

## II. Mass Media, Early Modern

### The Masses

0.—From a present-day perspective, it might at first sight appear to be a flagrant anachronism to apply the term “mass medium” to early modern drama, not least because the texts of this tradition, as well as the practice of performing them for an audience, became instances of a sophisticated and socially exclusive “high culture” from the beginning of the nineteenth century onward.

1.—In this respect, however, it is crucial to be aware of the historical distance between the reception of these texts and performances in modernity proper, especially in our times, and the reception during the period of origin. These drastically divergent modes of reception are conditioned by a great distance in terms of technological evolution. In the early modern period, what we consider nowadays to be quasi-natural elements of our cultural habitat were not present: TV and movies. The absence of a ubiquitous and easily accessible visual culture prior to the beginning of the twentieth century is the main reason why theatrical performances—it is of no import to distinguish in this respect between street theater and performances in playhouses or theatrical courtyards (*corrales*)—once held a societal role that was incommensurably more significant than it is today and that can hardly be imagined from a present-day perspective. When the objective was to influence or guide a nearly illiterate public, the theater represented the only alternative to an authoritarian imposition of norms and patterns of thought. This is the reason why it was, in the age in question, employed for a purpose which has more recently become a symptom of triviality: didactics. And very frequently, this didactic dimension was not separate from, but rather went along with highly sophisticated artistic standards, comprising features such as reflection and self-reflection.

The hesitance to make use of the term “mass media” with regard to the performative practices of previous epochs does, however, seem to be justified to a certain extent when it comes to two other phases of occidental cultural history, which, once again, constitutes a strong plea for considering the configuration of cultural material observable in early modern drama and theater as a “novel” assembly. Considering the events which took place in the arenas of the Roman Empire, such as fights against wild beasts and fights amongst humans (gladiators), one would be ready to concede that the “masses” indeed had easy access, since entrance was free and such arenas existed not only in Rome, but in all the cities (*oppida, coloniae*) of the Empire. Yet is it sensible to consider these fights to be “mediated” events? What was taking place was, it is true,

staged rather than evolving in an entirely contingent manner; but it was real nonetheless. The spectators witnessed authentic killings rather than actors pretending to dispatch an opponent, and the blood spilled before their eyes was equally real; it was physically perceived rather than imagined.<sup>310</sup> In order to consider these events to be a mediation of something “else”, that is, something which was not really present, one would be obliged to interpret the fights as representations whose reference would be, for example, the notion of life as a constant struggle, of death as an inevitability, or of cruelties as legitimate. I will not deny that such or comparable implications were, indeed, present. But the sheer event taking place seems to have been much more important than any other “thing” which might have been additionally mediated. The proof for this view is the fact that the performances ended with the most solid and uncontested reality there is: death.

As for pre-Roman (classical Greek) and post-Roman (medieval) times, there were, indeed, theatrical performances in the modern sense, that is, performances which were received by their spectators not as “real” events, but as representations of real or at least possible events (*dynata*, as Aristotle puts it<sup>311</sup>), in other words, mediations. What seems questionable in these cases is rather the application of the term “masses”. We have the tendency to apply it primarily to democratic or totalitarian societies, that is, to societies which make a strong claim to be committed to generalized equality. From this perspective, one might perhaps be inclined to see the theatrical performances of fifth-century (BCE) Athens as early instances of mass media. But what finally marks such an application of the category as at least slightly inadequate is the fact that Athenian “democracy” was a quite restricted or exclusive affair: females, minors, slaves, and resident aliens (metics) were not allowed to partake in political decisions; as to the ritualistic participation in theatrical performances, this stricture was suspended only with regard to the wives of the admitted males. Citizenship was the condition of belonging to the *demos*, and this status was reserved for those who had the right to bear arms. In sheer numbers, it was approximately 10 % of the resident population who were admitted. From a posterior perspective, one would therefore be inclined to call the Athenian society of that age an “aristocracy”—members were defined according to descent—rather than a “mass” society. The procedural rules according to which this aristocracy or oligarchy organized the deployment of power was, however, based

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**310** —in the theater of that age, it was common practice to represent blood with the aid of cherry juice mixed with oil.

**311** *Poetics*, esp. chap. 9.

on voting rather than hierarchy. This mixture, somewhat exceptional in human history, of a homogeneity of norms, based on internal equality, and a strict distancing from all “others” (*barbaroi*) or foreigners living on the same territory, generated a theater and drama culture that has remained fascinating to this day. From a historicizing perspective, the high degree to which these texts meet an essential criterion of canonical literature prevalent in modernity proper—the absence of didacticism and moralizing—is obviously contingent upon the social, and, by implication, ethical homogeneity of the implied recipients.<sup>312</sup>

Things might be different in the case of the Roman Empire. It was not only gladiator fights and similar popular performances for which the arenas were built; they were also the site of theatrical performances, tragic (Seneca) as well as comedic (Plautus, Terence). Entrance was free, and the politics of admission were not based on rules of social exclusiveness. But not enough information has survived about these events to allow for establishing well-founded hypotheses as to their function in society. Suffice it to say that Roman theater, at least from the imperial period onward, may bear significant similarities to what we know from early modern times; I should like to add that the corresponding political systems—a frame to which I would link, as will be explained in the following, the emergence of early modern mass culture—are characterized by a number of similarities as well. On the other hand, one should not overlook the fact that plays in Latin were—like the Roman culture of classical times in general—for the most part imitations of Greek models; the plots were not altered in order to adapt them to the specific societal situation of Rome. One might thus hypothesize that Roman culture created the enabling conditions for the emergence of a visual mass culture, but, for whatever reason, did not actually make use of this infrastructure in a way that would be comparable to early modern European societies.

2.—Although European states of the early modern age were in a way aristocratic—in any case, they were certainly not democratic—they display important characteristics of the mass societies of later times. For this reason, it is less astonishing than one might assume that they developed instruments for organizing and directing such societies which became fully developed only in the twentieth century. The commonality is, finally, a product of what we are used to calling “absolutism”. The societies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries still had a feudal class, and the legal and political differences between the first two estates and the third estate were considerable. But these differences

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312 In the sense of Wolfgang Iser’s concept of “implied reader” (*The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, Baltimore, MD 1974).

were rendered insignificant by the absolute power of the monarch. The transformative process which dramatically changed the structure of European societies began in Spain. After the expulsion (1492) of those contingents of the peninsula's Muslim and Jewish populations who were not willing to comply with the politics of ideological homogenization imposed by the "Catholic Monarchs", the process was completed in a relatively smooth manner.<sup>313</sup> Things were more difficult in France and in England. In France, it was only with the defeat of the *fronde* (1648–1653)—the active and violent resistance of parts of the higher nobility to becoming "subjects" or courtiers—that the Versailles absolutism of Louis XIV could later be established for the rest of the Ancien Régime. It may even be that the French "exceptionalism" briefly expounded in the hypotheses-chapter is contingent on the fact that absolutism's triumph was, in France, the result of a fierce civil war conducted among factions of the higher nobility. The intimidating effects of the feudal lords' devastating defeat may have been so strong that the monarchs did not see a need for a further politics of ideological homogenization, or, to put it more precisely, for more ideological homogeneity than that established by events such as the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), that is, by the abolishment of religious pluralism. Would it be overly speculative to regard the bloody revolution which occurred only seventy-four years after Louis XIV's death as a consequence of the fact that the French monarchs did not perceive the necessity for a more pervasive ideological homogenization once their absolute power seemed to have been secured?

In England, the establishment of absolutism went along with a bold step, namely, that of rendering the monarch "absolute" in a very literal sense, that of no longer being dependent upon a figure as important as Christ's vicar on earth, the Roman Pope. As is the case with almost every form of extremism in history, this was, perhaps, one step too far. The bloody consequences of the religious schism mark England's political history in the entire period under scrutiny. There is no need to provide a definitive answer to the question as to whether this struggle was "really" about faith and denomination. From what is known about the ruling class of that age, dissent regarding belief may have been a very appropriate device for emotionally affecting and thus mobilizing conflicting contingents of the population. The ideological work done by the different monarchs in order to counteract this factionalism seems to follow a very conspicuous rationale, namely, that of bracketing questions of faith and

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**313** I would like to stress the adverb; in Spain, too, there was serious physical constraint involved in carrying the process of ideological homogenization to the intended goal; but there was no open civil war.

of addressing other questions of general worldview at issue in those times. One could consider most of Elizabethan, in particular Shakespearean theater as a device for establishing a certain ideological homogeneity which, however, did *not* encompass the highly controversial field of religious conviction; hence, perhaps, its remarkable ideological openness, which is not an openness of random profile, but an openness that seems to be modern because it leaves the question of right belief out of consideration.

Things are much more difficult to systematize when it comes to cultural “nations” which did not attain the level of political unity in that age. Amongst the bigger European countries, it is mainly Italy and Germany which are encompassed by this description. If my guiding hypothesis is correct, this political “belatedness” would provide an explanation for the obvious fact that these two nations did not make a contribution to the corpus of early modern European drama comparable to those discussed in the previous paragraphs. But it should be stressed that such an evaluation is based on an *a posteriori* perspective. There are notable Italian and German dramas from the centuries concerned. It may even be the case that these dramas could no less reasonably be described as instances of early mass culture than corresponding texts from Spain or England. But it is problematic to argue in this manner in an age when we spontaneously associate the term “Italian drama” with the nation “Italy” as it has been understood for roughly 150 years now. The same applies in the case of the fragmented territories of the German-speaking lands of those times. If the “mass” to be homogenized is the population of a small principality, perhaps with no more than 100,000 inhabitants, one would not feel a very strong inclination to speak of plays written by famous authors from such principalities, e.g. Gryphius or Lohenstein, as instruments of a *German* mass culture existing as early as in the seventeenth century. From a scholarly standpoint, however, one would have to consider the possibility that German or Italian plays from that age were written with exactly the same intention—namely, the ideological homogenization of a public of roughly equal subjects—as their Spanish or English counterparts. To put it abstractly: the “portion” of people to be homogenized does not correspond to the linguistic borders of the cultural community in question; at least intuitively, this would seem to be the main problem with the hypothesis here expounded with regard to Italy and Germany.

But it may well be that these are problems linked to a specifically modern, nineteenth- and twentieth-century view of the relationship between linguistic and political borders. As has been shown by the previously mentioned studies dealing with dramatic performances even in such small and secluded places

as remote valleys of the Alps or villages in Slovenia,<sup>314</sup> it is very probable that the phenomena observable in those places were in principle comparable to what has been stated here with respect to Spain, England, and France: dramatic performances were instrumentalized as a means of bringing about ideological homogeneity. The inhabitants of the Alpine valleys were “taught” the basic tenets of Christian belief in its Catholic, Counter-Reformation variant by means of such performances; at the same time, they were reassured that their traditional norms, namely those of patriarchy, were “good” norms which apply in all places and at all times. And the Slovenes were given the impression that their homeland was not something separate from the Austrian mainland and its capital; notwithstanding their vernacular, which differed considerably from the one used in the metropole, their beliefs and convictions were, or, rather, were supposed to be the same as in Vienna, Salzburg, or Innsbruck.

3.—It is above all the case of Russia that would seem not to fit into this general view of early modern drama as mass media. Theater was, indeed, introduced into the country during that period, rapidly generating first attempts at composing pieces in the local language. However, into the nineteenth century, there was no middle class or bourgeoisie in Russia; there was only the nobility and the peasantry, the latter being divided into free farmers (*kulaki*) and serfs. Because of the immense distance between the small ruling elite and the common people, who did not even have a pretense to rights of their own, there was no need to develop instruments for directing the masses. Russia was—and may still be today—a particularly “belated” nation. Indirect instruments of exerting power were unnecessary because blunt physical force was a commonly practiced<sup>315</sup> and accepted means of ruling. Eighteenth-century Russian theater rather had the function of homogenizing the elites residing at court. It is a theater intended for *la cour* and not, as was the case with France, at the same time for *la ville*, the root of what was later to become, in the Age of

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314 See Bernhart, *Volksschauspiele*; Drnovšek, “*Certa Mina Dant VICTorlas*”. I will come back to these plays in a later chapter (pp. 246–248); in order to elucidate what I am expressing above, I might say in anticipation that plots like the story of Phaethon or Griselda were frequently made use of.

315 It is the adverb that counts here; also in Western European kingdoms of that age, physical brutality was a means of deploying power; but, in contrast to Russia, it was already regularized and thus confined by emerging rules and procedures, by laws and courts of law. In Russia, the situation was different. Particularly with regard to the overwhelming majority of the population, the serfs, it was the direct and arbitrary decision of the respective feudal lord that decided on their fate in case their actions jarred with the prevalent and mostly non-codified norms. Into the nineteenth century, if not until the February Revolution, the political system remained similar to what it had been in Western Europe in medieval times.

Enlightenment, the “public sphere” in the sense of Jürgen Habermas’s concept of “Öffentlichkeit”.<sup>316</sup>

4.—If one provisionally accepts the hypothesis of early modern European drama as a variant of mass media, the issue to be discussed in this second part of the present study consists in the question of whether mass media structures can be described as maintaining a specific relation to the cultural net at large, and in particular whether the formal structures “extracted” from the net by mass media culture differ from comparable structures of elite culture on the one hand and (exclusively) popular culture on the other. The constitutive function of mass media is to produce social integration, whether from a liberal<sup>317</sup> or from an authoritarian perspective. Hypothetically, one could argue that mass media phenomena are in principle anti-traditional with regard to form. In order to foster cultural integration, they make use of patterns and of material available in the net that are traditionally linked to diverse social spheres and to their respective aesthetic standards. Many of the features of early modern theater which appear to be modern in the sense that they anticipate democratic ideas<sup>318</sup> may belong more to its overall societal function than to the actual message of the specific plays.

Mass media phenomena are a provocation for all theories of literature or the arts which link the label of “work of art” to a formally “pure” structure whose purpose is *not* the transfer of “pragmatic” cultural material.<sup>319</sup> It may be that twentieth- and twenty-first-century mass media products are relatively poor in artistic value. Yet with regard to at least some of the products of early modern mass media, e.g. the works of Shakespeare and Calderón, it would not be par-

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**316** See *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Thomas Burger (tr.), Cambridge, MA 1991.

**317** Throughout this book, the term “liberal” is used in the sense of a political orientation committed above all to individual freedom.

**318** I am thinking of elements such as peasants claiming to be “honorable men” or “honorable women” in Spanish Golden Age drama; or the free interaction of noblemen and humble people to be observed widely in Elizabethan theater. As to the feature of peasants’ honor, quite striking within a conservative statist society, see my reading of Lope de Vega’s drama *Fuente Ovejuna* (“Lope de Vega. *Fuente Ovejuna*”, in: Harald Wentzlaff-Eggebert and Volker Roloff [eds.], *Das spanische Theater vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, Düsseldorf 1988, pp. 105–122).

**319** In that sense, I herein continue to historicize Immanuel Kant’s theory of art (*The Critique of Judgment*), which is considered at least within the German tradition, but also in some of the anglophone debates, to represent the “truth” as such regarding the question of what art is (see my “Kants *Kritik der Urteilskraft* und die Philosophie der Aufklärung”, *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* vol. 55,1/2010, pp. 9–23, and “Céline – Kant”, *Poetica* vol. 44/2012, pp. 229–238).

ticularly convincing to dismiss them in terms of aesthetic refinement. Not as items circulating in a partly autonomous subnet—which may be an adequate metaphor for modernist art and literature—, but as part of the cultural net at large, they are outstanding vestiges of what we call culture. They thus raise a question which remains to be addressed by modern aesthetic theory.

