinion was not that small either, and ambiguous esotericism was often just literary playfulness. […] However, such historical reflections were not entirely without their risks. […] Hermann Oncken presented Hitler as reflected in Cromwell, Hans Freyer used Machiavelli and Borgia, René König soon saw Schmitt as Machiavelli. Over the years, Schmitt developed a series of catchwords and images that reflected Hitler, National Socialism, and his own role."
174. See chapter 3 (3.8).

the past and the attendant creations that they determined, it is quite clear that such "intrusions" perform a political role. What was at stake in those turbulent years of "1600–03" was, precisely, civil war. And, if the reader recalls that Schmitt mentioned Wallenstein in *Dictatorship* in order to posit the distinction between absolute power and dictatorship[175]—the very same Wallenstein from Schiller's play, disputed in the 1952 prologue as a potential "mythical" work—then is not difficult to see how politics enhances creation to the point of giving an organic, existential feature to a dimension that was grounded in plain technique. Thus, *Hamlet oder Hekuba* is not an isolated work, a simple "little book" on *Hamlet*. It is a cryptic testament of the present and future of politics comprehended through a tragic scope.

The last paragraphs of the second section of Schmitt's essay brought up again the similarities between Prince Hamlet and the life of James I. The difference is that Schmitt now mentions the troubled king's incursions into the field of literature: James I's 1597 *Daemonologie* dealt, Schmitt assures the reader, with the "problem of ghostly apparitions." This point leads to a massive traffic of similarities and references in the tragedy of Shakespeare:

> The point of departure for Hamlet's doubt and "inaction" is the paralyzing question of whether the ghost of his father that appears to him might be the devil from hell. This question only becomes meaningful and concrete in terms of the contrast between Catholic and Protestant demonologies of the time.[176]

The "Ghost" is, then again, the spectral reference of a theological debate about worldviews. "Above all, James defended the divine right of kings with great fervor in treatises and

175. Schmitt 2014a, 69: "Despite his actual and real power, Wallenstein was only a commanding general at his first assembly of generals. Because in reality the military operation was always directed toward its military aim, so that it could take into account any other concerns, in this case, too, a situation frequently occurred in which Wallenstein could be portrayed as a dictator—in other words as a dictator of commission entrusted with absolute powers, that is, powers defined only in relation to the goal. But according to his legal status he was not a dictator, as the emperor had given him special functions, tailored to the fulfilment of a specific task." This distinction foreshadows those paragraphs of *Glossarium*, where Wallenstein is identified with Hitler's absolute power, only to later be compared to Kaspar Hauser: "This Caspar Hauser and *soldat inconnu* was adopted as the false Demetrius by Mother Germania. Between 1933 and 1941 she said again and again: Even if he is not the son of my heart / He shall be the son of my revenge. / Yet faithless Mother Germania could not carry through her role when she realized that things were moving toward the abyss. He [Hitler] however pulled down the house with his fall. Only the Catholic and Wallonian Joseph Goebbels from the left bank of the Rhine remained faithful until the end" (Schmitt 2015, 239; quoted by Hohendahl 2018, 44–45).
176. Schmitt 2009b, 28.

disputes," Schmitt remarks (28). To champion such a juridical figure was James I's "existential problem." Up to now, *Hamlet oder Hekuba* has provided a summary of James I's up and downs, much in the vein of Schmitt's analysis of Adam Müller. Schmitt mentions his "political enemies," who, just like those of Schlegel, mock him with gusto. But "[h]e has found truly intelligent defenders, though, among them Isaak Disraeli, the father of the famous Benjamin Disraeli […]." Why does Schmitt bother with this account of James I's life? He wants to challenge those Shakespeare scholars—Dover Wilson being the first among them—who dismiss any connection between the son of Mary Stuart and the son of Queen Gertrude. "Historical reality," Schmitt asserts, "is stronger than every aesthetic, stronger also than the most ingenious subject" (30). Strong, the reader will remember, as a rock. Obscure, dream-like transmissions of concrete events impact the finite work of a genius. "The figure of Hamlet had entered into the world and its history, and the myth began its journey" (31).

2.5 Tragedy

The fourth section of *Hamlet or Hecuba*, entitled "The Source of the Tragic," presents a serious modification in both tone and intention regarding the "intrusions" thesis and, more particularly, Schmitt's "objective" interpretation of *Hamlet*. One should recall how from its very beginning, Schmitt's approach on *Hamlet* was chosen following the dismissal of various canonical scopes of interpretation. The standpoint selected by Schmitt was that of Winstanley's; however, while the latter recognized the powerful historical references of Mary Stuart and James I, the former grasped the unique power of concrete politics as a "third, higher" type of allusion which, eventually, turned *Hamlet* into a myth. Nonetheless, when it comes to the conceptual framework established by Schmitt, the reader will likely ask questions such as the following: What is Shakespeare's artistic status if one accepts as correct the thesis on "intrusions?" If *Hamlet* does not belong to the aesthetic plane, where should the critic relocate its dramatic locus? Finally: If Shakespeare's archetypal play is less a tragedy than a myth, then what is the importance of tragedy, let alone theater, as an autonomous type of agency?

The blunt statements found at the beginning of previous sections of *Hamlet oder Hekuba* are now transformed into a more amicable invitation to rethink not only *Hamlet*, but

Schmitt's suggestions as well. This epistemic gesture—namely, shifting from assertions to questions—is needed for the simple reason that the greatest obstacle to convincingly proving that *Hamlet* is what it is (namely, the result of two events that managed to intrude into the play), is at stake. The questions are:

> Should historical arguments even be included in the consideration of a work of art? From where does the tragedy derive the tragic action upon which it lives? What is—in this general sense—the source of the tragic?[177]

The first question discusses the relevance of history regarding aesthetics; the second inquiries about the locus from which tragedy attains its permanence; finally, the third seeks to identify the underlying core of "the tragic." These three questions provide different angles on a single issue: Does art—the "work of art"—possess an independent status from that of politics, or of concrete events that occurred in time?[178] Schmitt notes how the aftermath of the specialization of "academic fields and disciplines" has ended up creating an irreconcilable distance between "different perspectives." The reader will safely assume that this critique is aimed at the immanency of viewpoints; namely, the impossibility of any transcendental—objective—access to reality. As regards *Hamlet oder Hekuba*, such situations can be expressed in the following terms: History is not linked to any epistemic bond to art. Regarding inspirations or references, Schmitt reminds us to think about "literary historians";

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177. Schmitt 2009b, 32.

178. It is somehow curious to note how close this inquiry is to that of Heidegger in his epoch-defining essay *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* (1950) apropos of the privileged metaphysical kernel that the phenomenon of art represented for the manifestation of truth. See Heidegger 2002, 1: "Origin means here that from where and through a thing is what it is and how it is. That which something is, as it is, we call its nature [*Wesen*]. The origin of something is the source [*Herkunft*] of its nature." But, then again, the similarities disappear soon. The German word *Herkunft* refers to the provenance of something, where this something belongs to and is as such through a process that ended up in that something being what it is. On the contrary, Schmitt uses the word *Quelle*, a much more concrete notion that expresses the direct source of which anything is part of. The concreteness of this word is palpable in his monograph on the work of art: "The structure of both sentence and thing derive, in their natures and the possibility of their mutual relatedness, from a common and more primordial source [*einer gemeinsamen ursprünglicheren Quellen*]" (Heidegger 2002, 7). However, as regards the public dimension where both the work of art and myth-fueled tragedy are present as such, Schmitt and Heidegger are quite near. The latter writes the following in *The Origin of the Work of Art*: "The world is the self-opening openness of the broad paths of simple and essential decisions in the destiny of a historical people. The earth is the unforced coming forth of the continually self-closing, and in that way, self-sheltering. World and earth are essentially different and yet never separated from one another." One could then say: *Hamlet* belongs to the "world"; tragedy is a representation of "destiny"; the autonomous realm of the play emulates the "unforced coming forth of the continually self-closing." For both thinkers, the "world" (time) plays a normative role.