## Mediality

0.—“Intelligit [intellectus] [...] hoc complexum: ‘quodlibet est vel non est’, sine aliquo instrumento seu medio.” // “The intellect grasps this formula: ‘anything either is or is not [something]’, [and it (the intellect) does so] without any further instrument or medium.”<sup>320</sup>—This sentence summarizes a long-standing Western philosophical tradition which views the imperative to avoid contradictions as the most basic principle to be obeyed in all cases of cognitive activity that lay claim to being meaningful. In our context, it is of interest because of its implication: it demonstrates that the relevant tradition considers the mind’s cognitive operations *stricto sensu* not to be mediated by something else. According to the principle mentioned, this means that all the other activities of human consciousness, primarily sensory perception followed by its cognitive processing, *are* considered to be mediated.

1.—Accordingly, the term “media” in the acceptance current in modern times always refers to a third-degree mediation. “Media”, in a very broad definition of the term, are “instrumenti”, that is, material items that may be *used* by humans in order to “understand something” (*intelligere*). All of the phenomena observable in the natural world are, from this perspective, media by way of which humans may grasp the principles and laws governing the physical world. Second-degree media could be defined as “instruments” *created* by humans in order to convey to other humans the findings they have made by recourse to first-degree mediations; symbolic practices of any kind, above all language, would be the paradigm of such second-degree mediation. Third-degree media would be, accordingly, *configurations* of second-degree media created with a view to conveying more complex “intellections” to specific recipi-

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**320** The quote is from a thinker of the age at issue here (Nicolaus Cusanus, *Compendium*, cap. XI: 36), while the idea itself belongs to the core of the Aristotelian tradition; in the Middle Ages, the *intellectus* to which Nicolaus refers (i.e., the part of the human mind which is able to grasp certain “realities” without the mediation of sense perception) was commonly named *intellectus agens*. One of the major controversies between “pure” Aristotelians (Averroists) and Christianized Aristotelians (Thomists) concerned the question of whether this most dignified part of the mind is individual or not.

ents; world-models, partial or integral, of any kind (scientific, philosophical, religious, artistic) would be instances of such third-degree mediations. In this latter sense, drama is essentially a medium—theater would be a fourth-degree mediation—but not necessarily a mass medium.

At first sight, it might indeed seem somewhat problematic to subsume pieces belonging incontestably to canonical literature under the concept of mass media, all the more as this qualification is not meant to refer to evident characteristics captured by the Aristotelian distinction between *mimesis* (dialogue) and *diegesis* (narrative); and it also goes beyond the fact discussed in Part I, namely, that most early modern dramas are meant not to be read but to be received as staged action (*lexis/opsis*, in Aristotelian terminology). “Mediality” in the sense of mass media is meant to denote a specific characteristic of drama in the historical age concerned, that is, a trait that is not automatically concomitant with drama as genre.

Mediality in this sense means that there is a sender, a recipient, a channel of transmission, and, most importantly, an intention on the sender’s part to communicate a specific message and to do so in a way that is appropriate for conveying this message and not another one. The possibly controversial implication of this book’s guiding hypothesis—as far as this second part is concerned—is, consequently, that early modern drama is not adequately captured by conceptualizations of art from later times, meaning from the *Critique of Judgment* (1790) onward. From Kant’s perspective, the transmission of a specific meaning renders a work, at least to some extent, into a pragmatic thing, an instance of didacticism, which automatically excludes it from the domain of art proper. As for modern instances of mass media “art”, such a deprecation would remain uncontested, at least amongst so-called cultured recipients. Is there a completely or at least partially different compartmentalization of the cultural field in early modern times than in modernity proper, that is, starting roughly in 1800 CE? And if there is at least some difference, how could it be conceptualized within the broader methodological frame of the present study?

2.—There is an important reservation to be voiced before discussing the historical scenario: as we are dealing not with pragmatic, but mainly fictional, that is, not directly referential texts, there is the possibility of receiving the texts in question as instances of aesthetics in a Kantian sense. There is no obstacle to reading a seventeenth-century martyr play considering only its formal aspects. But this claim is, in a way, trivial. Such a reception is a potentiality opened up by any material items from former times, and very frequently the aesthetic or aestheticizing approach to cultural artifacts from previous periods of our own tradition, or of any artifacts from “foreign” civilizations, is indeed the domi-

nant one, at least in the age of modernity. Medieval houses of worship—cathedrals, churches—are typically considered by modern people, including by believers, from a standpoint that valorizes formal organization above all else: the proportions of space, the relations between massive and ethereal parts of the building, the light effects produced by the alteration of day and night, etc. Further explanations regarding function within the original cultic contexts take on the shape of historical commentary. They tend to consider the conceptual edifice—symbolized by the material structure—as a signified in the Saussurean sense, that is, as a meaning arbitrarily conferred upon the material aspect of the “sign” by contemporary consensus, the arbitrary nature of which went unnoticed because the content of the signified held the status of transcendental truth.

3.—Are visualized third-degree mediations as briefly characterized above, that is, fourth-degree mediations, a universal structure? Arabists say that there is Arabic-language theater from the nineteenth century onward; but most of them, with the exceptions discussed below,<sup>321</sup> are ready to endorse what Jorge Luis Borges conveys in his short story *La busca de Averroes* (1949). In the mode of fiction, but with a totally justified claim to authenticity, the *Buenairense* writer hints to the fact that there is no drama or theater in traditional Arab culture; one might add that even today there is no word corresponding to our term “theater” in classical Arabic. As Western Japanologists who are not afraid of being anathematized as ethnocentrists say, this also holds true, *mutatis mutandis*, for traditional Japanese culture. In both cultures, there are, however, practices close to what we call theater in the West, practices that were assimilated after the spread of Western culture into a variant of what is considered theater in the West. In the case of the Arabic world, one might think of quasi-theatrical practices such as storytellers performing in public while “mimicking” in body language what they are telling; of Dervish dances; or of proto-farces performed in the streets by amateur groups. In the case of Japan, the most important such theater-like practice is Noh in its traditionalist variant, as it existed in the Edo period (1603–1868).<sup>322</sup> The question of how to separate drama and theater “proper” from such similar performative practices is all the more important as there seem to be in the Western performance tradition genres or quasi-genres which share this state of being “something close to theater” while not being theater in the strict sense. So, how should one define theater

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<sup>321</sup> See pp. 281–283.

<sup>322</sup> See the detailed information to be found in Stanca Scholz-Cionca, “Nô within Walls and Beyond: Theatre as Cultural Capital in Edo Japan (1603–1868)”, in: Gvozdeva et al. (eds.), *Dramatic Experience*, pp. 289–306.

and drama, and what does a possible definition imply for the problems here discussed, namely, the logics of cultural production?

4.—The first attempt at theoretically delimiting theater from performative practices which are not theatrical stems, to my knowledge, from Thomas Aquinas. Addressing the intricate question of whether or not what goes on at the altar during Mass is “theater”—one may infer from the fact that the question is discussed by Thomas that there were issues concerning this point—the *doctor angelicus* states in his clear-cut scholastic fashion: “Sed facere aliqua facta ad alia repraesentanda, videtur esse theatricum, sive poeticum; in theatris enim repraesentabantur olim per aliqua quae ibi gerebantur, quaedam aliorum facta. Ergo videtur quod huiusmodi non debeant fieri ad cultum Dei. Sed caeremonialia ordinantur ad cultum Dei, ut dictum est. Ergo caeremonialia non debent esse figuralia.”<sup>323</sup> The delimitation is (merely) normative; for that same reason, it can be unrestrictedly dichotomous—there are no overlapping zones between ritual and theater.<sup>324</sup> Whether or not a performance is theater is bound to an assessment of it as a “real” practice or as an imitation of reality which is not reality itself. As soon as those involved believe that what is taking place is real, one is not dealing with theater, at least not according to Thomas’ definition. As soon as they believe that the performance may hint at, imitate, or imply something real (“repraesentare”), while the actual interaction to be viewed is not a real-world situation, we call the performative practice taking place theater, and the textual basis, if there is any, drama. Since the delimitation is based on a consensual, but nevertheless subjective assessment, it is evident that it may vary. But in contrast to Aquinas’ view, grounded in faith, the differentiation seems to be contingent on the attitude of spectators or listeners and not of those who produce the “show”. A community of recipients or even an individual may come to assess a priest’s action during Mass as a mere performance delivered by the religious official as a sort of theater in which he engages with the motive all actors have when exercising their profession: to earn his living; or they may assess it with regard to the more or less brilliant quality of the performance, that is, consider it aesthetically in the first place, as a work of

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323 “But doing something in order to represent something else is evidently a theatrical or poetical kind of procedure; the actions performed in theaters in former times represented things done by others. Therefore it is evident that this sort of thing should not be done for the worship of God. The ceremonial precepts have in view the worship of God, as we have seen. They must not, therefore, be seen as figurative.” (*Summa theologiae* I<sup>a</sup> II<sup>ae</sup>, qu. 101, art. 2, arg. 2; my translation)

324 —as there might be in the case of other imitative actions: a learner imitating a sentence first pronounced by a teacher may be mimicking under certain conditions; under different conditions, it may be that he is “really” speaking and wants others to react accordingly.

art and thus as something not real. Similarly, persons who were never taught what theater is may fall prey to “real” concerns when seeing that there are humans “killed” before their eyes, and may even fail to be cured from their “naïveté” when the same people suddenly return to life a little later in order to receive applause from the more enlightened part of the audience. In periods of human history when miracles were believed to belong to reality, such things may indeed have occurred. Avant-garde theater (Pirandello’s *Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore* [1921], and even more so his *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* [1928/9]) made it an almost common device to playfully exploit the subjective character of the borderline described and to thus render explicit its subjective nature. And in older texts from the Western dramatic tradition, one may find numerous indications of the fact that the delimitation in question is nothing evident, but rather needs to be instituted, that is, taught to children as they grow up and to uncultured adults who do not know of its existence, as something that needs to be strictly respected.<sup>325</sup>

5.—There is another important feature which needs to be taken into consideration. Ritual performances such as religious services entail processes of “automation”<sup>326</sup> because of their repetitive structures. Theater in general—as art—has recourse to a variation of pre-existing patterns. Since it is based on variation, and not on replication, the potential level of attention on the recipients’ part is much higher than in the case of ritual performances. And it is not by chance that variation is such a general characteristic of theater; as a non-ritual cultural practice, theater cannot rely on a pre-established audience who is obliged to attend,<sup>327</sup> as was the case with the religious service, at least in the age under scrutiny. Any attempt at attracting an audience thus had to be based on structures of enticement. Besides variation in general, specific visual effects (“magic”, “marvel”) and emotional effects (love and laughter, but also “fascinat-

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**325** In the Alsfeld passion play, version A, from 1511, one may read the following lines: “ich wyl uch vorkündigen eyn gebott, / das der her schultheys thut: / wer da betreden wirt in dissem kreyß, / [...] / der do nit gehoret in dit spil, / [...] /, der muß syn buße groiplich entphan.” // “I wish to make known a proclamation from the mayor: whoever would enter into this circle who does not belong in this play, will be severely punished.” (Quotes according to the bilingual edition by Larry E. West, Lewiston-Queenston, NY 1997, l. 109–129); for further details, see Bernhart, *Volksschauspiele*.

**326** In the sense of the term as first introduced by the Russian formalists.

**327** This feature may account for many of the differences to be found when comparing classical Greek drama and early modern European drama. In Athens, attending the theatrical performances was a norm, or even an obligation to be complied with by every adult free citizen; in terms of the pragmatic context as well as regarding form and content of the plays, there were remnants of the ritual predecessors from which, according to Aristotle, drama, specifically tragedy, emerged.

ing” horror) are the cultural resources typically extracted from the net in order to effect enticement. It is one salient trait of early modern drama that these resources are combined indiscriminately with “serious” material extracted from the net (religious, philosophical, moral discourses).<sup>328</sup> The impact-related potential based on de-familiarization and enticement is enhanced by poly-mediality: the reception situation is not individual, but collective. The actual artifact is mediated by language and vision. Sound and perhaps scent are additional channels of mediation. The shared experience of reception, the engagement of all the (“indirect”) senses,<sup>329</sup> and the fusion of arbitrary (symbolic) and iconic sign systems result, for the recipient, in the state of being overwhelmed; or rather, it is the chief intention of the cultural practise called theatre, as well as of its modern variants, film and television, to bring about this effect.

6.—The relation between ritual re-enactment and theater is, however, not a two-term dichotomy. It seems that there is an intermediate zone between the two variants of performance which may be made use of or not in a given culture. Within the field considered here, there is one such intermediate practice to be observed, namely, the quasi-theatrical activities developed by the *Accademia degli intronati*.<sup>330</sup> Relying on Katja Gvozdeva’s extended description of the work done by this *Accademia* and its emulators all over the early modern Latin world,<sup>331</sup> one could perhaps succinctly define the performances they delivered as a playful enactment of, and hence an adaptation to, certain behavioral standards to be fulfilled if the performers wanted to be accepted as full members of the community. Obviously, such in a way pedagogical performances were presented not by professionals, but by amateurs, namely those who educated themselves by performing within these activities. The performers were younger “men of honor”; they belonged to the stratum of contemporary society where there were indeed such specific behavioral standards to be respected, under the threat of social exclusion. The standards they had to learn were, according to Gvozdeva, the patterns of patriarchy and heterosexuality. The plays performed were full of risqué “gender trouble”, but only to come to the result that men should desire women, and women men. The transgression of gender roles and even homoeroticism were presented onstage in order to playfully channel all possibly existing non-conformist desire into the “right” direction. In the

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**328** The boundaries of classical dramatic theory (Aristotle) are systematically transgressed; exceptions from this general rule (the French seventeenth-century stage) have to be carefully considered.

**329** Meaning: with the exception of touch and taste.

**330** The seat of the Academy was Siena. The activities started around 1520.

**331** *Compagnie d’hommes joyeux*.

case of this and comparable phenomena, there is and was the consciousness that what is going on onstage is not reality, but rather a play, that is, a configuration described above as typical of theater; nevertheless, there was a gradual transition from play to real life. The device of play was used to implement norms by way of habitualization (*hexis*), that is, without the means of external discipline and coercion.

It seems that the classical variant of Noh, that is, the practice from the Edo period, can be described in a similar way.<sup>332</sup> Here, too, there is no strict differentiation between actors and audience. Every samurai was not only expected to attend Noh plays, but also obliged to perform in such plays. It seems that the didactic dimension was, however, more directed towards “exterior” behavioral patterns than in the case of the plays devised by the *Intronati*: samurais were meant to learn how to move, how to look, and how to speak in real life by performing as actors in Noh plays.

One might speculate that the process of learning is in both cases intensified by narcissistic gratification. As Aristotle argues in the first chapter of the *Poetics*, learning is always based on imitation. “Mimesis” is the shared ground of pedagogy and theater. In the case of Noh as well as of the *Intronati*, there is a fusion of the theatrical and the pedagogical variants of mimesis. The actors *learn* “by doing”, and are at the same time gratified by applause and admiration if they *perform* well. One might consider linking playful agonistic practices such as sports to this tableau of performances which are neither ritual re-enactment nor theater in the strict sense and which primarily serve to implement behavioral patterns that are useful in a given place at a given time.<sup>333</sup>

7.—As a working hypothesis for all conceptual discussions in what follows, I should therefore like to suggest that theater, including drama as its textual basis,

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<sup>332</sup> As to relevant details, see, once again, the article quoted in n. 322.

<sup>333</sup> A careful reader will notice that I have not come back to the quasi-theatrical practices to be observed in traditional Arab culture. Suffice it to say that Dervish dances certainly are ritual practices; they are theatrical only from an “orientalizing” Western perspective.—I would assign the quasi-pantomimical practices of story-tellers in order to more effectively channel a verbal message to a feature common to all humans; the difference lies in the degree to which bodily expressions are considered appropriate or not; this degree varies according to places, times, behavioral patterns based on religiously inspired morals, and social class.—The point discussed shall remain an open question with regard to farcical representations by demi-professional amateur groups, which seem to exist in almost all premodern cultures about which I was able to gather some information. I would not exclude the possibility that such practices constitute the origin of the theater as comedy (as ritual re-enactment is said to have been at the origin of the “birth of tragedy”).

should be differentiated from ritual re-enactment, for the reason already mentioned: participants in ritual performances as well as observers who take neither an aestheticizing nor a “scientific”—that is, an anthropologist’s—stance, subjectively believe that what is going on in the performance is real, and not just an imitation referring to reality, or a symbolic referencing.<sup>334</sup> Pedagogical performances, such as Noh plays or the plays staged by the *Intronati*, constitute, in ontological terms, an intermediate region between theater and ritual enactment, but they are, according to my intuition, to be seen as closer to theater proper than to ritual, not least because of the fact that there is a consciousness, on the audience’s part, that the action presented on stage may be transferred to the level of “real” reality, but is not as yet such “real” reality. One might add that staged performances, on the “negative” ontological status of which the audience agrees (namely: that they are not real, but imitations), may pursue, in contrast to ritualistic performances, very diverse intentions. They may be created for mere entertainment, but also with a view to didactics, with a view to yielding frames for aesthetic, moral-philosophical, or even epistemological reflection, or with a view to “shaping”, i.e. educating, those who are performing and submitting the quality of their performance to general scrutiny.

8.—There is one more characteristic that has to be mentioned: the fact that theater is dependent on *language* differentiates it from non-ritualistic performative cultural practices which could be sensibly subsumed under the heading of “performances as mass culture” as well, such as ancient gladiator fights, medieval and Renaissance festival culture (courtly and popular), or modern sports events. One could perhaps formulate the thesis that events and performances with a mass appeal have a general tendency to produce social cohesion, or are at least intended to do so. Theater as a specialized variant includes language, that is: specific meaning. Language-based performative practices which are presented in order to be consumed by a given public are thus apt to produce cohesion and then to steer, as it were, the social body in one specific direction.<sup>335</sup> It seems to be mainly the specificity of this steering capacity that

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**334** In that sense, the Catholic variant of referencing the Last Supper would be ritual re-enactment, the Protestant variant would be representation—without being theater. However, the latter shares with theater the consciousness, on the part of all participants, of a distance between referenced and actual action, and, in addition, the reflective mode implied in the symbolic relation: what is the *meaning* of what is going on during the representation? The answer to this question is delegated to the individual believer, and according to the extent to which her or his personal answer is in congruence with the arcane divine truth, she or he will later on be able to access paradise or not.

**335** To come back to the already mentioned performative practice called “Mass”: although Christianity is known to be one of the religions of the book, the status of language was a very reduced one in the ritual of Mass as practiced at that time; Luther’s polemical engagement

differentiates theater from the other performative practices mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph.<sup>336</sup> And it is evident that this feature is the main enabling structure for making use of performative practices with a view to implementing norms, values, and behavioral rules. As paradoxical as such a claim may at first sight seem, it is meant very seriously: mass media fulfill their function by drawing primarily on the symbolic code of language. The mobilization of the full range of compact encodings (vision, sound, scent) and even the “sensationalist” hyperbolization of the effects to be gained by their privileging is a secondary device in order to better convey a specific message to a highly diverse audience.

The tentative parallel between the above-characterized activities of the *Intronati* and classical Noh allows for briefly addressing a question, not immediately pertinent to this chapter’s line of argument, to which there will not be a definitive solution in this book, but which is highly relevant from the perspective of a theory of cultural exchange, namely, the problem of mono- or poly-genesis with regard to culture.<sup>337</sup> As to the biological world, modern science seems to have decided in favor of the former assumption. Genetic analysis suggests that all seven billion members of the species living at present on the globe descend from one “first couple”, or, at most, from a very small tribe of (promiscuous) first parents. This may but need not hold true for cultural phenomena, too.

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with the traditional variant of religious service targeted in particular this neglect of the *logos*. But another point also mentioned already is of even greater importance when it comes to assessing the effectiveness of the language-bound message in the case of theater on the one hand, the performance of the Mass on the other: at least for an adult recipient, nothing is new in the words she or he is hearing while attending a traditional (Catholic, Tridentine) religious service; the conveyance of the message is thus contravened by automatization. Dramas, however, have to present something “new”, also in terms of the verbal message, in order to attract the audience.—Highly refined groups of recipients, “Kantians” so to speak, who do not care about the words, but only consider the relative formal characteristics of different stagings of identical pieces, are a restricted phenomenon and, anyway, a phenomenon of a later age than the one under scrutiny here; but even in this case, novelty is a primary criterion for assessing a performance. The requirement is, however, not to be fulfilled by the text, but by formal parameters concerning the relation between the text and the actual performance.

**336** Sports events, e.g., could be conceived—beyond the integrative function which seems characteristic of all performative practices—as instruments of implementing a spirit of competition amongst those who attend and watch. Gladiator fights may have a “brutalizing” function, highly welcome within the social and cultural structure of an empire based on physical, military force. Court festivals might implement an attitude of admiration with reference to the one who enabled them to take place, that is, the prince or monarch (etc.).

**337** There has already been some discussion regarding this question in the “Borderlines” chapter of Part I.

Given the immense efficiency of what is here called the cultural net to mediate between humans and regions which do not have any form of direct contact with each other, one cannot exclude that in case of practices such as those just mentioned, there is one specific “site of emergence”, and a subsequent story of spreading, step by step, to other parts of the globe, where these patterns either became “extracted” from the net or not. But precisely because of the genetically proven biological monogenesis, humans from different cultural backgrounds may share numerous basic needs and also abilities to cater to these needs. Consequently, it cannot be excluded either that similar, but finally different practices like ritual, pedagogical performance, and theater were “invented” more than once in human history. The fact that they were not invented “everywhere”, in other terms, that there are indeed—as mentioned—high civilizations without one or the other of these practices, does not testify to the contrary. Logics of control which remain stable for a very long period may lead to a veritable mental “blocking” of the individuals submitted to the control, up to the point that they are not able to imagine (even speculatively) what has been prohibited within their community for extended periods. In the case of the absence of theater in the classical Arab world, it might be the anti-representational attitude generally deriving from a rigidly conceived variant of monotheism that was the cause of the mental blocking.<sup>338</sup> This said, the massive and permanently reiterated anti-theatrical diatribes by Muslim theologians<sup>339</sup> from the very beginnings onward make clear that such mental barriers against the production of cultural patterns which cater to humans’ basic needs are effective in the long run only with respect to secluded communities to whose territories the universal cultural net was able to ramify only under the conditions of technological modernity.

The only way to reasonably answer the intricate question of a mono- or polygenesis of culture would thus be to find out what level of cultural sophistication the primordial tribe had attained when its members decided or were forced to choose different ways. And did the various sub-tribes into which it split ever completely lose contact with each other, or was there, from time to time, a sort of exchange, be it a mediated one? At least as soon as the device of language had been invented, even one human being moving, willingly or under the pressure of external circumstances, from India to China could have been the “carrier” of enormous quantities of cultural material, not only Indic, but also Mediterranean or even Celtic and Germanic.

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**338** For a more detailed explanation, see below, pp. 281 f.

**339** See the reference given below, n. 554.

## The “Orientation Toward The Message”

**0.**—Didacticism,<sup>340</sup> the main distinctive feature of early modern European drama when compared to subsequent instantiations of the genre, is basically distinct from an unconscious encoding of meaning in the structures of certain objects which can be decrypted only from a specialist’s standpoint. It is based on the intention to direct recipients’ thoughts and actions in a specific way. It thus requires a certain level of explicitness. But didacticism—and this is the main feature separating the concept from various forms of coercion—can only be successful to the extent that its recipients are ready to accept these directions not as instruments of power (as devices of other people’s interests), but as instruments intended to disclose to them that which is good for them but of which they may not be sufficiently aware. Didacticism is effective only when its recipients are ready to believe what they are being taught.—There is a second strand of didacticism which at first sight appears to be different from the one just characterized; but when it comes to concretion, that is, to creating actual didactic works, the two strategies of communication are in most cases hybridized. The second strategy is, obviously, persuasion, the attempt at luring people into accepting positions they might not be ready to accept willingly by offering them material to which they react positively without any further reflection; it consists in contents and devices that appeal to the recipients’ basic needs, and in most cases to those they do not have the occasion to sufficiently accommodate in their “real” lives.

The instrumental aspects of such artworks, that is, the devices by which such texts or representations try to make people believe what they teach, will be expounded in more detail below. For the time being, I will limit my considerations with a view to illustrating the general questions to be discussed to the situation in two countries of quite distinct profile in that age, Spain and England.

**1.**—Early modern Spain was a stronghold of the Counter-Reformation, that is, of Catholicism’s attempt to “roll back” the Protestant reform, which in fact constituted a revolution insofar as it destroyed the effective, material power of the traditional Church by postulating a “universal priesthood”, that is, the equality of all baptized humans in matters of faith. The dogmatic essence of this reaction was conceived by the Council of Trent (1545–1563). Two sessions

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**340** The formulation contained in the heading of this chapter is obviously borrowed from Roman Jakobson’s famous article “Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics”, in: Thomas A. Sebeok (ed.), *Style in Language*, Cambridge, MA 1960, pp. 350–377.

were in part dedicated to problems revolving around art.<sup>341</sup> These discussions were informed by the assumption that secular art is to be considered a medium in the sense roughly explained above, that is, as a channel through which sinful behavior and misguided thoughts may be represented to the populace. But it was also taken to serve as a channel for propagating morality, including religious orthodoxy. Succinctly put, the Council's attitude towards art was Thomistic as to content and Platonic as to function.<sup>342</sup> In order to prevent undesirable material from being diffused through this medium, the Inquisition was strengthened and further institutionalized by means of reinforcing its bureaucratic structure. The clerks working within this classic agency of cultural control were endowed with a compact set of rules to apply to the control process as well as with a set of procedures for dealing with problematic material and with its human producers or transmitters.<sup>343</sup> This was the, so to speak, re-active component of the Counter-Reformation's instrumentalization of art. There was, however, also a pro-active component, which was less systematized for the obvious reason that the material in question did not exist as yet; it had to be "created". This pro-active component consisted in the appeal to make use of art's potential to impress and persuade its recipients with a view to propagating correct behavior and worldview both with regard to religion and beyond. It was left to the bishops and those under their guidance, that is, believers including persons who had the means to act as patrons, to develop concrete ideas of how to put this program of art-as-didactics into practice.<sup>344</sup>

2.—Spanish literature, above all drama, of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries may be conceived as a paradigmatic instance of such didactic art. The first point worth mentioning in this regard is perhaps the fact that a "new" genre was created for that purpose, a genre which does not exist in countries where ideological homogenization was not as streamlined as in Spain and for which there are only very rare analogues in other European cultures of the time.<sup>345</sup> From a historical standpoint, the *auto sacramental* was

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341 *Sessio XVIII* and *sessio XXV*.

342 Regardless of his general reservation, based on the assumption of a second-degree distance from truth, Plato admits fictional texts apt to strengthen morals, especially those of the warriors (the "guardians" of his ideal republic).

343 See once again Summer-Schindler, *Zensur und Involution*.

344 See Werner Weisbach, *Der Barock als Kunst der Gegenreformation*, Berlin 1921 (mainly focusing on the graphic arts, but with a useful elucidation of the general ideological and confessional context); the introductory chapters of Henry W. Sullivan's book *Tirso de Molina and the Drama of the Counter Reformation*, Amsterdam 1976, continue to be, in my view, one of the most helpful publications concerning this point.

345 The Slovene Passion play mentioned above is one such non-Spanish analogue.

a sort of accommodation of the medieval European religious drama to the needs of the period in question.—In order to substantiate this claim, some brief points concerning the genre’s prehistory shall be recalled: the practice of pilgrimages and processions is documented from the origins of Christianity onward, that is, starting in the first century CE. Processions have a more or less accentuated “mimetic” dimension; the scheme of the itinerary as well as the nature of its destination (an altar decorated with a crucifix erected somewhere in the countryside) illustrate that they derive from the idea of faith as an *imitatio Christi*. Processions emulate, in a way, the *via crucis*. Pilgrimages (which are not of particular importance in the context of this study) add the veneration of holy objects, relics, to the faith-grounded constellation employed by such performative practices.—Religious drama seems to have emerged in later times only. Most importantly, the mystery and morality plays we know about from the tenth to the twelfth centuries onward, depending on the vernaculars in question, seem not to have been linked to the practice of the procession.

The evolution of both performative practices, the “active” and the “receptive” variants, in the following centuries was characterized by a quantitative augmentation which led to the point of degeneration. Processions became longer and longer, frequently lasting for several days; as to the religious plays, it suffices to say that the oldest documented piece, the *Résurrection de Tours* (thirteenth century), consists of ca. 300 lines; the *Passion du Palatinus* (fourteenth century), of 1,900 lines; the *Passion d’Arras* (fifteenth century), of 25,000 lines; and the plays known as *Le Mystère de la Passion* and *La Passion Jhesuchrist*, dating from the end of the fifteenth century, contain, respectively, 35,000 and 55,000 lines. The factor of multiplication is roughly 175 within a period of 200 years. One should add that the performance of a standard early modern play comprising ca. 3,000–4,000 lines, e.g. by Shakespeare or Racine, lasts about three to four hours.

It is not astonishing to learn that the degenerative stage of these performative practices was one of the points chosen by the Reformers, in the first place by Luther, as a privileged target of the drastic polemics leveled against the traditional Church. And one may well imagine, even if there are no extant written testimonies, that such social practices, lasting over several days, indeed became the sites of parasitical bodily excess (*gula, luxuria*). In the period following the Council of Trent, there are still religious plays, but a disciplined variant conceived in the interest of countering the Protestant polemics as well as of reconverting the practices to restore their former purpose, namely, of shaping the masses’ behavior by way of engaging them, actively and passively, in religiously connoted performances.—The form of these new plays was that of a short, one-act (Spanish: *auto*) play, the performance of which did not last longer than thirty to forty minutes. The spectacular formal revolution (or,

rather, involution) was obviously based on the extraction from the net of material that had not been available for centuries,<sup>346</sup> namely, the concept of drama as the “mimicking” of something “particular” (*kat’hekaston*) that conveys something “more general” (*katholou*), that is, the integration of primary and secondary symbolization and the possibilities for semiotic concentration thus opened up. In Spain as well as in Slovenia, where the tradition is far less rich, these new, humanistically informed religious plays were incorporated into ostentatious, lavishly ornamented, and thus highly impressive processions.<sup>347</sup> The formerly separate active and passive variants of religious performance floating in the net became fused, presumably in order to enhance impact. The

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**346** For details, see pp. 190–193.