Shakespeare could easily have taken them from different "literary" sources. Schmitt then highlights the contemporary conflict between "a broadly prevailing philosophy of art and aesthetics" (32). Whether the reasons are to be found in the current "division of labor" is something that is not important regarding this topic. The crucial aspect of this conflict, on the contrary, relies on the comprehension of the work of art "as an autonomous creation, self-contained and unrelated to historical or sociological reality" (32). At this point, one can point out that such a dispute is highly similar to that found in the opening lines of Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political*: "The distinction of friend and enemy denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation. It can exist theoretically and practically, without having simultaneously to draw upon all those moral, aesthetic, economic, or other distinctions."[179] Politics is the magnitude from which the different realms of human agency are defined. That being said, Schmitt offers an alternative way to tackle this problem. He puts forward a threefold analysis regarding (1) the agency of the writer, (2) the significance of the notion of "play" for tragedy, and, finally, (3) the importance of *Hamlet*'s "play within the play" ("The Mousetrap"). *Hamlet or Hecuba*'s theoretical import is almost entirely located in these pages.

2.5 Between Creation and Coercion

Schmitt's first concerns regarding the agency of the writer are placed in Germany. For too long, Germans have seen the writer as an agent whose creations resemble those of a modern demiurge:

> The cult of genius that arose during the German *Sturm und Drang* period of the eighteenth century has become a *credo* of the German philosophy of art, precisely with respect to Shakespeare's supposed arbitrariness. The creative freedom of the writer becomes thereby a defense of artistic freedom in general and a stronghold of subjectivity.[180]

179. Schmitt 2007a, 26–27. See also Schmitt 2009a and Schmitt 2012c.
180. Schmitt 2009b, 33.

Schmitt's meditations are quite clear. The "cult of genius" became the spot where the defense of subjectivity found its ultimate argument; namely, that specific agents are above the rules and norms defined and imposed by politics or other realms. The "genius" does not have to acknowledge references or allusions to his present. He has superseded his own time. Many of the points shared here can be found previously in *Politische Romantik*. That "realm of the beautiful, where historical and sociological questions become tactless and tasteless" shares a great kinship with the criticized, playfully uncommitted agent of Romanticism.[181] A further statement is now provided by Schmitt; that is, the conceptual conflation between "poetry and drama." This confusion is more palpable in the German language, where "aesthetic concepts are generally determined more by poetry than drama" (33). What are the consequences of this misleading situation? The decisive experience of theater is eclipsed, for it is considered a "lyric poem." In theater, the audience needs to be fully in sync with its time. Raw interventions come back and forth, as well as inputs and outputs of creation and the time reigning over that very creation. In the "lyric poem," an entirely different process occurs. The elemental bond that characterizes theater—or "mythical theater"—is ostracized in the mental and spiritual depths of the poet's subjectivity—Schmitt brings to mind Stefan George's dictum on the vain status of experience for the artist. The poet delves into the tranquility of his thoughts, unlike "the epic writer" or "the dramatist." Apropos of this last figure, Schmitt summons "Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, Grillparzer, and Hebbel" to point out how these authors worked under the understanding that their books would be published. They were "domestic workers." They needed furniture in which to place their "manuscripts," which later were published. By contrast, "Shakespeare's plays were produced in a completely different way" (34). Shakespeare wrote for the public, not for the presses. "Not one of Shakespeare's plays anticipated spectators who had read it beforehand and recognized it from a published book," continues Schmitt (34). Such a distinction will satisfy the reader's doubts regarding the differing status of Shakespeare and that of those German classics. Thus, one of the

181. Schmitt 1986, 20: "It is only in an individualistically disintegrated society that the aesthetically productive subject could shift the intellectual center into itself [*das geistige Zentrum in sich selbst verlegen*], only in a bourgeois world that isolates the individual in the domain of the intellectual, makes the individual its own point of reference [*an sicht selbst verweist*] […]. Because of the central significance and consistency of the religious, it is also left to him to be his own poet, his own philosopher, his own king, and his own master builder in the cathedral of his personality."

consequences of the existing bond between Shakespeare and his public was, naturally, the use of allusions and references—which were "unavoidable," according to Schmitt. His plays remind us of the disclaimer typically found in television shows: "All characters and events in this production are fictional […]." Although Schmitt does not pretend "to treat the author of Hamlet on the same level with contemporary production of films and period plays," he nevertheless acknowledges the relevance of such a point in relation to the use of references in Shakespeare. Shakespeare's London-based audience embraced his *Hamlet* just as he embraced their worries and preoccupations. They share "a common public sphere," meaning limits and "restrictions":

> Observance of this limit is guaranteed by the fact that the audience will no longer follow the events on stage if they deviate too much from the audience's knowledge and expectations and become incomprehensible or meaningless. […] The knowledge of the audience is an essential factor of the theater.[182]

The restriction affects creativity; ergo, it affects the playwright's subjectivity. Once again, the reader will be taken by Schmitt toward another conceptual elucidation. A restriction of creation does not mean that Shakespeare's liberty was curtailed. On the contrary, he was—Schmitt here quotes Paul Ernst—"essentially anti-historical" (36). However, this expression relates to "literary sources," for regarding his use of the figures and problems of his own time, they were and must have been well known for his audience too. Schmitt quotes Jean Paul's "dictum" on the "sovereignty" of the writer; namely, the transformation of history but also the maze of "situations" that shape the references made by the author. Nuances and even a subtle set of misspelled names and lookalikes are concentrated onstage. A similar situation was experienced by the audience of *Hamlet*.

2.7 Play and Seriousness

Another batch of bold statements articulates the sub-section of *Hamlet or Hecuba* devoted to the relationship between tragedy and the concept of "play." Schmitt states that that

182. Schmitt 2009b, 35–36.

"knowledge" of the audience does not suffice to thoroughly comprehend a creation of this kind. "The theater itself is essentially play," observes Schmitt (37). Such a notion is polyhedral. It embraces all types of oppositions and has its own logic:

> The play has its own sphere [*Bereich*] and creates a space for itself within which a certain freedom is maintained both from the literary material as well as from the originating situation. Thus it creates its own field of play in both space and time [*ein eigener Spiel-Raum und eine Spiel-Zeit*]. This makes possible the fiction of a completely self-contained, internally self-sufficient process.[183]