**347** The author of this book, who was educated in the Protestant tradition, but in a primarily Catholic region of Germany, had in his youth the occasion to view, from the perspective of an unengaged spectator, a number of such Corpus Christi processions, which were at the time still customary in the Catholic parts of Germany and later on mostly shrunk to the dimension of a rather short walk around the cathedral of the city in question. What was to be seen in the streets on that day was, indeed, a sort of open-air “grand opera”; the priests as well as the believers taking part in the procession were dressed festively; the streets were decorated with freshly cut tree branches and banners; there were rich altars to be seen on street corners where the procession paused in order to sing, accompanied by instruments, etc.—The above descriptions of the situation in Spain and Slovenia are conceived for non-specialists. If one were to offer a more detailed characterization, one would have to take into account that the Slovene plays engaged all participants to a higher degree than their Spanish counterparts. In Spain, too, the Corpus Christi processions and the performances of the *autos* took place within one comprehensive (ritualistic) context. As to the plays in particular, however, the separation between performers and viewers was as strict as in the case of the (pre-avant-garde) secular stage. The believers took part in the procession; at certain points on the way, usually two, they stopped in order to view the performance of a religious play which took place on a mobile stage. The difference between stage and “real” space was thus clearly demarcated. The authors, the stage directors, the musicians, and the actors were the same as in the case of professional secular theater; this implies that the performances were highly stylized, to the point that they were open to a non-didactic, aestheticizing reception. In Slovenia, by contrast, the performers were amateurs who had rehearsed many times in the weeks before the festival day on which the procession took place. The play was enacted on the selfsame ground on which the procession took place; there was no topographical separation between the stage as secondary reality and the “normal” ground as primary reality. And in a manner that was reactivated in the last part of the twentieth century by stage directors such as Ariane Mnouchkine, the common believers were—to a certain extent at least—part of the performance; they were invited to enact the role of the populace of biblical times. To put the matter in a nutshell: the Spanish plays, which were mainly created for the metropolitan populations of Madrid and Toledo, represent a more intellectualized variant, whereas the Slovene plays manifest an impetus to “directly” (and corporeally) engage the targeted recipients.

content was either allegorical or “literal”,<sup>348</sup> or, as in most cases, a mixture of both. The intention was, accordingly, either moralizing or ideological in a broader sense, or, as in most cases, both.

The stories presented by these *autos* display an amazing variety which goes far beyond what was known from medieval religious plays. There is still a category focusing on biblical history, of the Old as well as of the New Testament. As for the former, the re-narration always comprised a typological interpretation, as evidenced in many cases—e.g., Calderón’s *Primero y segundo Isaac* (before 1674)<sup>349</sup>—by the plays’ titles alone; what was implied in comparable medieval plays, the Christian version of salvation history,<sup>350</sup> is in a way laid bare in these early modern plays by way of a humanistically informed formal concentration. The additional interest of the entirety of these plays, including the ones drawing on New Testament material, was to acquaint believers with the manifold stories narrated in Holy Scripture, which Catholics were not allowed to read on their own, but in a way that freed the material from the cultic constraints of the Mass proper, where its status was reduced to such a degree that it remained opaque on the level of narrative. We are faced here with a sort of dramatized catechism, whose establishment, for the first time in the history of Catholicism, may have been an attempt at countering the Reformation’s accusation of neglecting Scripture, while upholding the inderdict against individual reading.—Much more intriguing with regard to “drama as mass media” are the *autos* presenting mythological fables mainly drawn from the Ovidian collection, which was one of

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**348** In order to avoid any possible misunderstandings, I should like to explicitly stress that the following description of the new genre refers to its Spanish variant. The aforementioned Slovene play is much less sophisticated; it is, as to its content, a more or less traditional Passion play. It shares with the Spanish plays, however, a number of decisive features: the integration of active and passive religious performance (play and procession); the radical reduction of length; and, finally, the hybridization of the mimetic and the allegorical modes; as mentioned, allegories of the non-Western continents appear on stage in order to propagate the universalistic claim of Christian faith and of Western culture in general.

**349** The first Isaac is the one to be found in the Old Testament. According to Christian figural hermeneutics, the “second” Isaac is Jesus Christ, who fulfills what the first Isaac announced or foreshadowed. By means of his consummated sacrifice, the covenant between Abraham and Yahweh is renewed, this time with respect not only to Abraham’s progeny, but to humankind in its entirety.—The seminal publication on the hermeneutical practice of typology, including its repercussions in literary texts, is Auerbach’s essay “Figura”.

**350** The conceptual frame of this and comparable constructs goes back to Romans 5: 14–17, where Paul establishes the relation between Adam and Christ. Adam is “forma futuri”; he caused death to reign amongst humans, a condition which was annihilated by Christ’s salvific deed.

Renaissance readers' favorite books. In Calderón's *El divino Orfeo* (1663),<sup>351</sup> one of the most beautiful and intellectually fascinating instances of the genre, the reference is to the story of Orpheus' descent to the underworld and the liberation of his wife Eurydice from the bonds of death, which is interpreted as a piece of fiction ("fábula") under the surface of which is hidden the only true corresponding "historia", that is, Christ's Harrowing of Hell and his defeat of Death. Here, the intention is a more ambitious one, namely, to demonstrate that the stories and the wisdom of pagan times do not constitute an ideological cosmos of their own, or even an alternative to the spiritual world of Judeo-Christianity, but were rather drawn from biblical sources which were then distorted.<sup>352</sup> The purpose of the mythological *autos* was to present the mythical fables once again, but to reduce them at the same time to their "original" shape and meaning, the latter being contained in stories narrated in the Bible. The intention was, beyond plain catechizing, the "rolling back" of Renaissance pluralization: there is only one revelation, and all alternative systems pretending to the status of truth are based on nothing but "stolen" material, which is, consequently, to be restituted to its legitimate owner, Christianity.—This idea was not new, but stemmed from Justinus Martyr, who relies on corresponding concepts with regard to the relation between gentile and Jewish knowledge developed by Philo of Alexandria. As far as is possible to determine on the basis of the extant documentation, it was extracted from the cultural net and systematically merged with the Ovidean corpus for the first time in the *Ovide moralisé* at the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century. In terms of basic interpretative practices, Calderón's play may be considered a renewed extraction of this medieval allegorization from the net. The playwright assembles it, however, in a new formal register, the post-medieval, humanistically inspired genre of a stage performance of short duration, thus dramatically shifting the targeted recipients: from the learned to the common people, from a restricted to a general audience.<sup>353</sup> In

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**351** There is a first version from 1634 which is much less sophisticated. The fact that Calderón dramatized and allegorized this mythological fable twice (which he did in no other cases) testifies to the importance of this plot in particular for the endeavor of a Catholic restoration (see also my following remarks above).

**352** The ideological basis of these dramas was the aforementioned priority thesis; for all related questions, see the analysis of the piece in my *Discursive Renovatio in Lope de Vega and Calderón*, chap. 3.3.2.

**353** Language training in medieval colleges was different from what it became in the age of grammar books, that is, from roughly the sixteenth century onward. Pupils learned the language by a supervised reading of original texts, starting with simple texts such as *De bello gallico*. The *Metamorphoses* were an important part of this pedagogical compendium. Although the reading process was not directed at gathering information regarding the culture of antiquity, but mere language-learning, it seems that the ecclesiastical authorities who oversaw all sorts of instruction deemed it necessary to provide an authoritative take on the at times strik-

addition, Calderón draws on erudite material from Late Antiquity and from medieval and Counter-Reformation theological discourses thematizing the relation between Christian belief and pagan knowledge. The result of this mix of pre-existing features is astonishing; there seems to be not a single new element in Calderón's play; all of its features may be considered to derive from acts of extraction of items floating in the cultural net. Yet the composition as a whole provides one of the most fascinating comments on the relation between belief and myth available in the discursive history of Christianity.

The most startling section of the text corpus I am referring to, however, is comprised of the so-called "historical *autos*", that is, plays dealing with actual events from times posterior to those narrated in the New Testament. A particularly impressive example is entitled *La lepra de Constantino* (1647/1657);<sup>354</sup> it presents the world-historical watershed event of the fourth century CE, when the status of Christianity suddenly changed from that of a sect of violently persecuted public enemies to that of a legitimate cult and, shortly afterwards, the official religion of the Roman Empire. The intention here is obviously moralizing, and it is also anti-pagan, or, rather, it is directed against tendencies of re-paganization; but it is in the first place assimilative. The goal to be achieved was the demonstration of the fact that even post-biblical, secular history is governed in its entirety by the Christian God, that all worldly struggles are only a surface under which the basic structure of salvation history lies hidden as a recursive pattern, first revealed in Scripture, that will continue to structure secular time and history until the end of this world, which is initiated by the Parousia.

An embryonic achievement of this goal had already been accomplished in the age when the problem of how to conceptualize post-Incarnation history first emerged, i.e., in Late Antiquity. Lactantius and even more so Eusebius of Caesarea<sup>355</sup> had syncretized the Roman emperor's vita with the biblical pattern of Paul's miraculous conversion from a persecutor to a propagator of the "true" faith. Calderón reactivates this material in the *auto* mentioned above by extracting it from the net and connecting it to another pre-existing template, namely, the interpretation of every single believer's life as a repeti-

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ing parallels between pagan mythology and the Christian narratives. Texts such as the *Ovide moralisé* were created in order to fulfill this task. By way of plays such as the one mentioned, what had been restricted to a minority of 1–5% of the population in the Middle Ages became a "lesson" taught to the entire populace in the early modern age.

**354** For an in-depth presentation of this play, see *Discursive Renovatio in Lope de Vega and Calderón*, chap. 3.3.3.

**355** *De mortibus persecutorum* (ca. 315); *Bios tou megalou Konstantinou* (ca. 337).

tion of salvation history.<sup>356</sup> He thus succeeds in creating an effective device for divulging the concept of history-as-repetition, which had come under serious pressure since the discovery of the New World.<sup>357</sup>—The latter concept is an intentional feature of all *autos sacramentales*, and it is sedimented in their highly conventional ending: the reduction of all events, past, present, and future, to one foundational pattern is symbolized in a concentrated manner in the last scene of each play, when a tabernacle is exposed to the viewers while one of the characters comments on its contents. The Host as the “real presence” of Christ’s body draws the audience’s attention not only to the central tenet of Catholic dogma, but also, and even more powerfully, to the higher meaning underlying all worldly events: namely, God’s firm intention to ensure human salvation.

One should add that the plays just outlined were performed as open-air spectacles on street corners. The stage was formed by carts so as to enable the theater to move from one part of the city to the next, engaging the largest possible audience. The plays were presented on a festival day, Corpus Christi, which was a general holiday, meaning that in principle everyone could attend. To further encourage attendance, the performances were open to the public without charge. Each year, those responsible saw to it that the plays would be different from the ones performed in previous years in order to arouse the curiosity of the public; the communal authorities sponsored an annual competition for two new plays. The promise of monetary reward and artistic prestige combined to ensure that the most talented playwrights would compete for the prize. The results are highly intriguing even today. Although the religious and secular authorities sought primarily to impress the people of Madrid, other parts of the population were not left out. After the Corpus Christi premiere in the capital, the actors would travel with their carts in the ensuing months from city to city, from town to town, and even from village to village throughout the rest of the country.

3.—It may seem obvious to refer to these early instances of mass media as blatantly didactic religious propaganda which made use of both visual and verbal instruments to demonstrate without ambiguity how believers were supposed to conceive of religious dogma, as well as to further its pragmatic application. The

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<sup>356</sup> The Fall is equated with being stuck in the state of sinfulness before conversion; Christ’s sacrificial death is equated with conversion and baptism; the state of the post-Incarnation world as redeemed but at the same time exposed to the dangers of sin is equated with the possibility of a relapse into sin on the part of the converted and baptized individual. The eschatological perspective is equated with the definitive renouncement of sin, preceding physical death, and with the ensuing access to paradise.

<sup>357</sup> See in more detail the explanations given above (pp. 89–92).

situation may be different, however, when one shifts one's attention from plays that did not try to conceal their didactic intentions to those which at first sight seem to be purely fictional, with no obvious message or purpose other than aesthetic and intellectual pleasure. Does it make sense to label the Spanish *comedias* of the era vehicles of prearranged ideological content? Or are they rather to be located in the tradition of ancient tragedy, as an artistic presentation of anthropological problems to which normative, conventional behavior does not apply, and which thus can only be empathetically exposed?

In order to be convincing in this respect, one has to avoid gross generalizations. As is well-known, Calderón's most famous *comedia*, *La vida es sueño* (1635), is so evidently didactic that the sophisticated and spellbinding action culminates in a formula repeated several times in near ritualistic fashion, a formula which expresses a sentiment regarding human behavior generally, independent of time or place: "[...] Mas sea verdad o sueño, / obrar bien es lo que importa."<sup>358</sup> Regardless of its philosophical sophistication,<sup>359</sup> Calderón's dream-play is a sort of extended *auto sacramental* as far as its intention and the precision of its message are concerned.<sup>360</sup> At first sight, the case may seem to be otherwise when it comes to the equally famous *dramas de honor* such as Lope de Vega's *El castigo sin venganza* (1631/1634) or Calderón's *El médico de su honra* (1637).<sup>361</sup> These dramas dealing with female marital infidelity—in the first case actual; in the second case either putative or imagined, but certainly not consummated—obviously do not contain a moral message articulated as explicitly as in *La vida es sueño*. But their implicit message is of that simplicity and easy accessibility which is typical of didactic literature, namely, that married women would do well to avoid adultery, or even situations which might raise concerns regarding their fidelity, if they wish to avoid being put to death.

Bearing in mind the above reservation that non-didactic readings of these dramas are distinctly possible, one could make a strong argument for the interpreta-

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**358** “[...] Be it true or just / A dream, to do right is what matters most” (V. 2420 f.; William E. Colford [tr.], New York, NY, London, Toronto, and Sydney 1958).

**359** Let me stress for readers of this book who are not familiar with the corpus of *autos sacramentales* that very many of these plays, in particular the two plays (respectively mythological and historical) referred to above, are also intellectually highly sophisticated texts (see the above-cited chapters from my *Discursive Renovatio in Lope de Vega and Calderón*). For reasons of convenience, my above formulations refer to the stance vis-à-vis didactic literary texts that is current in modernity.

**360** See, once again, the essay of mine referred to in n. 64. For a more detailed analysis of the play, see Pawlita's book (*Skeptizismus im europäischen Drama der Frühen Neuzeit*).

**361** See the analysis of these plays in my *Discursive Renovatio in Lope de Vega and Calderón*, chaps. 2 and 6.

tion here proposed—i.e., that the *dramas de honor*, too, share the basic structure and function of the *autos*—based on the evidence of contemporary literary production in Spain. The most prominent Spanish author of the age in question was Cervantes. His attempts to gain access to the lucrative market of drama production were not crowned with success. However, his main novel, the *Quijote* (1605/1615), sold very well, as did his collection of short stories, the *Novelas ejemplares* (1613). The *Quijote*—by way of stories interpolated in the narrator’s tale as the narrations of characters—and the novellas contain quite a few tales dealing with “honor”, that is, with the question of female infidelity. But they treat the topic in a manner dramatically diverging from the *comedias* of the time. Whether one is dealing with *El celoso extremeño* or *El curioso impertinente*, even when adultery is physically consummated, as is the case in the latter story, there is never the slightest doubt that it is, morally considered, not a mistake on the part of the female which causes the imbroglio. The question around which these narrativized honor plays revolve is rather the problematic implications of normative patriarchy. It would be audacious to interpret them as anti-patriarchal texts, or even as instances of an emerging feminism. What these stories show is, rather, how difficult it is for females as well as males to master the contingent interactions between affects and societal (moral) norms. The endings of the stories—in one case, tragic, in the other, quasi-tragic—are based on so many heterogeneous factors, incapable of being systematized, that one hardly finds a possibility of equating them with real-life scenarios, which is a requisite for didactic tales. In contrast to the *dramas de honor* mentioned above, the Cervantine honor stories do not convey a message; Cervantes seems content to let them reflect the complexity of human life. Not only because these stories were available to a literate public only, but also because they have no discernible practical message, I am inclined to see them as playing a different role within the contemporary literary scenario from what I call an early form of literature as mass medium.

All of the texts mentioned above revolving around the theme of “honor” are based on related conceptual features, but also in part on ready-made stories dealing with honor cases which have been circulating in the cultural net since medieval times at the latest.<sup>362</sup> The difference between Cervantes and the play-

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<sup>362</sup> Because of a lack of documentation, I shall not engage here in further discussions concerning possible antecedents to the relevant medieval texts, whether literary or pragmatic. It is plausible, indeed, to assume that the specific profile of the premodern European honor code derives from unwritten Germanic sources introduced to all of Europe via the raids of the Vikings. The common ground which these concepts share with the Greek concept of *arete* and the Roman concept of *virtus* or *pudor* are the universal, that is, abstract principles of patriarchy. When it comes to literary modelings of patriarchy, the fact that literary texts, though intended to convey the *katholou*, start from a *kat’hekaston*, may explain why most Spanish Golden Age honor narratives are not based on the extraction of floating material that we are

wrights is situated on the level of the respective abstract, evaluative, moral-philosophical discourses that the authors extract from the net in order to assimilate to the narratives they devised. In Cervantes's case, the extracted discourse is Aristotelian ethics, the ideal of *mesotes*, of using one's reason in order to behave in a way that avoids extremes of any kind. The playwrights, in contrast, assemble the theme of honor into a template whose basis is the (Christian) theological discourse, specifically the dogma of the Fall and its consequence, original sin, including the latter's most conspicuous symptom, *luxuria*. In some cases, it is possible to demonstrate even with regard to the details of formulation that they had recourse not only to the corresponding concepts, but also to relevant *texts* floating in the net, namely to Thomas Aquinas' description of the particular sin of *luxuria* and to a famous contemporary handbook, edited by Antonio de Escobar y Mendoza, instructing priests how to make believers tell the "real" (and frequently unconscious) truth about their sexual behavior.<sup>363</sup>

I will comment only briefly on the subgenre of *comedia* known as the *comedia de capa y espada* ("plays of cape and sword"). These include pieces such as Tirso de Molina's *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* (1615/1635) and Lope de Vega's *Dama boba* (1613), which are highly elaborate comedies of intrigue, well known for eliciting constant laughter. While one could readily take a more intellectualized approach to this type of play, this would inhibit studying its reception as performance. Comedy of any kind is for the most part a popular genre, a genre addressing the "masses", including intellectually sophisticated readers or viewers. In modern scholarship, one may detect the tendency to "Kantianize" or even to "Adornianize"<sup>364</sup> comedy, that is, to deny the presence of effects which in classical times were understood with reference to the saying *castigat ridendo mores* in order to focus either on formal parameters or on a supposed "subver-

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able to trace back to classical times, but rather on material we are able to identify (as *written* material) in postclassical medieval texts.

**363** *Liber theologiae moralis. Viginti quatuor Societatis Jesu doctoribus reseratus, Monachii* 1644; regarding this point, see my analysis of *El médico de su honra* in *Discursive Renovatio in Lope de Vega and Calderón*, chap. 6 (as indicated above, the play was written around 1637, that is, several years before the 1644 edition of Escobar's compendium, which is the oldest extant edition; the title page indicates that it is the 40<sup>th</sup> ["quadragésima"] print of the book; the first print is no longer extant); as to Thomas see below, n. 599.

**364** Theodor W. Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) famously posits that the central feature of non-trivial literature is its "negativity". What is completely justified within an argument focusing on high modernist literature might be questionable with respect to previous periods of literary history; in line with the present-day predilection for anachronisms of various kinds, the point made by Adorno has been applied to pre-twentieth-century comedy in many recent publications concerning the genre.

sive” sub-text contained in the plays. But these views seem to be based much more on a shift in literary theory, accentuating de-pragmatization and devaluing or even deprecating the traditional dimension of *docere*, than on the texts in question. As to formal parameters, comedy is highly standardized; as such, it might not be the best possible basis for initiating the “free play of the mind’s capacities” which is, according to Kant, the dimension, not available in practical life, to be gained when receiving works of art. And as to a reading in line with the assumption of art as a counter-discourse, it is hard to deny that plays like the two mentioned above enact fantasies of female independence or emancipation; yet they systematically combine the obligatory happy ending with the female characters’ willing return to the constraints of patriarchal law. Of course, these laws may well have been made to appear less onerous to contemporary female spectators due to the fact that their male executors have for their part been made to look somewhat foolish over the course of the play.

4.—It would be problematic to postulate that the situation of early modern English drama is roughly identical to the one just outlined for the case of Spain. This said, there are, in addition to the differences to be pointed out, striking similarities with respect to certain subgenres which can be explained on the theoretical basis suggested in this book, that is, without the problematic assertion of deeper similarities regarding the respective ideological or even political contexts. It is obvious that what I primarily have in mind is the last subgenre of the Spanish *comedia* discussed above, namely, comedy. Without going into the details, I would claim that the above characterization of the Spanish *comedia de capa y espada* holds true for Shakespeare’s comedies as well. The materials extracted in both cases from the cultural net for the construction of plot are, to a large extent, the same. This material includes themes, formal elements, the (patriarchal) honor code, marvelous effects such as ghosts and metamorphoses derived from the medieval tradition, as well as farcical and obscene topoi which circulated in the cultural net as discursifications of a social practice described by Bakhtin as “carnival.”<sup>365</sup>

As to the other subgenres, there seems to be much more difference than similarity. And there are good reasons for arguing that asserting this lack of similarity is not anachronistic, but grounded in solid historical evidence. The “source” cited above as the origin of theater as mass medium in Spain did not exist in early modern England. While there was religious controversy, there was no Counter-Reformation, nor was there an attempt to forge a homogeneous Protestant society—or, rather, these attempts were doomed to failure from the very

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365 See the reference in n. 60.

beginning. Rendering the thinking of the masses uniform as this was effectuated in Spain remained a mere dream of certain monarchs and religious dignitaries.<sup>366</sup> *Rebus sic stantibus*, social cohesion could only be produced by reducing the level of homogeneity aimed at. In a way, early modern England faced a problem well known from later, properly modern times: how to achieve a minimum of social consensus in an ideologically and religiously fragmented society, the various contingents of which at times even have recourse to physical violence in order to settle their disputes. In terms of function, modern mass media are an obviously effective answer to this question. Might there also be a mass media dimension of Elizabethan drama beyond the already mentioned domain of comedy?

As in most of Europe's countries affected by the early modern religious schism, there was no religious drama in contemporary England. The two medieval sub-genres of religious drama, which had in a way been revived and fused in the Spanish *autos sacramentales*, continued to occupy the status of largely inactive, obsolete cultural material in Britain. The reasons behind this situation are not at all difficult to grasp: it is not feasible to stage such propaganda pieces—be they of Catholic or Protestant tenor—in the streets of a religiously divided country. In times of a religious effervescence difficult to understand from a modern perspective, such public stagings would have provoked uproar and violence.<sup>367</sup> As for the period I am dealing with, performances of religious

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**366** One might speculate about the reasons for this difference. On the one hand, one may take into consideration that there was nothing in England that could have compared to the move towards ideological and confessional homogeneity triggered by the centuries-long *reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula. And although there was much violence originating from difference of belief, there were no events that could be equated with such drastic “purging” measures as the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre in France. The court itself and the ruling nobility were ideologically fragmented; a civil war or a coup as in France would most probably have had an uncertain outcome.

**367** Let me mention parenthetically that the practice of Corpus Christi processions provoked social tensions and incidental (if relatively harmless) violence in religiously divided cities of Germany during my own childhood, right up to the massive movement of secularization provoked by the cultural revolution of 1968. Such acts of violence, mainly perpetrated by male youths from Protestant families under the cover of night, consisted in the devastation of the temporary altars erected by Catholic youths on street corners on the day before Corpus Christi, altars that were mainly composed of arrangements of beautiful spring flowers and reeds exposed on wooden tables. There was no physical damage done to any human being; but one may imagine the fury felt by Catholic believers when they realized in the early morning hours of their festival day what had been done to the fruits of their endeavors. Since these temporary altars were consecrated only at the moment of the actual procession, when the tabernacle containing the host was placed on them, it was not a “real” sacrilege that was at stake, but

propaganda plays did exist in certain religiously divided countries, but only under the condition that they were not public. Jesuit school theater is one example of the constellation I am referring to.

This being said, there is a sort of secret life of the contents and devices of medieval religious drama in the secular theater of early modern England. Scenes of “mystery”, and even more so structures evidently influenced by the pattern of personified allegories, are ubiquitous in the plays written by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. The presence of such structures even allows for the suggestion that certain plays of this sort be read in a manner that reduces them to morality plays.<sup>368</sup> I am, however, inclined to consider such interpretations of Elizabethan plays to be just as anachronistic as the current modern, “Kantian”, aestheticizing readings of Spanish *comedias*. Such approaches are potentialities opened up by the non-conceptual character of all literary texts<sup>369</sup> and by the concomitant possibility to de- and re-contextualize them in a framework differing from the time and place of their origin and initial reception. The limits of such anachronistic readings of Elizabethan drama—which may, indeed, at times be fascinating—become apparent as soon as one attempts to compare Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1606) with a medieval mystery or morality play.

What, then, is the didactic dimension of Shakespeare’s “serious” (non-comical) drama, without the presence of which it would not make sense to consider these dramas as early instances of mass media? The mere fact that “everybody” was admitted to the performances is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for making such a claim. Does it suffice to concede that the didactic tenor is less pointed or less comprehensive than in Spanish dramas of the time in order to consider the question to be provisionally resolved?

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rather a sort of preemptive one. Nevertheless, it typically took a number of days, and necessitated the official admonishment of the parish’s youth by the Protestant minister in office, followed by several acts of apology, to reduce the tensions to the normal level of mostly peaceful cohabitation.

**368** See Robert A. Potter, *The English Morality Play: Origins, History, and Influence of a Dramatic Tradition*, New York, NY 1975; see also Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function*, Baltimore, MD 1978.

**369** There are exceptions to such generalizations of which I am fully aware (and have dealt with; see my essay “Was ist Literatur?”, *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* vol. 45,2/2001, pp. 187–215); one such exception is constituted by the corpus of moralistic literature (La Bruyère, Gracián, La Rochefoucauld, Joseph Hall). But these cases do not testify against the acceptability of the generalization in question if the latter still accounts for the vast majority of the instances to be taken into consideration.

I prefer to hypothesize that Elizabethan drama represents an entirely different kind of didacticism. The messages conveyed are meant to establish a social consensus and to enhance behavioral norms that do not require a common religious basis. The problems these dramas address are in principle problems we continue to face today—which is why the plays remain topical in our own time even though they deal with events and social constellations that are more than four hundred years old.<sup>370</sup> Their appeal lies in part in their “universal” approach. They do not deal with subtle psychological or emotional problems relevant only to certain strata of intellectuals; they do not deal with historical events which are so exceptional that it only makes sense to consider them as unique and unrepeatable; they are not experimental in form, a contingency that would limit their appeal to a certain, highly sophisticated segment of the public; they do not expound esoteric views; they are not self-referential. Or, to put it more positively: they deal with basic anthropological configurations—that is to say, with configurations we continue to consider anthropological<sup>371</sup>—and with the ethical questions provoked by them.

But do these dramas also answer the questions they raise? And if not, does it make sense to understand them as early instances of mass media when there is no instruction given to the audience should its members find themselves in situations similar to those presented on stage? Perhaps there is a middle way to ponder before opting for one of these two alternatives. The general argument expounded in this book is certainly linked, as is every scholarly argument, to the logical maxim first theorized by Aristotle which reads *tertium non datur*;<sup>372</sup> but the texts I am dealing with bear a moral dimension and are therefore phenomena with regard to which this maxim does not only *not* apply, but for which it would even be highly inadequate. According to the Stagirite, in all questions of ethics, *mesotes* is the correct choice—which does not simply mean the median between two extremes.<sup>373</sup> My suggestion is in essence to consider the hypothesis that serious Shakespearean drama “teaches” the audience to

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**370** Let me say for readers not familiar with present-day German culture that, starting in the early seventies of the last century, it was and still is a widespread fashion to stage Shakespeare’s serious plays as though they were set in Nazi Germany. Although the author of this book is less inclined to anachronisms than many currently working in the field of literary studies, I have to say that these “modernizing” interpretations are, at times, absolutely fascinating and enlightening.

**371** I have already mentioned that, *pace* Freud, the pattern of oedipal revolt is not a universal structure, at least according to my observations of the present-day globalized world.

**372** See *Metaphysics* 1005 b 19 f.

**373** See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1106 b–1107 a.

avoid extreme patterns of behavior by showing that such behavior leads to catastrophe.<sup>374</sup> Just as Aristotle's *Ethics* leaves the question unresolved of how to shape a viable middle ground of action, so the dramas similarly fail to propose a *via media* for their characters. The common norm they establish—or, rather, try to establish—is not a positive, but a negative one. They suggest avoiding certain patterns of behavior, namely patterns which may be particularly widespread in ideologically fragmented societies.—I shall conclude these remarks by drawing readers' attention to Shakespeare's most important play. It certainly does not teach its audience how to behave in the oedipal situation; but it does teach that excessive hesitancy is as devastating a pattern as an excessive, quasi-Nietzschean "will to power".<sup>375</sup>

5.—To return to the theoretical terminology outlined in the first part of this book: both the Spanish and the English plays seem to show that the most abstract principle governing the extraction or non-extraction of material circulating in the net, at least as far as this period is concerned, is the criterion of control, the concrete profile of which is defined by those who believe they have the right to govern the "masses". The striking feature shared by all the dramas mentioned<sup>376</sup> is their being composed of heterogeneous material circulating in the net; the ideal of homogeneity of internal structure seems in all cases to be outweighed by the intention to steer the masses.—Since mass media are a non-coercive instrument of directing subjects, all the plays mentioned manifest a second, subsidiary level of selection and extraction which is governed by the logic of enticement or appeal. When it comes to these "rhetorical" resources, the dramas of both countries exhibit a similarity that is as striking as their dissimilarity with regard to their respective ideological messages. I should like to add as a codicil to this chapter that in post-absolutist, so-called democratic societies, the hierarchy of these two different logics of selection has perhaps been inverted.

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**374** In anticipation of my polemics (see below, Part III) against the descriptive viability of such widely accepted basic parameters as "national literatures", let me point out that there is one very prominent Spanish author of the age in question, Cervantes, to whose writings one could ascribe the above-characterized message as well. What I say in generalizing terms in this chapter only applies to the great playwrights of each nation (Shakespeare on the one hand; Lope de Vega, Calderón, and Tirso de Molina on the other).

**375** As to the necessary differentiations of this very brief characterization of *Hamlet*, see once again the references given in n. 54, n. 59, and n. 76.

**376** I am aware of the fact that I have demonstrated this feature mainly with respect to the Spanish plays; but as far as I am able to gather from research concerning Elizabethan theater, a characterization of the plays as given above will not provoke the request for further demonstration.

## The Predilection for Tragedy

0.—When it comes to the specific poetological features that characterize European drama in the early modern age, few specialists would contest that the reception of Aristotle’s *Poetics* constitutes the most important factor. It makes sense to link the second striking commonality—besides the “orientation toward the message”—of the European drama of that age, namely, the predilection for tragedy, to this process. As is well known, the paragraphs of the treatise dedicated to comedy are lost. One may doubt whether this is a serious problem. In the rare passages of the extant text in which the Stagirite mentions comedy, he does not hesitate to clearly convey that tragedy stands at the top of the hierarchy of all “mimetic” literature; next comes epic, which he describes as a sort of narrativized tragedy whose cathartic effect is comparatively minor due to the more mediated mode of presenting the action. And one may conclude from many short remarks of a more or less derogatory tenor, articulated in passing, that Aristotle’s esteem for comedy is rather limited.