This enticing definition of the notion of "play" is crucial for both the reconstruction and the comprehension of *Hamlet or Hecuba*'s intellectual architecture. The quoted paragraph asserts the autonomous aspect of the "play." However, the reader cannot forget that such understanding is inseparable from the theater. While the concept of "play" is acknowledged as a self-generating space with its own rules, the "fiction" pointed out by Schmitt is, of course, the play performed on stage. Nonetheless, a question arises: How does the play communicate with its context? Does this fiction shun its environment and hide in a non-existent "self-sufficient" enclosure? Yes, but "[t]his is true only for *Hamlet*" (37). Why? Schmitt considers that most of the scenes of this tragedy are "pure play." One then sees the stark difference between the allusions and references so well-articulated by Winstanley and the mythical strength of Shakespeare's mirroring of the years 1600–1603. A simple reflection of Shakespeare's political context would imply, according to Schmitt, something typical of any other drama. But *Hamlet*, despite being considered a "tragical history" and also a "tragedy," is not—Schmitt reminds the German reader—*only* a tragedy. Yes, it is quite tragic and may even be considered, perhaps, the paradigm of modern tragedy. But it is not tragic in the way a *Trauerspiel* or a "mourning play" is. Schmitt logically equates "tragedy" with "seriousness." However, if *Hamlet* were a painting, it would certainly not be painted exclusively with dark colors. Schmitt elaborates further on the idea of "play." The key points through which this notion will unfold its conceptual orientation are philosophy and theology. Schmitt mentions a number of references regarding Protestantism, Catholicism, and

183. Schmitt 2009b, 37.

Kabbalism. Monotheism presents an entrenched affinity with the concept of "play." Nonetheless, Schmitt keenly stresses how far-removed Shakespeare was from "church liturgy." The examples are taken from the Religions of the Book simply wanted to claim that "the idea that God plays with us can elevate us to an optimistic theodicy just as well as it can lower us to a despairing irony or bottomless agnosticism" (39). The point should be stressed—Schmitt is again thinking of the German word *spiel*—is that "all possible and contradictory meanings—from the dispensations of an omnipotent and omniscient God to the activity of irrational creatures—can be circumscribed by the concept of 'play'" (40). The universal aspect of play confirms that "auto-sufficient" nature mentioned by Schmitt:

> The tragic ends where the play begins, even when this play is tearful—a melancholy play for melancholy spectators and a deeply moving *Trauerspiel*. It is with Shakespeare's *Trauerspiel*, whose "play" character also appears in the so-called "tragedies," that we can least afford to ignore the unplayability of the tragic.[184]

An ultimate opposition is thus presented between "play"—a Luhmann-esque, "self-centered," self-generated, normed space—and seriousness—and the irreducible drama presented onstage, which emulates the finite nature of an existence grounded in death. While the concept of "play" is systematic, the notion of "seriousness" is entropic. *Hamlet* is charged with these two types of energies. Thus, the reader will discover that Schmitt's insistence on the "mythical" status of Shakespeare's drama is entirely convincing: King James is not merely mirrored, nor is *Hamlet* arbitrarily based on literary sources. A concrete reality was adapted to the theater, while the audience itself was already immersed in the reality the play endeavored to treat.

2.8 Hamlet *or* Hecuba?

The arguments on "intrusions" and its vocabulary—"tragedy," "play," "seriousness"—have been adamantly repeated throughout *Hamlet or Hecuba*. However, the attentive reader will not have forgotten her first, obvious question: Why is this little monograph titled *Hamlet or*

184. Schmitt 2009b, 40.

Hecuba? Schmitt tackles this issue by interpreting the "play within the play." This is probably the most compelling and difficult section of the book.

Schmitt points out the importance of theater for that "already intensely baroque atmosphere around 1600." The world was a stage; people were actors, and life was a play. "This sense of the staged nature of the world existed in other times, but in the baroque epoch it was especially intense and widespread," explains Schmitt. In 1600, life consisted in "role-playing." This applied for both "men of action" and James I, who "admonished his son to always remember that as a king he would be onstage and all eyes would be focused on him" (40). It is possible, then, that this "theatricalization of life" was the context for *Hamlet*'s "play within the play"? Schmitt considers that in "Shakespeare's Elizabethan England the baroque theatricalization of life was still ungrounded and elementary" (41). This means that theater was not linked to the state—and thus, politics. The Shakespeare scholar might think that such a statement is unfounded. On what sources does Schmitt base this assertion? Likewise, the reader might think that the encompassing influence of Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of German Trauerspiel* is undeniable. However, this is not entirely true.[185] Schmitt's intellectual reference points were, as the reader grasped in the first subsection of this chapter, Winstanley's and Dover Wilson's investigations on Shakespeare. All in all, the view analyzed here is clear; upon closer examination, the "Mousetrap" is a scaled miniature of reality itself. Shakespeare's "raw" treatment of *Hamlet* made such an operation possible:

> Even a double magnification was possible: the play within the play, whose possibility found its astonishing realization in Act Three of *Hamlet*. Here one can speak even of a triple magnification, because the preceding pantomime, the "dumb show," once again mirrors the core of the tragic action.[186]

If the preceding sections of *Hamlet or Hecuba* aimed to prove the thesis on "intrusions," this subsection insists on the dimensions and scales of those "intrusions." If James I was mirrored in the "highest" sense through Hamlet the character, then the "play within the play" is a

185. An examination of the unpublished material and notes from the 1950s, available at the Schmitt *Nachlass* in Düsseldorf, suggests that Schmitt's use of Benjamin's thought was a later development. I am indebted to Reinhard Mehring for this reference.
186. Schmitt 2009b, 41–42.

miniature version of the complex political environment of the years "1600–03"—as such, the foreboding "dumb show" develops "the core of the tragic action." Schmitt distinguishes this unique theatrical gesture so well masterminded by Shakespeare from those "originated in the nineteenth century in the wake of social revolution," or even Sartre's theater. In both of these cases, the audience is safely disconnected from the current events of its context. At its best, these works could be considered stinging propaganda pieces. Schmitt next paraphrases Marx: "The emancipation of the actors is achieved in such a way that they become the heroes, and the heroes become the actors."[187]

However, no answer has been given yet about the title of this monograph on *Hamlet*. The justification for such an election is to be found in the "play within the play." The reader should bear in mind the main elements of "The Mousetrap"; Prince Hamlet has summoned a handful of players to perform a little act. The play will be presented at night—this is quite symbolic, because the absence of light is one of the key elements of the play: the Ghost is a shadow, Prince Hamlet cannot tell King Claudius from Polonius due to his "wildness,"[188] while Queen Gertrude frantically exclaims "Ah, my good lord, what have I seen to-night!"[189] The play is known to Prince Hamlet. Its name is "the Murder of Gonzago."[190] Prince Hamlet arranges the details but then ponders over the fiction. He asks himself:

> Is it not monstrous that this player here,
> But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
> Could force his soul to his own conceit
> That from her working all his visage wann'd,
> Tear in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
> A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
> With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing!
> For Hecuba
> What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
> That he should weep for her?[191]

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187. It is not quite clear if Schmitt is referring to *On the Jewish Question* (1844) or some other short political writing of Marx.
188. 3.1.43.
189. 4.1.4.
190. 2.2.539.
191. 2.2.553–62

This besotted speech expresses the philosophical question of truth vs. fiction. However, this problem is posed within the sphere of Prince Hamlet's intimacy. Just like those players, he presented himself with great zeal before the performers, just as he did with Ophelia before and with King Claudius and his mother. However, once Hamlet finds himself without company—"Now I am alone,"[192] he states almost surprisedly—he unmasks his true feelings. If everything is just theatricalization, mimicry, pantomimes, a never-ending game of fakeness and deceit, then what good is truth anyway? Prince Hamlet rebels against this subpar reality. The play is transformed into a lie-detector,[193] the prince becomes an agent who judges others, but also a playwright. He instructs the actors on how to perform. The "mirroring" that Schmitt has posited so many times was crucial for Prince Hamlet's carefully orchestrated "Mousetrap":

> Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor: suit the action to the word, the word to the action; thing so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.[194]

These are the theatrical elements that help to solidify the play. The link between fiction and reality must be raw, not "overdone." The "play within the play" must act as a mirror; namely, it has to reflect the attributes of a whole, as the whole is recognized in its global dimension. The play then begins. The kind and queen enter before King Claudius and Queen Gertrude. A tender scene is performed, and then the murder of the beloved king is committed. Poison has been poured in the king's ear. The murderer "woos" the queen who, all-too-soon, will accept the one who defiled the state in the bed. Two monologues are performed, both good enough to distress and shock an audience in which two spectators are eerily connected with the "murder of King Gonzago" and his "wife Baptista." The mirror reflected a dark lady and a murky yet familiar murderer. The night embraces Elsinore, just like the "thoughts black."[195]

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192. 2.2.551.
193. See Menke 2005, 161–165.
194. 3.2.17–25.
195. 3.2.243.

King Claudius demands that light be cast over such a gloomy setting: "Give me some light: away!"[196]

Hamlet is engaged by the "dumb show" that he himself had requested be played out before him. It was "Aeneas' tale to Dido." Yet, he hides his thoughts from Polonius, who was the first to express the obscenity of such deceit: "Look, whether he has not turned his colour and has tears in's eyes. Pray you, no more."[197] Hecuba is not mentioned in that monologue. However, the reader partially familiar with Greek mythology will know that Hecuba, the "mobled queen," wept for the death of Priam beside the "mincing" sword of Pyrrhus. Hecuba writhed "[w]ith bison rheum,"[198] just "[w]hen she saw Pyrrhus make malicious sport."[199] Up to now, Prince Hamlet has bested that player by far. Polonius cannot be aware of the prince's inner-self, constrained in sorrow. Hamlet outperforms the performer. The prince carries on in order to capture the king of carrion. It is time to return back to *Hamlet or Hecuba*:

> Hamlet, however, does not weep for Hecuba. He is somewhat astonished to learn that there are people who, in the performance of their duties, weep over something that does not concern them in the least and has no impact upon their actual existence and situation.[200]

Schmitt considers that Prince Hamlet's silent outburst represents "astonishment," not despair. Shakespeare did not want to provoke the very same effect that Hecuba's weeping had on Hamlet. If that were the case, "[w]e would, however, in point of fact weep for Hamlet as for Hecuba if we wished to divorce [*abtrennen*] the reality of our present existence from the play on the stage" (43). But this would be off, untrue. Schmitt further stresses this point: "[T]hat would be bad, because it would prove that the gods in the theater are different from those in the forum and the pulpit" (43). The importance of the "play within the play" must be acknowledged in its organic gesture: "It is the real play itself repeated *before* the curtains" (43). Repetition belongs to reality, Schmitt ponders. No artifice was performed in "The

196. 3.2.257.
197. 2.2.522–523.
198. 2.2.509.
199. 2.2.517.
200. Schmitt 2009b, 43.

Mousetrap." The play orchestrated by Hamlet was for real—and, indeed, it reeled in reality. As for Schmitt, he finds here "a consummate test of the hypothesis that a core of historical actuality and historical presence—the murder of the father of Hamlet-James and the marriage of his mother to the murderer—has the power to intensify the play as play without destroying the sense of the tragic" (44). Schmitt recoils from Eliot view that *Hamlet* is an "artistic failure." The intrusions, he adds, are "dark areas." This play is no "unity," "riddles flow," unanswered questions abound. Those intrusions are "shadows":

> They disturb the unintentional character of pure play and, in this respect, are a *minus*. Nevertheless, they made it possible for the figure of Hamlet to become a true myth. In this respect they are a *plus*, because they succeeded in elevating *Trauerspiel* to tragedy.[201]

The unfinished feature of *Hamlet* is enhanced by "intrusions." Its imperfections grant enough space to history, even if it is through a refracted, oneiric-like image. The "play within the play" is reality, just like that "mirror up to nature" demanded by Hamlet. Amidst allusions, reality was pinned down in theater, just like a familiar portrait is hung on a wall in a dream.

2.9 Is Creation Grounded in Norms?

Schmitt titles this last subsection "The Irreconcilability [*Unvereinbarkeit*] of Tragedy and Free Invention." Up to this point, the main aspects of *Hamlet or Hecuba* can be summed up in the following terms: (1) the rejection of specific disciplines as regards "objectively" interpreting *Hamlet*, (2) the importance of the historical context in which Shakespeare participated, (3) the thesis of "intrusions"; namely, a "third type" of allusions that prove that the play is grounded in reality; and (4) the limits of artistic creation regarding the tragic aspect of life itself. *Hamlet or Hecuba* seems to develop a particular theory of tragedy—or, at least, it provides the elements of a notion of tragedy and the tragic aspect of life as such. Tragedy, according to Schmitt, "has a special and extraordinary quality, a kind of surplus value that no play, however perfect, can attain because a play, unless it misunderstands itself, does not

201. Schmitt 2009b, 44.

even want to attain it" (45). While to the reader this was obvious, Schmitt's position regarding creation now is crystal clear: tragedy—not drama, nor comedy—is the ultimate artistic approach to history. The reason for this was also stated in the previous arguments of Schmitt's 1956 essay; namely, the status of "objective reality of the tragic action itself" (45). There is an "enigmatic concatenation and entanglement of indisputably real people in the unpredictable course of indisputably real events" (45). One now is able to grasp why Schmitt held that tragedy was characterized by its entropic status. Amidst chaos, real-life events occur. Schmitt equates, as he already asserted, "tragic action" with "seriousness." While tragedy belongs and happens in reality—where no human control is possible—the "tragic action" is the event mirrored and emulated onstage:

> This is the basis of the seriousness of the tragic action, which, being impossible to fictionalize or relativize, is also impossible to play. […] This unalterable reality is the mute rock upon which the play founders, sending the foam of genuine tragedy rushing to the surface.[202]

A few sections back, I addressed the origin of this metaphor as well as its meaning regarding the hypotheses of Schmitt. One of the questions that the reader may be tempted to ask here would be: Is Schmitt a realist? What is the origin of said "realism?" Is "realism" the dimension where political action—and thus art, too—is properly developed? While I cannot tackle this matter here, the reader shall be warned about the importance of *Hamlet or Hecuba*'s vocabulary. Reality has to be distinguished from realism; namely, an ideology that functions on purely immanent terms. According to Schmitt, reality itself cannot be measured, controlled, or dominated. On the contrary, human agency is rooted in this chaotic, unthinkable space. The events that occurred in reality are objective; that is, they cannot be disputed by any theory. Tragedy unfolds in reality, while a tragic action emulates it. The theater becomes a privileged means, just like true poetry, to access reality through history. Schmitt is no realist. He merely acknowledges the main forces—politics, law, art, theology—that can face what cannot be acknowledged:

202. Schmitt 2009b, 45.

> This is the final and insurmountable limit of literary invention. A writer can and should invent a great deal, but he cannot invent the realistic core of a tragic action. […] The core of tragic action, the source of tragic authenticity, is something so irrevocable that no mortal can invent it, no genius can produce it out of thin air.