1.—Before returning to the specific question of the early modern predilection for tragedy in subsequent paragraphs of this chapter, I would like to discuss the broader question of how the generally accepted view of the early modern literary era as an age of Aristotelianism might be described within the framework here proposed, and of how such a description might affect or even alter the standard assessment of the renewed reception of the *Poetics*.

A major consideration that turns out to be of particular interest from the vantage point of the approach here submitted is the frequently forgotten or even unknown fact that the text of the *Poetics* was actually circulating in the net during the period in which it was not received in Western Europe; it was available, but was not extracted from the material at hand. The short story by Borges briefly mentioned above, *La busca de Averroes*, is not one of the author’s many stories which could be characterized as only seemingly factographical.<sup>377</sup> It is indeed partly fictional, but the basic motif around which it revolves is authentic, and there is documentary evidence for it. In his famous commentary on Aristotle’s works, Averroes (1126–1198) deals in a most lucid fashion with all of the Stagirite’s writings—that is, with the exception of the *Poetics*, a tract which he indeed comments on, but in an uncharacteristically confused manner. One may extrapolate from the extremely scarce remarks concerning this text that Averroes did not have any notion of what drama is; they attest to the

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377 —as, for example, the wonderful story about a French author named Pierre Menard who is supposed to have rewritten the *Quijote*.

tacit assumption that the various rules established by Aristotle in his tract are meant as directions for writing “good” narrative, including narrative poetry. His incomprehension notwithstanding, Averroes transmitted the text of the *Poetics*.—The status of the tract as material that was actually circulating but was not made use of did not change with Wilhelm von Moerbecke’s rendering of Aristotle’s works into Latin (1278), which included the *Poetics*. This translation of the complete works of a man who was largely referred to as *philosophus*, meaning, the most outstanding representative of the discipline in human history so far, marked the apogee of the age of scholasticism. The non-reception of the *Poetics* during the medieval heyday of Aristotelianism is all the more astonishing as there was during that age a flourishing drama and theater scene in the countries concerned.

But these dramas clashed with what Aristotle describes as a well-wrought play. The comic drama of the time (*farces, facéties*) was, as is evidenced by its name,<sup>378</sup> an extremely short genre, mainly consisting of brief scenes without the structure of a *mythos* in the Aristotelian sense,<sup>379</sup> whereas “serious” drama—the “mimetic” rendering of portions of biblical history, the Fall and the Crucifixion being the most important topics—was likewise incompatible with the basic description of tragedy provided by Aristotle. Within a Christian framework, there is hope even after the worst calamities; the catastrophes of the actual world are superseded by the prospect of an unlimited happiness in the world beyond. And however one interprets the genitive case in Aristotle’s central definition of the genre (*pathematon katharsis*), from a Christian perspective, pity (*eleos*) is not something that needs to be discharged or purified, and the “purgation” of an affect like fear (*phobos*)—which might indeed be a useful thing within a society of warriors, as was Greece in those times—was not a desirable goal in a world governed by an omnipotent God who rules over the human part of His creation not least by establishing “commandments” and by instituting a netherworld called “hell” where those who fearlessly transgress these rules will be punished in eternity.—As to the third genre of medieval drama, the morality play, it may suffice to say that its basic allegorism is hardly compatible with Aristotle’s praise of the imitation (*mimesis*) of “real” human action (*pragmata*) not only as an anthropological constant, but also as the basis of drama, a remark with which he begins his tract.

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**378** See above, n. 60.

**379** A *mythos* being characterized as having a beginning, a middle, and an end; see, in addition, *Poetics*, chap. 7, for the Stagirite’s disparagement of any items so small (in this case: brief according to the standards of classical tragedy or comedy) as to provoke ridicule or laughter by a form that is all too deviant from normalcy.

This scenario was radically altered when a part of the net that had been cut off from Latin Europe for centuries suddenly became reconnected. As early as during the first decades of the sixteenth century, many translations of Greek tragedies into Latin were produced; some decades later, such translations became unnecessary thanks to the systematic study of Greek among the educated classes, spurred by the flow of classical Greek texts from Constantinople into major European cities.<sup>380</sup> Every cultured person was immediately conscious of

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**380** It would be problematic to hold that there had been absolutely no net-bound connectivity between Byzantium and the West in the preceding period. But the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century CE and the definitive religious schism that occurred at around the beginning of the second millennium had created conditions unfavorable to the circulation of cultural material. There was contact, not least mediated by the commercial activities of the Venetians. As to the material allowed to float in the cultural net, it is symptomatic that there was a Greek translation of the works of Aquinas, but that the translator, Demetrios Kydones (1324–1398), was exiled to Crete for having tried to make such subversive material generally available. The circulation of literary texts is not submitted to such strict scrutiny as texts touching upon religious dogma. But in this regard, too, the quantity of material allowed to float and to be extracted from the net was remarkably reduced. Petrarchism, for example, made it to Cyprus, but not, as far as I know, to Byzantium. And as to the question of why the Greek tragedies were received in the West only after the Fall of Constantinople (even though it would have been possible, with a certain but not all too great effort, to access them previously), there is a point to be taken into consideration which I already referred to above (pp. 89–92): certain transformations occurring in Western Christian theology from the end of the thirteenth century onward, and massively present since the end of the fourteenth century, paved the way for the renewed extraction of the Greek tragedies from the net which occurred in Western literatures from the fifteenth century onward. This situation may also account for well-known anecdotal episodes of previous Western intellectual history, such as Petrarch's attempts at learning Greek from Barlaam di Seminara, a Byzantine scholar (although born in Italy), which the perhaps first early modern literary author discontinued after a while.—There is a highly instructive document from which one may extrapolate what the state of classical learning was in the generation immediately following Petrarch, but still before the fall of Byzantium. Leonardo Bruni's *Ad Petrum Paulum Histrum Dialogus* (written around 1400, staging a fictitious dialogue between leading Florentine intellectuals of the age, including Coluccio Salutati, which is said to have taken place around 1390) gives expression to the fact that these people, in contrast to Petrarch, had continued their studies and were able to read Greek; they say that they admire the famous Greek authors, philosophical as well as literary—a fact that leads many modern scholars of intellectual history to postulate that humanism and the Renaissance set in as early as in that age and that the Fall of Constantinople was without greater importance. However, Bruni's dialogue makes explicit that, while the generation in question knew the names of the great Greek authors as well as the titles of their works, the actual texts were not available to them, a state of affairs they lament in great detail. This situation also applies with regard to Aristotle's writings: they were well known, but only in translation, and the proto-humanists conducting the dialogue suspect these translations to have distorted the original, without having access to the textual documentation that would allow them to substantiate this suspicion. To put it succinctly: the Christian West was intellectually very well

the superiority of these dramas over their contemporary counterparts in the West, including highly sophisticated, but formally somewhat uneven ones such as *La Celestina* (1499/1504).

The rapid and enthusiastic reception of the original Greek dramatic works led to the nearly immediate elevation of Aristotle's *Poetics* from a quasi-unknown treatise to a canonical text. From an item merely floating in the net, it became once again an item that was actually extracted. The first humanist translation was produced by Giorgio Valla as early as in 1498. In the year 1536, another translation was produced by Alessandro de' Pazzi, and starting with Francesco Robertello's and Bernardo Segni's famous translations cum commentary (1548, 1549), a Europe-wide discussion of Aristotle's text took place which initiated a new era of European dramatic production.

The "fate" of Aristotle's tract seems to provide a good illustration of the hypothesis that the withdrawal of material from the net is mainly driven by demand. This demand may be direct or, as is the case here, indirect. Here, it is motivated by the impetus to "better" understand material that had been cut off from the "Western" part of the net for a very long period, but which was received anew as soon as it became available; the enthusiastic attitude with which it was received may be explained by the fact that the "Occident" was largely based on concepts stemming from the cultural tradition to which these dramas belonged. One would have to add that the second pillar on which European culture is based, the Christian dogma—with which, as has been noted, the concept of the tragic is hardly compatible—became substantially weakened exactly at that moment in time, on the one hand because of the religious schisms raging in the West, on the other hand on behalf of the discovery of the New World.

2.—There is an interesting detail to be mentioned with respect to this vogue of literary Aristotelianism. As noted above, the concept of *katharsis* (an intricate one, judging by the scholarly discussions having taken place up to the present<sup>381</sup>), and especially the notion of a total or partial "reduction", follow-

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prepared when the ships from Constantinople came ashore some fifty years later; but without this event, the intellectual evolution of Europe might have looked different from what it actually looks like (*Ad Petrum Paulum Histrum Dialogus*, in: *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, Eugenio Garin [ed.], vol. 13, Milan and Naples 1952, pp. 44–99; see esp. pp. 54–56 ["Qui libri utinam nunc extarent [...]"/ "if only those books (containing the writings of the Stoics, Academics, Peripatetics, Epicureans, etc.) still existed [...]"] (p. 54)).

**381** See my essay "Verschwiegene Illusion. Zum Tragödiensatz der Aristotelischen *Poetik*" (*Poetica* vol. 38/2006, pp. 1–30), in which I briefly summarize the scholarly discussion up to the current point in time.

ing upon arousal, of *eleos* and *phobos*, which is in Aristotle's view the main goal (*ergon*) of tragedy and the source from which spectators derive their pleasure (*hedone*), is an item that is difficult to harmonize—if possible at all—with basic tenets of the Christian dogma regarding behavior or moral philosophy.<sup>382</sup> The “solution” to the problem devised by the early theoreticians was a quite elementary one. At the same time, their approach seems to be representative of the way in which the “extraction” of cultural material from the net actually operates in many cases: the material (in this case: Aristotle's text) is decomposed into its different topical parts; parts considered useful were adopted, while parts considered “problematic” or “uninteresting” were *not* extracted from the net. In Gian Giorgio Trissino's famous preface (1514) to his *Sofonisba*, which may be considered the first tragedy ever written in the early modern West according to Aristotle's basic concepts, the entire complex of *katharsis* is not even mentioned. *Hedone*—literally, intense pleasure, bodily or otherwise—is rendered as *diletto* (delight); in addition, Trissino postulates that viewing the piece entails some *utilitate* for the spectators, in the sense of a moral lesson that can be drawn from it.<sup>383</sup> It need not be stressed that these two functions ascribed to the viewing of tragedies derive from descriptions of literary texts primarily by Horace, but also in part by Donatus and Diomedes, that is, from a corpus always widely available in the Christian West, in large part because it was readily adaptable to Christian doctrine, thanks to the emphasis on moralizing not present in Aristotle. Later stages of reception, up to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's eighteenth-century discussion of the *Poetics*, foreground the *arousal* of pity (and of fear), that is, of emotions that have their place within Christian morality, while downplaying the emphasis on evacuating these affects by systematically reading the genitive in question as referring to a “cleansing” not *from*, but *of* pity, meaning: to a process of morally “refining” the emotion of pity. On this reading, it may even be asserted that the affects to be evacuated are other ones than pity and fear (e.g., envy, vanity, etc.), thus blurring the abyss which separates *eleos* from *agape* (*caritas*).

From my theoretical perspective, the most intriguing point to be observed in the entire scenario is the general attitude with which early modern theoreticians, starting with Trissino, make use of the *Poetics*. They treat the text in a way that allows it to be compared with a compound material in the literal sense, from which they take the parts considered useful or valuable while leaving all the “rest” without further consideration. The “reconstruction” of what the author,

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<sup>382</sup> See above, p. 191.

<sup>383</sup> I am quoting from Gian Giorgio Trissino, *La Sofonisba*, Franco Paglierani (ed.), Bologna 1884, pp. 2f.

Aristotle, might “really” have meant when giving his description of tragedy the shape that has come down to us is a very modern, a philological question, a problem that became widespread only with the rise of historical thinking in the late eighteenth century. Although all of us are familiar with the history of our discipline, philology, we frequently neglect this point, assuming the search for the historically “authentic” meaning of a text to be an uncontroversial goal. Meanwhile, the well-known fact that the text of the *Poetics* was most probably not written down by Aristotle himself, but rather by his pupils, and the constraints this fact imposes on attempts to reconstruct what the Stagirite “really” intended to convey, should serve as an invitation to look less condescendingly at the manner in which early modern theoreticians dealt with the *Poetics*.

Dismantling, disassembling texts or works floating in the net, appropriating parts of them, reassembling these parts, and combining them with different, “exogenous” material in order to construct a new text meeting the needs and demands of the contexts in which it is created—this seems to be the general logic of dealing with pre-existent material. Seen from this perspective, the “historical” approach—searching to reconstruct the text’s “original” and “authentic” meaning—would be the exceptional case. Considered from a more abstract perspective, one may even say that there is no substantive specificity involved in such an approach; it is the expression of the wants and needs of the age in which it emerged, of Romanticism and its search for origins and “roots”, for ordering paradigms to be found in history and tradition after the near suspension of the old paradigm of a God-given order which occurred in the Age of Enlightenment.

3.—I would now like to present some remarks on the more specific point at issue in this chapter, namely the predilection of the early modern age for tragedy, which in fact seems to have emerged independently from or at least parallel to the rediscovery of the Greek dramatic texts as well as the reception of the *Poetics*.<sup>384</sup> That tragedy should have captured the European imagination at this time is all the more astonishing since the concept of definitive failure seems squarely at odds with Christian doctrine, at least as far as Catholicism is con-

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**384** My argument is linked to the above-discussed fact that Aristotle’s text was accessible in the net before the age of humanism; it became extracted anew, however, only at a time when there emerged a “new” demand for tragedies. Had this demand not existed, the classical tragedies could well have been reconnected to the Western European part of the cultural net without having been reactivated, quite as this had happened to Aristotle’s tract in the period from the rendering by Averroes to Giorgio Valla’s translation. Need I mention that very many texts other than the classical tragedies brought by the Constantinopolitan scholars to Italy—texts from the period we nowadays call “Byzantine”—were *not* extracted in the age I am dealing with, but only in later times, namely in the age of historical thinking and modern philology?

cerned. Spain, and other Catholic countries, did in fact reject the tragic model. As already mentioned, Spaniards of the time characterized “mimetic” drama of any profile as *comedia*, meaning there is always the prospect of a happy ending, even if this ending takes place beyond the temporal bounds of the actual plot. To those whose sins are not too pernicious,<sup>385</sup> authors—and often fictional antagonists, too—accord a moment in which to repent and pray for forgiveness before receiving “just” earthly punishment, i.e., violent death. Thus, Spain too had “tragedy”, though in a limited sense confined to the human world. In other words, tragedy existed on the Iberian peninsula as a literary genre, yet without endorsing the worldview on which the model was originally based.—As for contemporary Protestant cultures, the obstacles to assimilating the tragic model may have been less significant. One may even identify the assignment of a place amongst the *massa damnata* with what the ancients called negative fate, although this entails the conceptually problematic point that the mass of those who will go to hell is supposed to be huge while tragic fate is something quite exceptional according to the classical view.<sup>386</sup>—To summarize this first point: Europeans of the early modern age, be they Catholics or Protestants, were intelligent enough to manage the reconciliation of orthodox Christian views with the fascinating new genre of tragedy rediscovered after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople. One may imagine how strange these reconciliations of Christian dogma and Greek tragedy might have appeared to those who first developed and theorized the genre (Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles, and Aristotle) had they had the chance to read them.

The truly astonishing factor in the flourishing of tragedy in early modern times thus concerns yet another point: how can one explain the prominence of tragedy in an age that developed the political model of absolutism? Absolutism is,

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**385** As, for instance, in the case of Tirso de Molina’s *Don Juan* as presented in *El burlador de Sevilla* (1612/1625).

**386** I allow myself the following speculation: Aristotle gives expression to the idea that a total lack of poetic justice (the “good” punished, the “evil” triumphant) is not suited for well-conceived literary texts because such plots are not, as he puts it, *philanthropon* (*Poetics*, chap. 13); they convey the view that this world is not a very pleasant place for humans. It would be congruent with this position to assume that Aristotle would have subscribed to the above statement (and there is, at any rate, the evidence of the texts; no classical tragedy is mimetic in the sense of nineteenth-century realism; they present exceptional constellations in all cases). My further speculation is that a radically pessimistic worldview—that of life as such as doomed to failure—solicits compensatory discourses; it solicits hope, which means in premodern times: religion, soteriology. The Stagirite, the first rationalist in documented intellectual history, did not like such features. He was an entirely worldly thinker.

as Carl Schmitt argued,<sup>387</sup> the first and perhaps most important instance of what the theoretician calls the “political”, which he sees as characterized by a secularization of theological concepts. According to Schmitt’s observations, the absolute monarch is a sort of worldly Mono-Theos. He does not depend on anyone. He is not bound by any rule or law. His position is defined by, or rather in need of assertion by means of acts of “sovereignty”, i.e., acts which transgress all legal and moral norms and limits that subjects must respect. He is characterized by the fact that he is entitled to act on a merely voluntary basis. He is not responsible to anyone. As soon as he has been invested with royal dignity by God, he is no longer contingent upon anything but his own will.

How is one to harmonize such a political theory with tragedy, which is essentially about the misfortunes and fall of great men, and about how their fates are contingent upon the vagaries of fortune? Even within the pattern of tragedies with an irenic ending, there are in all cases many characters of high, aristocratic standing who die a violent death; the “happy” ending is restricted to the central personage(s). The entire scenario provokes the question of why it should have been precisely these conceptual and literary configurations that were selected for extraction from the cultural net under the political conditions of early modern Europe.

4.— One may consider some tragedies that might help to devise a possible answer to that very question. The most prominent amongst them would certainly be Pierre Corneille’s *Le Cid* (1636). On behalf of the norms of honor, the eponymous hero is obliged to take revenge for an insult perpetrated against his father, who is too old to fight. The ensuing dilemma places the Cid—who is in love—between two irreconcilable demands: he cannot neglect to avenge his family’s honor, for to do so would dishonor him, and as a dishonored knight he could never contract a marriage with an honorable woman; but unfortunately, the offender is the father of Chimène, the young woman whom the Cid loves and who reciprocates his feelings. The knight chooses vengeance. This, in turn, results in a dilemma for Chimène: she would dishonor herself by accepting the courtship of the man who killed her father; and as a dishonored maiden, she would not be a fit wife for a hero like the Cid. After a series of additional actions that are of no import here, the political theory of absolutism is “enacted” on stage, so to speak: the monarch suspends all moral rules and

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<sup>387</sup> *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, George Schwab (tr.), Chicago, IL 1985.

societal norms, arranging a short supplementary episode<sup>388</sup> which will make it possible for Chimène to marry the man who killed her father—a possibility she is obliged to seize, since it was created by the sovereign himself, but which she also seizes independently of this obligation, on her own volition. The piece ends with the prospect of a future of fairytale-like happiness. In being based on the rationale that the monarch is entitled to transgress all rules, absolutism—that is the play’s message—is an apt means to resolve all conflicts of social life which at first sight seem to be unresolvable.

There are several further plays which succeed in rendering the theory of absolutism and the pattern of tragedy compatible. The price these plays have to pay for this achievement is that they would be, according to Aristotle’s categorization, “second-rate tragedy” (*deutera tragoedia*) only—this is the Stagirite’s judgment of plays revolving around *pathos*, that is suffering, which conclude with a happy ending. Such plays, he remarks in a quite condescending manner, are popular amongst the uneducated because they match their wishful thinking concerning reality.<sup>389</sup>—It is well known that Corneille was aware of the problems attendant on a fairytale-like ending. He attempted to resolve them by refraining from displaying on stage the actual festive event, which would consist of a somewhat startling ceremony, uniting a woman in marriage with the man who killed her father. Instead, the Cid is called upon once again to take arms against the Moors. The marriage is thus postponed until his return. The device used to harmonize the political message with the norms of *bienséance* is ingeniously conceived. Since the play refers to a historical person whose biography, including his marriage to a woman named Ximena, is known to the spectators, there is no uncertainty implied as regards the happy ending—if not of the play, than of the story underlying it.

5.—But how to assess, in this context, a drama such as *Hamlet* or *Phèdre*?—that is, a piece about a king who is killed by his own brother, a murder in which his wife is involved at least as an accomplice, and the additional consequence of which is that his only son will die a premature death when he tries to take revenge? Or, in the case of the French drama: what is the “absolutist propaganda” contained in a play in which a king has his eldest son and heir

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**388** By fighting the “Moors”, the Cid has to prove that he is a most valiant warrior and, as such, indispensable for the future of the realm. In addition, it is conveyed that the imminent battle is to be seen as a divine ordeal.

**389** Because of its status as an esoterically intended text, the *Poetics* is not always free from internal contradictions; the most important one may be the gap between the argument summarized above (chap. 13) and the reference to the two *Iphigeneia* plays as paradigms of a well-conceived plot (chap. 17).

killed in a most cruel way because he blindly believes the false accusations brought forward by a servant named Cœnone who is the governess of his actual wife, the son's stepmother, who in turn has fallen in love with the young man? And what about the numerous German *Trauerspiele* in which kings and queens lose their position from one moment to the next and are shown on stage subjected to cruel forms of torture before actually being killed? Why did the kings of that age take delight in seeing their dramatic analogues not as absolute at all, but rather as inescapably subject to blind fate and to the pitfalls of *hamartia*, that is, limited wrongdoing entailing terrible, devastating consequences?

The most prominent answer to this question was provided by Walter Benjamin in his book on the *Trauerspiel*, and his position has been reiterated again and again in the last decades, by outstanding scholars like Louis Marin<sup>390</sup> as well as by a huge number of junior specialists, to the extent that it may appear audacious to problematize what has become a nearly universal view. Benjamin's answer, which is, indeed, ingenious, considers tragedy as a setting in which self-reflection on the part of the absolute monarch is able to take place. By showing the kings as subject to fate, such plays would help, on the one hand, to strengthen the morale of the monarchs for the (inevitable) cases when "real" fate strikes them. And, as an additional feature, it would help them to evade the danger of falling prey to the ideology which is meant to subjugate the subjects: in order to perform successfully as an absolute monarch, a king must always be conscious of his being subject to Fortune. It is only under this condition that he will be able to counter her evil blows when she decides to strike, and to grasp the opportunity to enforce his will over hers when there is a propitious moment to do so.<sup>391</sup> This said, the exposition of the stark fact that all humans, including monarchs, are finally dependent on the whims of blind fate is supposed to create the overall atmosphere of *Trauer* (melancholy) characterizing the plays in question.

There is one problem, however, with this standard explanation of the interplay between absolutism and tragedy. Benjamin's argument would be entirely convincing were it the case that the tragedy of the period in question consisted in courtly theater only. Then one could legitimately interpret it along the lines familiar to modernity proper, i.e., as a device for self-reflection mediated by aesthetic distancing.

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**390** See, e.g., *Le Portrait du Roi*, Paris 1981.

**391** The ideal royal spectator of a *Trauerspiel*, according to Benjamin, would thus be a monarch who views the performance on stage while bearing in mind the lesson conveyed by Machiavelli's *Principe* (1513/1532).

But even in the most hierarchical cultural community of that age, the situation was quite a different one. There is, of course, courtly theater, and it may be that the mental processes suggested by Benjamin and described in a more transparent fashion by Marin occurred when a play was staged at Versailles, at the Palace of Zarzuela in Madrid, or at St. James's Palace. But even in France, there were, in addition to the audience of *la cour*, the recipients labeled *la ville* in Erich Auerbach's seminal essay on French classical drama;<sup>392</sup> and in order to be successful, the authors had to meet the demands of both of their audiences. *La ville* refers, by metonymy, to the third estate, to those excluded from the sphere of power by absolutism, but only to its educated strata. In England and Spain, the theater audience comprised the lower strata of the population as well; these spectators, who were called "groundlings" because they could not afford a ticket entitling them to a seat, were in most cases illiterate.

6.—So, *rebus sic stantibus*, in early modern times, the view that mighty kings are subject to blind fate is conveyed not only to the kings themselves, or to potential kings, but to the "masses" also. At first sight, one might think of qualifying tragedy as subversive against such a backdrop—which would certainly provoke applause from the many for whom the link between literature and ideological subversion is a quasi-ontological one. However, I would like to propose another line of thinking which is in accordance with my assumption that early modern drama is the first historical instance of what we now call mass media.

Sigmund Freud argues in his essay "Der Dichter und das Phantasieren" ("The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming")<sup>393</sup> that the main function of consuming fiction is fantasmatic compensation. Literature gives us what the real world will always deny us; the artistic or aesthetic sophistication of a piece of literature mainly has the function of helping cultured recipients repress the insight that it is such a trivial desire which makes them read books or view plays, a "help" the uncultured do not need because they do not consider their drives to be shameful—this is the reason why they can do without the "veil" of aestheticization.

Freud illustrates his theory of fictional texts as a device for the compensation of real-world frustration by referring mainly to love literature. But the Freudian concept of drives is all-encompassing. Accordingly, one might speculate that, within the frame of tragedy, it is primarily aggression<sup>394</sup> that is fantasmatically

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**392** See, once again, the essay bearing this title ("*La cour et la ville*").

**393** See the reference above, n. 56.

**394** Need I mention that almost every tragedy also allows for a fantasmatic gratification of the recipients' libidinous desires? Extramarital and strictly forbidden, incestuous sexuality is in many cases (and in some in a hardly veiled fashion) at the center of the plot.

released for the duration of the performance. All those subject to the monarch's absolute power in real life—such as courtiers, the bourgeois, and humble people—were accorded the pleasure of witnessing, at least for the duration of the play, their oppressor, the king, at the mercy of the same fate as themselves. And they surely may have taken a subconscious delight in seeing how the high status of kings and princes did not only fail to protect them from the vagaries of fate, but caused even greater anguish than that faced by ordinary humans in proportion as the royal personages had more to lose.

Early modern tragedy as mass medium may have helped to channel and thus to tame the discontent experienced by the subjects of the political system of absolutism. From such a perspective, it might have served as a means of stabilizing the political and societal order. It may be considered as providing momentary relief from the dichotomization of monarch and subjects. Within tragedies, the monarch is presented on stage as nothing but a subject, too. All humans have to suffer on behalf of Fortune's caprices and, what is more, this suffering is all the more intense when the previous situation was a privileged one. After having viewed a tragedy, the "common man" was able to return home and even feel happy that his domestic misery was far less than what the king had to suffer in the last act of the play.<sup>395</sup>—The aesthetic fascination emanating from the literary treasures of classical tragedy committed to a renewed circulation in the net after the violent end of the isolation of the Byzantine sub-net was thus, according to me, supplemented by a strong demand originating in the contemporary political system. The interplay between renewed availability and new functionality may even explain the astonishing fact of the extraction of a genre from the net whose world-modeling parameters were incongruent with the still prevailing "official" world-model of early modern times, Christianity.

Since I refer to Freud's theory of the function of literary fiction at various times in this book, I should like to make a remark—not directly pertinent to my basic line of argument—regarding the critique of Freud's literary aesthetics which is the basis for the condescending attitude with which it is typically treated in literary scholarship, namely, Freud's "neglect", or rather his relative devaluing, of what makes a fiction a work of art proper, the formal dimension. Freud is, indeed, not a Kantian in matters of art. As has been said, he considers the formal sophistication of canonical texts as a sort of enticement ("Vor-Lust") for

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**395** One might speculate that, at least in Europe, this former function of tragedy is nowadays served by the tabloid press, which presents, on a nearly daily basis, sensationalist stories dealing with the "fall of the mighty" of our days (in most cases, "celebrities").

the cultured reader, luring him into what he otherwise would never allow himself: indulgence in the fantasmatic gratification of his repressed aggressive and libidinous drives.

But I would not see it as a major problem to integrate a view valorizing the formal features of literary works as a primary rather than a subsidiary dimension into a theory in line with Freud's essay. The gratification emanating from a recipient's "penetration" of the formal rationale of a specific literary text would specifically consist in the gratification of his intellectual narcissism. It would nurture the recipient's illusion that, thanks to the capacities of his mind, he is able to "penetrate" the "world", to understand what keeps it going, and to grasp its formal principles of organization. This illusion would end as soon as the recipient in question leaves the fictional world and returns to the world proper, namely, reality, which will be hardly less impenetrable than before reading the text (or viewing the performance) in question. But for the duration of the reading or viewing, of the "immersion" in the world of fiction, he may have believed what he felt. In that sense, highly refined literary texts, even avant-garde texts, read from the perspective of recipients inclined to views derived from Kantian aesthetics, would also have a compensatory dimension: they are able to give us what all our intellectual endeavors directed at the "real" world will never be able to yield, the conviction that we fully "understand" it, that we see through its mechanisms and are perhaps capable of creating, on behalf of the capacities of our mind, another such world, maybe even a better one.

## Devices of Enticement: Love, Horror, and Marvel

**0.**—It is a commonplace that literature as such—narrative, poetry, and drama—mainly revolves around the topic of love. This formula, when considered from a distance, does not give expression to anything other than the observation that literature is about what most preoccupies humans. Considered from a scientific perspective, our task is to spread our genes. In order to veil the consequences of the act—that is, the hard labor going along with the raising of one's offspring, as well as the possibility of quite poor results—nature has linked pleasurable feelings to the performance of that task, and human narcissism has added the concept of "love" and "emotions" in order to repress the consciousness that sexual activities are rather animalistic practices which might remind us of our proximity to the *fauna* at large.

**1.**—What is striking in early modern drama is thus not the fact that love is an important theme; it is rather its pervasive presence and, perhaps even more im-

portantly, the recourse to explicit obscenity.<sup>396</sup> The striking character of this observation applies to serious drama only; comedy as a genre with strong historical affiliations to the practices of the carnival is a different case and can only be linked to my observations by taking this carnivalesque dimension into account.

I allow myself to immediately propose an answer to the question—that is: why was the register of love, sexuality, and obscenity so frequently extracted from the material circulating in the net, and why was it associated not only with comic, but also to a large extent with serious drama?—by examining what is perhaps the most obscene “serious” drama of the age, a text that had an enormous resonance and was, indeed, the most successful European drama of the sixteenth century.<sup>397</sup> It was the formal restrictions imposed on dramatic production by neo-Aristotelianism, to which it did not conform, that brought the reception history of *La Celestina* to an (undeserved) end. Contemporary readers willing to receive a drama no longer belonging to the canon will not have the slightest difficulty in understanding why educated Europeans admired this piece more than any other work of the period.

The plot deals with two youths of noble origin living in a city in southern Spain who come into contact with each other by chance; Calisto’s falcon has escaped from him and come to rest in the garden of the home of Melibea’s parents. Calisto falls in love with Melibea. After a short interval, she gives in to his desires. They spend a number of ecstatic nights together in Melibea’s garden. On one occasion, however, Calisto hears a noise from outside the garden; he believes that his servants, who are waiting for him, are being attacked. Hastily, he climbs over the garden wall, takes a false step, falls to the ground, and is smashed to death. On the next day, Melibea commits suicide by jumping from the tower of her parents’ house. The play ends with a long monologue pronounced by Pleberio, Melibea’s father, who accuses the “world” (*mundo*) of being a site of permanent suffering without any compensation, not even that of a world beyond the grave, which he does not believe to exist.