The reader is now familiar with most of the vocabulary of *Hamlet or Hecuba*. She or he knows how, at this point, theater has become a threshold of experiences. Life manifests its raw nature on the stage. However, theater is not a simple combination of different elements (reality + drama = authentic tragedy). All the points made by Schmitt can only be applied to *Hamlet* (or Schiller's *Wallenstein*, if one recalls the 1952 prologue). Schmitt does not mention any other play akin to the most important of Shakespeare's plays. So, the thesis of *Hamlet oder Hekuba* being a "case study" comes immediately to mind. Moreover, the title of this monograph can be considered appropriate: "Hamlet or Hecuba" refers to the connection between tragedy and drama, between seriousness and play, between reality and fiction. The conjunction "or" is the grammatical basis on which Schmitt stresses the fictional element that finds its limit and powerless when confronted with reality. "Hamlet"; namely, the "Hamletization of the avenger," is the second "intrusion," and, thus, the "test" that assures how time (history) is prevalent over creation.

Just as in his prologue to Winstanley, Schmitt now meditates on "Schiller's historical drama." The approach is almost identical. If the answer is positive, Schiller could then achieve the status of authentic tragedy (and, thus, of myth). If it is negative, his dramas would have only represented magnificent *Trauerspiele*. Schmitt thinks that "knowledge of history" cannot "replace myth" (47). Even Schiller's "philosophy of play" cannot fully account for the creation of a myth. "In such a philosophy," Schmitt adds, "play must become superior to seriousness. Life is serious, and art is jovial; indeed, but the serious reality of the man of action is then ultimately 'miserable reality,' and seriousness is always on the verge of becoming an animal brutality."[203] It seems that, according to Schmitt, Schiller's theater is too joyful or, as he labeled it, was made for the sole purpose of "self-edification" (47). The quote from his *Homage of the Arts* is brought up once again for the reader. Schmitt even quotes Nietzsche's eponymous *The Birth of the Tragedy* (1867) and states that "music cannot be that

203. Schmitt 2009b, 47.

which we designate here as the source of tragic action" (46). Such a quotation does not seem too appropriate, mainly because Nietzsche was concentrated on the tragic chorus of Ancient Greek theater and, also, because Schmitt already stated how *Hamlet* became a myth through a two-folded historical process. However, the next quote makes this reference more understandable: Schmitt now clings on to Willamowitz-Moellendorf's conception of "Attic tragedy," which is defined "as a piece of myth or heroic legend" (46). While Schmitt disapproves of how the ruthless opponent of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* is not "consistent with this insight"—that is, how he grasps myth as mere "content"—he does acknowledge the non-literary source of myth. "Tragic figures like Orestes, Oedipus, and Hercules are not imaginary but actually exist as figures from a living myth that are introduced into the tragedy from an external present," concludes Schmitt (46).

Hamlet or Hecuba keenly compares Schiller with Shakespeare and his fierce, raw brand of theater. In that "sixteenth-century England," "the play still belonged to life itself—that is, to a life full of spirit and grace, but not yet 'civilized' [*poliziert*]" (47). Schmitt stresses—as he returns to both *Nomos* and his book on Hobbes—how this epoch is to be understood as "the first stage of an elemental departure from the land to the sea, the transition from a terrestrial to a maritime existence." Hence, the theater, by then, was merged in that condensed, monolithic reality where no great division of spheres of action had yet developed. That is why "the play was still barbaric and elemental."

Schiller, on the other hand, mastered both play and theory. His "philosophy of play" supports the tendency of a "self-edifying theater, as Schmitt labels it. His relation to history was studied in hindsight. Schiller, in fact, was a historian. His use of sources led him to the use of history as a literary source—so we learn in the last section of *Hamlet or Hecuba*. None of this happens in Shakespeare's creations: "[H]is plays are always straightforward theater—burdened neither with philosophical nor aesthetic problems" (48). Underdeveloped and "straightforward" as it was, *Hamlet* allowed allusions both to the low and the high. Moreover, the two "intrusions"—that is, the "taboo of the Queen" and "the Hamletization of the avenger"—were "the two doors through which the tragic element of an actual event enters into the world of the play and transforms the *Trauerspiel* into a tragedy, a historical reality into a myth" (48).

It is curious to note how Schmitt became more ambitious and even strove to develop a quasi-normative[204] theory of tragic theater. While his forerunners in Shakespeare studies had attempted to draw up a global interpretation of *Hamlet*—i.e., Schmitt's main sources: Dover Wilson, de Madariaga, and Winstanley—Schmitt was more interested in stating the basic assumptions that one must accept in order to tackle *Hamlet* from an objective basis. "Intrusions" are the irrevocable, normative figures that, ultimately, will define and shape the play. That is why "[t]he core of historical reality is not invented, cannot be invented, and must be respected as given" (48). If in the "myth of classical tragedy," that core penetrated through the mediation of "tragic action," in *Hamlet* no mediation is needed: reality and theater, audience and people, tragedy and reality are one. This is, Schmitt asserts, "typically modern" because Shakespeare was "a playwright who establishes a myth from the reality that he immediately faces" (49). His invention was great, universal. But so were the "intrusions":

> Shakespeare […] was capable of extracting from the confusing richness of his contemporary political situation the form that could be intensified to the level of myth. […] Thus, the myth of Hamlet was born [*entstanden*]. A *Trauerspiel* rose to the level of tragedy and was able to convey in this form the living reality of a mythical figure to future ages and generations.[205]

2.10 *Ergebnis*

Hamlet or Hecuba ends with four conclusions. Each one of them summarizes the views established in the previous sections. The first "result" is a state of the art; that is, a general description. Schmitt is amazed by "the unbelievable excess of existing interpretations of Hamlet" (50). All of them tried to solve this "riddle"; however, "[t]he riddle does not allow

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204. See chapter 2 (2.1; 2.8). As I have already argued in the introduction, Schmitt is quite respectful of Aristotle's paramount reflections on tragedy. The whole "intrusion" thesis can be seen as a political interpretation of that hidden "logos"; namely, the theoretical logic that builds and sustains tragedy. Hence, what really "intrudes" is the plot of "historical reality." See *Poetics* 20, 16–22: "For tragedy is a *mimesis* not of men [simply] but of actions—that is, of life. That's how it is that they certainly do not act in order to present their characters: they embrace their characters for the sake of the actions [they are to do]. And so the [course of] events—the plot—is the *end* of tragedy, and the end is what matters most of all."
205. Schmitt 2009b, 49.

itself to be elucidated by the content of the stage play itself, nor by the inner relations of a self-contained process" (50). Otherwise put, neither historicism nor aestheticism can properly explain *Hamlet*. Subjectivity will always be insufficient when it comes to accounting for "historical reality."

The second result again distinguishes "mere allusions from true mirrorings of the contemporary historical present (Essex) and from genuine intrusions." This conclusion is epistemic. Such a distinction is effective due to its capacity to differentiate the authentic from the inauthentic. Three types of historical degrees were developed in *Hamlet oder Hekuba*: (1) allusions (references, names, cities, people, conflicts, etc.), (2) mirrorings (the dramatic creation unfolds a fiction that is ruled by the same structure as the original model it is based upon), and (3) "genuine intrusions" (the core of "historical reality" expanding through its normative nature over creation, to the point of limiting its scope). However, if the intrusions are accepted as autonomous and separate from the tragedy—namely, if they are seen as two contents placed outside its reality—then the correct interpretation of *Hamlet* is endangered. "One can then perform *Hamlet* as pure theater, as Jean-Louis Barrault did in 1952."[206] Even if that was the case, it would still be better "than the continuation of attempts to deck out the two intrusions with philosophical or psychological superficialities" (51).

Schmitt's work contains a third result, which is of methodological importance. His interpretation of *Hamlet* eschews "all historical and even anti-historical misunderstandings" (51). Prince Hamlet is not James I: "This would be either a historical panopticon and nineteenth-century costume drama or, alternatively, the attempt to pump blood into a specter, a kind of vampirism" (51). Such an expressionist remark aims to prove the inconsistencies of an exclusively aesthetic approach. Shakespeare, on the contrary, "recognized and respected the tragic core" (51). Hamlet is no doppelganger; he is Prince Hamlet of Elsinore, a universal creation under the rule of its reality. A further conceptual clarification is provided by Schmitt, who remarks: "[w]here history is only understood as the past and that which 'has been,' and no longer as present or real, the protest against period costumes becomes meaningful, and one must perform *Hamlet* in tails" (51). No sooner than such approaches

206. Schmitt 2009b, 51. Schmitt is referring to the performance of André Gide's (1869–1951) version of *Hamlet*.

show themselves as "the enemy," they are soon banished: "Its consequence is a rapid self-destruction."

The fourth and final result is conceptual; namely, the already stated difference between *Trauerspiel* and tragedy. While subjectivity shapes those mourning plays, tragedy is enhanced and optimized by "that incontrovertible core of a singular historical reality that transcends every subjective invention and can then understand its elevation to myth" (52). A last meditation on the three representative figures of literature is provided by Schmitt; namely, "Don Quixote, Hamlet, and Faust. […] Let us pay attention, then to their origins and provenances." The first, "Spanish and Catholic," the third "German and Protestant," and the second "stands between them in the middle of the schism that has determined the fate of Europe." The continent rises as the great spiritual context in which only *Hamlet* managed to become a myth.

> Mary Stuart is still for us something other and more than Hecuba. Even the fate of the Atreiade does not affect us as deeply as that of the unhappy Stuarts. This royal line was shattered by the fate of the European religious schism. Out of its history grew the seed of the tragic myth of Hamlet.[207]

"Us," of course, means "us, Europeans." The actuality of *Hamlet* is, needless to say, in tune with our present because its creation is marked by our own fate. Tragedy reigns supreme where tragedy has not ended. That fate is located in "the European religious schism." *Hamlet or Hecuba* is a report of that tragic backdrop against which the people of Europe saw themselves reflected. This book was written in 1956, although it was first outlined in 1952 and planned in 1947 as a discussion of Kommerell's book on Schiller. *Hamlet oder Hekuba* is not a book merely about *Hamlet*, just like Prince Hamlet was not a mere copy of James I. If that is the case, how did the "tragic seed" evolve in the years leading up to 1956?

2.10 On the Three *Exkursen*

207. Schmitt 2009b, 52.

Schmitt offers two appendixes and one bibliographical note[208] after the last section of his monograph on *Hamlet*. This should be questioned by the reader for the following reasons: First, the appendixes elaborate two approaches regarding two different issues that are not directly related to the prior considerations on "intrusions" or the vocabulary developed in his 1956 book. They are, so to speak, a philological afterword. Second, the use of such material has a strong resemblance with those subsections introduced in Schmitt's classic essay *The Concept of the Political*. This essay's standard edition[209] is divided into eight sections and eight subsections or notes, plus "three corollaries." Those notes are meant to further develop some of Schmitt's typically emphatic statements,[210] and they abound in erudition and insights. Moreover, and regarding the economy of both *The Concept of the Political* and *Hamlet or Hecuba*, these annotations express the inner dynamism of Schmitt and his habit of revisiting his own texts. He was more interested in opening new perspectives. More often than not, these perspectives involved different disciplines, like jurisprudence, aesthetics, philosophy, and philology.

Appendix 1. The first *Exkurs* provides a juridical account of *Hamlet*. Schmitt discusses in positive terms the second chapter of Dover Wilson's *What Happens in Hamlet*, which carries out a "careful analysis of the question of Hamlet's succession to the throne" (54). From a juridical standpoint, the question is whether Claudius was a usurper or not and if Hamlet "was the rightful heir to his father's throne." The answer to this question would determine if "[t]he drama would not only be a revenge play but also a drama of succession" (53). Schmitt tackles this matter by planning his analysis and firstly examining passages of the three first acts. Only "when one connects the points in act 1.2.1–089 […], act 3.2.90–92 […], and 3.2.342–4," does the problem of succession become visible to the reader. Schmitt

208. In the English translation of *Hamlet oder Hekuba*, the footnotes are found at the bottom of the text. In the original, footnotes are found at the end of it. The following section follows the original German text.
209. See Walter 2018, 7–34; Franco de Sá 2015, 12–14.
210. Schmitt 1986, 18: "Romanticism is subjectified occasionalism because an occasional relationship to the world is essential to I"; Schmitt 2007a, 19: "The concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political"; Schmitt 2007a, 26: "The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy"; Schmitt 2007a, 30: "First, all political concepts, images, and terms have a polemical meaning" (every section of CP is accompanied with such statements); Schmitt 2005, 5: "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception"; Schmitt 2005, 15: "The exception is more interesting than the rule. The rule proves nothing; the exception proves everything…"; Schmitt 2014c, 128: "All de-theologised concepts carry the weight of their scientifically impure origins"; Schmitt 2004b, 73: "Legal and jurisprudential thought expresses itself only in connection to a historical, concrete, total order." These are quotes from Schmitt's canonical essays. His large correspondence and diaries are full of these kinds of statements as well.

supports Dover Wilson's statement on the rightfulness of Prince Hamlet's claim to the throne, which makes Claudius a usurper.[211] Schmitt then goes on to link Dover Wilson with Winstanley's book. Schmitt next offers some conceptual reflections on the "hereditary monarchy" and compares it with today's "elective monarchy." Crucial to this point is the notion of "election." Modern law's "*free* election" does not accurately describe the original term, so "we thus need a legal-historical clarification" (55). Schmitt—just like Dover Wilson before him[212]—unfolds his analysis of Prince Hamlet's "dying voice," conveying how he rightly had the power to name his successor. This was determined by an "old blood right" and, subsequently, "had a sacred character" (56). The jurist briefly focuses on "the history of our German Kings"—"the naming of the Saxon Duke Heinrich by the dying King Konrad, who was Frank"—to assert how "[t]he norm is thus confirmed in light of this exception": Frank was, of course, a member of another clan (56–57). The "third factor" is the acquired influence of those figures who accepted to be his successors. Thus, along with the "dying voice" and "the old blood right," the third factor proves how "these events" need to be grasped "within the context of its own time period and its own people."[213] Schmitt concludes that King Claudius "stifled the *dying voice* and violated young Hamlet's right of succession to the throne," which also means that Dover Wilson's thesis was not entirely correct. There is an objective relationship between Hamlet and James I; namely, the "sacred blood right." A last consideration is made regarding the importance of these issues in Q1 and Q2. But the reader now knows that this first appendix stresses, again and again, the magnitude of Schmitt's notion of "intrusion" to the point of championing an authorized interpretation: Dover Wilson's.

Appendix 2. This supplement is an acknowledgment of Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of German Trauerspiel*. Even today, the motives for Schmitt's recognition of this book remain unclear. Benjamin's analysis of *Hamlet* was, to say the least, exotic. And while Benjamin praised Schmitt in a letter sent to him in 1930, the jurist did not return the gesture in any of the essays published in the late twenties or the next two decades. Thus, the reader

211. Dover Wilson 1952, 31: "The throne was the centre of Elizabethan political life in a way it has long ceased to be in ours, and the question of succession, as Laertes puts it, affected "the sanity and health of the whole state. How, then, would the second scene of *Hamlet* strike an audience with this political outlook?"
212. Dover Wilson 1952, 33–38.
213. Schmitt 2009b, 57.

is right to be baffled by those contemporary accounts that go as far as to speak of an "entire exoteric debate between Benjamin and Schmitt."[214] Although a good amount of philological and conceptual connections can be made between these two authors, such "debate" is at best an anecdote. Schmitt's made several observations in his personal copy of Benjamin's book, but neither the author nor his essay was important for Schmitt leading up to his book on *Hamlet*. His notes and loose thoughts in *Glossarium* barely mention Benjamin at all. It is more likely that Schmitt was aware of the rising relevance of the author of *On the Concept of History* and saw an opportunity to engage with this philosophical phenomenon ex-post. Also, the connection between Schmitt and Benjamin was soon noted by Kurt Marko, who published a review already in 1957[215]. The very same author who coined the expression "secret dossier" does not mention Marko's insightful comment of *Hamlet oder Hekuba*.

Schmitt asserts that "the book is rich in important insights and perspectives both for aesthetics and intellectual history in general, as well as for Shakespearean drama and *Hamlet* in particular" (59). Benjamin's thesis on the "allegorical aspect" of *Hamlet* is the point of departure for Schmitt's reflections on the German philosopher. The allegorical leads to the Christian element of Shakespeare's tragedy. Benjamin's book deals with fate, but for Schmitt, "*Hamlet* is not Christian in any specific sense" (61). The latter stresses how in entering "into theological controversies about special and general providence," Benjamin missed such a crucial distinction. Schmitt discusses these concepts in a scholarly fashion, engaging them on his own terms; namely, his remarks on "the difference between insular England and continental Europe, and therewith also between English drama and the seventeenth-century German baroque *Trauerspiel*."[216] The criteria, then, for analyzing *Hamlet* should be provided between these "historical coordinates" and not according to "intellectual or aesthetic categories like the Renaissance and the baroque" (62). And those coordinates are "the antithesis between the barbaric and the political" (62). Schmitt thus provides an account of English history, and insights already developed in *Nomos* are given to prove that opposition. "In this situation, the word *political* acquires a polemical meaning and consequently the thoroughly concrete sense of an antithesis to the word *barbaric*" (63).

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214. See Agamben 2005, 55. The Italian philosopher was probably drawn to this issue by Samuel Weber's article published in 1992.
215. Marko 1957, 386-388. See also Mehring 2022, 59-61.
216. Schmitt 2009b, 62.

The rationalism of the state diminishes and punishes anything that opposes its "civilized existence." Hence, barbarism is banished. The expressions of European theater are deeply affected by this piece of juridical reasoning: French theater finds here its origin, and Germany's *Sturm und Drang* rediscovery of Shakespeare acts as a reaction to it, as well. *Hamlet* was written and performed in the century spanning from "1588 to 1688," where "the island of England withdrew from the European continent and took the step from a terrestrial to a maritime existence" (64). The play participated in that "departure," as it was a brilliant expression of it. *Hamlet* is not Christian—the reader recalls how this drama can be found somewhere in between "Don Quixote and Faustus"—because its time, the time of the Stuarts, was unaware of "the sovereign state of the European continent" and "the transition to a maritime existence that England achieved during their reign" (65). Benjamin's book proved to be an insightful exercise on philosophy and history, philology, and aesthetics. However, and according to Schmitt, it missed the point in relation to those epoch-defining historical phenomena. Whereas the philosopher was directly influenced by Schmitt, the jurist mentioned Benjamin only in order to highlight, again, his own standpoint on *Hamlet*.

2.12 Conclusion

In the last twenty years, *Hamlet oder Hekuba* has received renewed critical interest. A constant stream of articles and papers are now focusing on Schmitt's thesis on "intrusions." However, this critical rediscovery is quite particular. Victoria Kahn's *Hamlet or Hecuba: Carl Schmitt's Decision* has triggered a considerable number of critiques. These reactions are often negative, although they do recognize the merit of Kahn's study of Schmitt; namely, her account of the German jurist's "insensitivity to literary form"[217] and the relation to his critique of liberalism. Her approach is, while pioneering when it comes to the English-language reception of Schmitt, quite typical. Schmitt's significant oeuvre is reduced to the bibliography available in English; the most significant debate in *Hamlet or Hecuba* is purported to be that with Benjamin. When the reader is informed that "[i]n recent years, there has been a notable revival of interest in the work of the German Jurist Carl Schmitt,"[218] it

217. Kahn 2003, 69.
218. Kahn 2003, 67.

bears keeping in mind that this "revival" only covers the English translation of Schmitt and some of the well-known philosophical studies that obliquely interpret his most famous assertions. Such a "revival" helped bring about a second wave of studies: largely reactions to Kahn's article, most of them grouped and published by the *Telos* Journal. Just like Kahn's, most of these interpretations propose a comprehension of *Hamlet or Hecuba* as a short yet exotic treatise on the aesthetics-politics connection.[219] Even these new approaches to Schmitt's essay on *Hamlet*[220] respect Kahn's outline of Schmitt's work: the importance of sovereignty, and, thus, Schmitt's idea of authentic, anti-liberal politics; the shift from Hobbes to Hamlet; the crucial philosophical-historical element provided by Benjamin; the epistemic unfolding of Schmitt's "disjointed" approach—"either/or" becomes the locus to interpret the 1956 book in individual terms, so *Hamlet* becomes Schmitt, Hitler is Prince Hamlet, *Hamlet oder Hekuba* is the return of *Der Begriff des Politischen*, etc.

Nonetheless, basic questions apropos of the origin, structure, and method of *Hamlet or Hecuba* are missing from these critical efforts. Likewise, the so-called "revival" does not acknowledge those previous efforts that dealt with the significance of the 1956 book within the broader context of Schmitt's work.[221] Hence, the debate about the "core" of this little book is confined between two theoretical dimensions: the English bibliography on Schmitt (including his own material) and the dialogue with Benjamin. Within these two coordinates, the aforementioned "revival" has proposed different scopes of analysis. Most of them posit that Schmitt's monograph on *Hamlet* is a crucial piece of Schmitt's bibliography—which is true. However, the reasons for such a viewpoint are not adequate. This short essay on *Hamlet* is linked with *Roman Catholicism*, *Political Theology I*, *The Concept of the Political*, and *Nomos*. When it comes to Benjamin, the aforementioned letter of 1930 is valued as an incontrovertible document that enables all kinds of enticing theses and points of contact between these two authors. Finally, *Hamlet or Hecuba* is read without even considering the bibliographical context of the contemporary studies on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* published in

219. Kahn 2003, 89; Türk 2008, 74; Rust & Lupton 2009, xix; Pan 2009, 72–73; Michelbach & Poe 2016, 6; Mosssa 2016, 72.
220. Daniel 2010, 53–54; Trüstedt 2010, 110–111.
221. Altmann 1956, 39; Tommissen 2001, 51 ff.; Flügel 1965, 170; Mehring 1992, 47–48; Noack 1993, 276–277; Menke 2005, 210–212; Cacciari 2009, 15; Hofmann 2016 [1964], 241–243.

Schmitt's time. A great number of these publications fell under Schmitt's attention. He was, indeed, undoubtedly aware of this situation.

Thus, *Hamlet oder Hekuba*'s current approaches, while productive and interesting, are biased from the very beginning. It was not until Reinhard Mehring's definitive biography of Schmitt and Andreas Höfele's reconstruction of *Hamlet oder Hekuba* that the reader finally found the opportunity to delve into the context in which the little book on *Hamlet* was written. Schmitt's main correspondents at the time—Ernst Jünger, Nicolaus Sombart, Reinhart Koselleck, Rüdiger Altmann, Heinrich Gremmels, Ernst Forsthoff, Armin Mohler, and Ernst Rudolf Huber—were aware of the importance that Schmitt granted to his book. But even both Mehring and Höfele do not address the main interlocutors identified in *Hamlet oder Hekuba*—Winstanley, Dover Wilson, de Madariaga, Eliot, Freud—and their connection to the secondary sources used by Schmitt (Gervinus, Börne, Kohler), which are, if the reader investigates them further, nothing but crucial for understanding *Hamlet or Hecuba*. Hence, a second type of bias is generated: the theoretical implications of Schmitt's short essay on *Hamlet* are unbalanced. Benjamin's *The Origin of the German Trauerspiel* is praised as the key text, and Schmitt's notions of "play" and "seriousness" are relocated toward *The Concept of the Political* or Schiller's philosophy of play—although such a conceptual connection has yet to be demonstrated.

It is necessary to mention a third bias regarding *Hamlet or Hecuba*: its genesis. While the previously mentioned Mehring and Höfele have provided important information regarding the origin of Schmitt's reflections on *Hamlet*, a full investigation on the genesis of his essay is missing—only an isolated article written by Mehring tackles this issue. Thus, the reader is not told that Schmitt had already planned an article on Kommerell's interpretation of Schiller in the 40s (something that can be partially proved by reading Schmitt's 1952 prologue), or how Schmitt even used his thesis from *Politische Romantik* in his interpretation of Shakespeare's drama. The current "revival" or "renaissance" of Schmitt studies also fails to point out to the reader the strong links between *Hamlet oder Hekuba* and the arguments he put forward and defended in *Glossarium*. Schmitt's interest in *Hamlet* was not exclusively fueled by Winstanley's book or his eerily early identification of the figure of Othello.[222] The thesis on the relationship between "politics and aesthetics" needs to be corrected: the main

222. See Schmitt 2014d, *passim*; see Höfele 2016, 160–191.

topics that kept Schmitt busy before and after *Hamlet or Hecuba* were history and tragedy. These two fields were approached from Schmitt's usual viewpoints: legal science (jurisprudence), politics, theology, etc. Unsurprisingly, each one of these scopes has been championed as *the* locus from which Schmitt's 1956 essay should be grasped.

Finally, a more implicit fourth bias needs to be demonstrated when it comes to a full assessment of *Hamlet oder Hekuba*; namely, Schmitt's use of concepts and terms not when interpreting *Hamlet* exclusively, but the aforementioned themes of history and poetry. Interpreters of the 1956's essay reflect on Schmitt's vision of "aesthetics," "tragedy," "politics," and "play." However, they hardly distinguish "aesthetics" from "theater"—which is the exclusive topic of *Hamlet or Hecuba*—"tragedy" from the "tragic," or historical from non-historical tragedy; they also fail to describe "politics" and both the specific, "concrete" political situation into which *Hamlet* was introduced and the German tradition to which Schmitt himself contributed; and, finally, the importance of the concept of "play," which is much more related to the logical standards of modern critical thought. According to these scholars, the concept of "play" is merely a combination of Schillerian philosophy and a vague outline of liberalism. Hence, there is no exaggeration in asserting that—at least in the most visible spot of the debate on Schmitt's book on *Hamlet*—we have barely scratched the surface of its genesis, structure, method, and vocabulary.

Amid these complex, biased hermeneutic levels of interpretation, the more obvious and logical questions have yet to be truly raised. Why did Schmitt turn his mind to literature—specifically, to *Hamlet*? Why did he choose such a title for this short essay? Why is *Hamlet or Hecuba* so brief (as compared, for instance, to *Political Romanticism*? If the early plans of the book of 1956 were to give an account of Kommerell's Schiller—and, thus, the question of art as a comprehension of history—what did he find in *Hamlet* and consider much more enticing? If, as Kahn herself argues, "Schmitt, that is, uses the aesthetic power of Shakespeare to allegorize his own situation in World War II as genuinely classic–tragedy,"[223] what are the differences then between his also contemporary notions of "parallelisms" and "analogies"—both regarding history and tragedy—that the reader finds in the essays on *Donoso Cortés* and *Glossarium*? Otherwise put, why has *Hamlet oder Hekuba*'s vocabulary

223. Kahn 2003, 89.

not been tracked down to its original locus; namely, the draft based on an article concerning Kommerell's Schiller and, hence, art, tragedy, and history?

In the last eight sections, I have attempted to develop these modest, although essential questions regarding *Hamlet oder Hekuba*. That is the main reason why I described in detail the apparently minor bibliographical elements surrounding this essay. Conversely, it is quite clear to the reader that my intention has not been to diminish or dismiss those interpretations that represent the "revival" of Schmitt's *Hamlet or Hecuba*. On the contrary, my aim was none other than to elaborate a thorough account of this enigmatic "little book." By achieving this, I hoped to revisit the logical amazement that this book arouses in all readers: Why did one of the, if not, *the* most brilliant jurist of the Weimar Republic choose *Hamlet* as a topic? While before 1956, Germany had given rise to other intellectual efforts that singled out the present-day relevance and nuances of this drama,[224] there was no substantial reason for Schmitt—aside from the fact that he had already written in his prologue—to delve into *Hamlet*. As I think I have convincingly outlined the theoretical architecture of *Hamlet or Hecuba*, the following chapters will tackle those other eccentric and implicit elements that lead Schmitt to elaborate his reflections on *Hamlet*. In the next section, I will analyze a handful of Schmitt's essays written during the 50s. The reader will encounter, by following the train of thought established by the jurist in these texts, two major topics that defined and shaped the approach through which the reflections of *Hamlet oder Hekuba* were made—namely, the normative relationship between history and art—this, one could say, is a method of hermeneutical nature. I posit that such material will help determine the proper place of the essay on *Hamlet* within the greater context of Schmitt's oeuvre. By scanning his considerations on Donoso Cortés, Karl Löwith, Ernst Jünger, and Erich Przywara, but also his thoughts on space, the "unity of the world," and the problem of the "power-holder," I aim to develop a full account of the main topics that determine Schmitt's vision of tragedy.

224. For example: Gerhardt 1950; Belinskij 1952; Glaser 1952; Port 1953; Kreft 1955; Knorr 1956; Döblin 1956; Lehmann 1956; Glaser 1956; Schulze 1956. I have not listed, for obvious reasons, both Winstanley's German translation and Schmitt's *Hamlet or Hecuba*.