As to its serious content, one could portray the text—leaving the plot as such aside for the time being<sup>398</sup>—as consisting of two components. On the one hand,

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**396** I insist on the epithet. From a Freudian standpoint, even the thematization of Platonic love is nothing but the slightly veiled invitation to have our desires or drives fantasmatically gratified. But here it is a matter of the degree of explicitness. In the case I will deal with in the following paragraph, as well as in many other cases one could mention, there is nearly no sublimation when it comes to thematizing bodily pleasures.

**397** See, regarding this point, the study by Kilian (“*Escrituras andantes*”), as well as my essay on the *Celestina* (n. 43).

**398** I will come back to the play in a subsequent chapter (pp. 293 f.).

it is a sort of compendium of proto-humanistic didactics. Large portions of the text are a sort of *cento* of quotes taken from crucial sentences to be found in prominent works of moral philosophy (Seneca, Augustine, Petrarch; in the latter case mainly from *De remediis utriusque fortunae* [1354–1367]). This component is not very entertaining; it is a matter of classical learning and philosophical reflection.—As to the complex of bad luck underlying the ending of the text, it may be considered as a radicalization of the classical tragic model.—The plot’s abstract frame is based on three acts of disassembling material floating in the net: by separating the *phobos*- and *eleos*-provoking outcome from the mythical horizon to which it is linked in the original Greek and Roman tragedies, tragic failure is translated into the dimension of present-day, “common” life. By means of the explicit rejection of the idea of a spiritual life continuing beyond death, the conceptualization of the (physical) world as a *lacrimarum vallis*<sup>399</sup> is detached from the consolatory dimension linked to it within the (Christian) religious tradition. A third act of disassembly, evidenced in the play by way of Pleberio’s final monologue, consists in the separation of the discourses of pagan moral philosophy from the palliative dimension which is, according to these discourses’ claims, the “fruit” to be collected from reflecting on life’s vanity. The daring step thus taken may legitimately be considered an unconscious anticipation of modern thinking: human life as such may be doomed to failure, and there may be neither an otherworldly compensation nor a means of mentally alleviating this fact. What is absent in this drama, which was written and received around the year 1500, is the compensatory horizon created by modernity proper in order to render such a gloomy conceptualization bearable: the discourse of endless “progress” which promises to provide for happiness on earth, if not in the present, then in a future to whose construction we are invited to contribute.

These discursive elements out of which the *Celestina* is assembled are enriched, or made palatable, by recourse to a discursive register of obscenity familiar from contemporary farces and narrative texts conveying patterns of the carnivalesque.<sup>400</sup> It is not possible here to provide examples; but the sentences emanating from the mouths of the two noble youths, the female as well as the male, are at times shocking even by present-day standards. The more or

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**399** This formula, a quote from Ps 84:7, is used in the Latin original in the final monologue pronounced by Pleberio when he gives expression to his conviction that there is no afterlife in the Christian sense.

**400** Besides the undocumented popular oral tradition, one might mention the tradition of the Boccaccian novella and, with respect to Spanish texts in particular, the *Arcipreste de Hita* and the *Arcipreste de Talavera*.

less veiled appeal to the spectators' extreme sexual fantasies stands in somewhat sharp contrast to the internal plausibility of the plot configuration (where might a fifteenth-century Spanish noble girl of the age of fourteen or fifteen have acquired all these highly obscene words and concepts?) as well as to the significant dose of philosophical erudition and reflection to which the spectators are subjected. Given the enormous success of the play in all European countries referred to above, it seems that the anonymous author did find the right way to propagate his somewhat dire ideas on the futility of philosophical learning and on life as deprived of any sense whatsoever.

2.—Need I mention that horror was another device for effecting enticement in early modern drama and thus for rendering plays based on more serious ideas extracted from the net more palatable? With regard to the present-day critique of cruel practices as components of visual fiction, one should perhaps mention, without going into the details, that the representation of horrific cruelties on stage, or having them recounted in a most explicit and detailed manner, was a ubiquitous phenomenon in that age. In particular, Spanish, German, and Dutch theater of the time excelled in this regard. As an example, I should like to highlight the case of a Christian queen slowly torn to pieces and then, still alive, burnt on the pyre because she refuses to renounce her faith and become the wife of an “infidel” (Gryphius, *Catharina von Georgien* [1657]).<sup>401</sup> The primary context of such a motif in the play is evident, and it is telling with regard to many of the atrocities shown on the Spanish and the German stages of that age. The fascination with horror is exploited with a view to religious propaganda, or, to put it in terms of rhetoric, the “bitter pill” of religious didacticism is made easier to swallow by coating it with “sweet horror”. In an age of religious division, the lesson of the moral depravity of the heretics (or, in the case mentioned, of non-Christians) was brought to the believers' consciousness by showing or telling of their evil deeds on stage, which, one must add, were not mere invention. Identification with the martyrs who were decapitated, boiled, torn to pieces, etc., as well as relief (*katharsis*) after the end of the performance, were major devices of religious propaganda. And the extremely drastic Protes-

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**401** It is evident that the martyrdom of Queen Catherine of Georgia, who is an authentic figure (1565–1624) and who indeed died as a captive of the Persian Shah, could not be represented onstage; it is presented by way of a narration which indulges in all the details imaginable concerning the horrors of Catherine's torture.—As a footnote to the general theoretical frame of this book, I should perhaps mention that the story of the violent death of a Christian queen in Central Asia floated to the West almost immediately after Catherine's demise, became narrativized in France (Claude Malingre, *Histoires tragiques de nostre temps* [1641]), and then floated on to the remote eastern German province of Silesia, where Gryphius worked in the public service.

tant martyr plays—mostly, as in the case mentioned, school plays, that is, instruments of pedagogy for the education of grammar school boys—were probably meant to incline the audience to agree to the somewhat harsh dogma of predestination in its traditional variant:<sup>402</sup> only those prepared to undergo pains as described above may perhaps legitimately pretend to have deserved a seat in paradise. All others must resign themselves to accept what God has decided concerning their eternal fate.

Profane plays of the time also frequently have recourse to this variant of enticement, albeit with differing levels of explicitness. The last scene of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is as paradigmatic of the contemporary English stage as the *récit de Thérèse* from Racine's *Phèdre* is of the French theater of the time. A half dozen kings, queens, and princes killed on stage in the first case; in the other, the recounting, by an eyewitness, of the event of an innocent young prince torn to pieces by his horse, who is trying to escape from a sea monster—these two sequences are in a way indicative, in their similarities of plot and their differences of presentation, of a largely egalitarian popular theater culture in Britain and, on the other hand, of a theater linked to the refined taste and the ideal of sublimation practiced by *la cour* in France.—From the Freudian perspective presented above, there is little left to comment on in these and comparable pieces,<sup>403</sup> especially the explicitly religious ones.<sup>404</sup> They appeal, under the disguise of a dramatized catechism, to the audience's aggressive drives.<sup>405</sup>

3.—Present-day “enlightened” readers have a tendency to consider the device of marvel as a feature that is emblematic of the historical period in question, in the sense that it renders palpable the distance in time and mentality between the world of these plays and their own. Consequently, modern stagings of *Hamlet*, at least in Germany, refrain from having the ghost appear on stage; and neither Freud, who “forgot” how much the standard solution to the oedi-

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**402** Present-day continental, especially German Lutheranism is, as regards the theology of grace, closer to Origen and his *theologoumenon*, in former times considered heretic, of an *apokatastasis panton* than it is to the teachings of the man still invoked by the denomination's name.

**403** I shall supplement my above remarks in a short sub-chapter of Part III dedicated to the Dutch drama of the time (pp. 223–226).

**404** As to my reading of the cruelties depicted in English and French plays like those mentioned above, see, once again, my discussion of Walter Benjamin's and Louis Marin's respective hypotheses (pp. 198 ff.)

**405** In the case of the explicitly religious plays, there is also always a dimension of explicit religious propaganda. In Gryphius's *Catharina von Georgien*, the soul of Catherine appears to her torturer after her death and announces that his evil deeds will not remain without punishment.

pal situation suggested by him owes to a reception of Calderón's *La vida es sueño* (stripped of its Christian implications, of course),<sup>406</sup> nor his disciples refrain from expressing their astonishment at one of Calderón's most "magical" plays, *La devoción de la cruz* (1628/1633).<sup>407</sup> Indeed, in this play, as well as in similar ones such as *El mágico prodigioso* (1637), spectators may watch the Devil appear in person on stage; they witness beautiful young ladies revealing themselves to be nothing but skeletons dressed up with flesh by the powers of evil in order to pervert decent young men; they see a sorcerer at work who is able to resurrect corpses (or, as is revealed later on, to make people, and not only naïve ones, believe that he is able to effect such miracles), etc.

Leaving aside the historical index of these marvelous incidents, one might admit that plays like the ones just mentioned do not do anything different from what present-day visual fantasy fiction does. Suggesting to viewers that there is something real or possibly real that transcends what regular, everyday sense perception conveys to us (e.g., that "the aliens are already amongst us") seems to be a transhistorically effective device for producing enticement. In both of the early modern cases mentioned above, it is evident that the device is mobilized in order to incline spectators to engage with problems that are neither exciting nor pleasant: the problematic character of so-called "bonds" of blood in the case of *Hamlet*; the problematic character of all this-worldly success and achievement in the case of the *Mágico* play.

The most convincing explanation for the extraction of such archaic fantasies from the net-bound material circulating in the early modern period, in order to then attach them—in a process of assembly—to serious material, may be provided by what Tzvetan Todorov proposed with respect to the Romantic gen-

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**406** —a negligence which might be related to a weak point of Freud's cultural theory. In Calderón, there is a transcendental compensation for the act of total sublimation (refraining from killing the father and waiting for power to be transmitted by the father to the son; refraining from physical appropriation of the mother-*imago* and transferring the sexual desire to another woman). In Freud, the only and rather shallow promise given to humans who are ready to repress their drives consists in that sublimation guarantees some decades of life under the imperative of constant self-control, that is, in a state of permanent frustration. Is the "prison" of society more comfortable than the prison one has to go to in case one does kill one's father and sleep with one's mother?

**407** See Otto Rank, *Das Inzest-Motiv in Dichtung und Sage*. Grundzüge einer Psychologie des dichterischen Schaffens, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Leipzig and Vienna 1926, chap. 20, esp. pp. 550–554. In the years of the book's first print (1912), Rank was a close collaborator of Freud. Let me remind readers that Calderón was one of the most frequently staged playwrights in nineteenth-century German-language theaters, the most important of these being the Viennese *Burgtheater*.

re of the fantastic, known as the *conte fantastique*.<sup>408</sup> Todorov concerns himself with the question of how to explain the emergence of the genre and the re-emergence of a connected archaic conceptual pattern in an era that claimed to be thoroughly enlightened. It may be sensible to assume an analogous explanation for the period under scrutiny here as well.

The seventeenth century is, of course, not as yet an “enlightened” age. But starting in the epochal year of 1492, the rise of modern science had initiated the massive process of the “disenchantment” of the world. For an ever-growing part of the population, especially for those living in big cities—that is, for those targeted by early modern drama as mass media—daily realities, in the sense of real-life experiences, were not much more “miraculous” than for present-day inhabitants of Western cities. To return to Todorov’s argument: the belief that there might be a “real” reality hidden behind the surface phenomena, an assumption rooted in our species’ minds for hundreds of generations, still exists in the modern world, although it is more and more repressed and relegated to the unthematizable (“superstitions”). Literary fictions, as texts that refer to reality but are not bound to reproduce it, make use of this constellation. They have recourse to structures gratifying the desire for what got lost in the processes of modernization. The gratification of desires of the psyche that began to be less and less satisfied in early modern times might, as noted above, have made recipients ready to listen to the rather disillusioning messages of the texts in question.

4.—It is a symptom of a deep cultural change that serious literature of our time can no longer extract material like that mentioned in this chapter from the net in order to assemble plots, dramatic or narrative, that thematize persistent moral or epistemological problems which recipients experience in their own lives. In the present, such devices of attraction have become an index of the trivial status of the texts in question. The penetration of the results of scientific progress into the general consciousness has made “wonder” fall prey to rationalization, so that no enlightened person is willing to accept it as “real”. The disappearance of “horror” from serious literature might be contingent on the generalization of previously exclusive humanitarian ethics to broader strands of the educated population. And in societies without erotic taboos, the appeal accompanying the staging of love and sex has become quite weak. This said, all these registers continue to play a prominent role in present-day fiction. As may be observed with regard to a variety of further phenomena, cultural trivial-

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**408** *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Richard Howard (tr.), Ithaca, NY 1975.

ization always comes about by means of the appropriation of norms, patterns, and predilections first cherished amongst the elite by popular culture. If we infer from the scenario presented in this chapter that the distance in terms of taste and predilection to be observed between the elite and the “masses” was not as great in early modern times as it seems to be in our own, this is not a very reassuring diagnosis.

## Mass Media, Early Modern and Present

**0.**—Talking about mass media today inevitably directs readers’ attention to electronic media, particularly film, television, and the information conveyed by way of various other devices (computers, tablets, smartphones).<sup>409</sup> This technological “gap” notwithstanding, early modern and present-day mass media phenomena do have many features in common.

**1.**—There is, however, one important difference to be mentioned when it comes to applying the term to both early modern performance culture and present-day mass media; this concerns the question of degrees of mediation. It makes a difference whether we are witnessing a performance given by “real” humans, that is, actors on a stage in front of us—which is a fourth-degree mediation<sup>410</sup>—or whether there is an additional level of mediation involved as a result of the performance being electronically recorded and broadcast via television or streamed online. The “technical” aspect may even be a point of minor importance. The most relevant difference is that between the communal, collective profile of live performances in previous ages and the mainly private and remote viewing on electronic devices today. If, as is argued here, mass media performances fulfill their purpose mainly by activating or even unleashing emotions and by partially neutralizing reason, one may ask if it is sensible at all to hypothetically consider the reception of televised soap operas and of early modern theater performances as variants of the selfsame cultural prototype.

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**409** Against the backdrop of my previous argument, it is evident that I will be dealing in this short chapter only with those sectors of present-day mass media production which are dedicated to divulging fiction, and not “news” in the strict sense. This said, one might think about the question of the extent to which this distinction has been in part leveled, at least as to those mass media catering to people whose self-image is not linked to the concept of the “intellectual”. Most news of this kind is embedded in at least partly fictional stories, whose logic might be quite similar to the one described above with regard to early modern mass media.

**410** See above, pp. 164 f.

One might provide a quick and easy answer to the problem just raised by pointing to the fact that there are historically different stages of mass culture and that those mentioned above engage different levels of emotionality. Just as it was common practice—as one might infer from Aristotle’s *Poetics*—to quake and weep in public during certain moments of a tragic performance, such uninhibited utterances of shared emotions were still possible in early modern theaters or theatrical courtyards. It may be the case that present-day recipients of trivialized tragic stories broadcast on TV weep at certain moments; but weeping in private or in the presence of one’s nuclear family is quite different from sharing the expression of such affects with the entire ruling class of the community to which one belongs. One might end the discussion by pointing out that enhanced mediation dramatically increases the number of people reached by performances, but that the level of unifying affectivity decreases in the process. In sum, one could argue that the mere quantity of emotion unleashed (with a corresponding repression of reason), which can be channeled towards goals desired by the organizers of the performances (in most cases: state cultural agencies, religious authorities, private corporations dedicated to propagating the dominant ideology, or some combination of these agents), is probably much greater today than in previous periods, so that the price paid for the enhanced propagation—the relative reduction of shared and thus unifying emotionality—is well invested, seen from the investors’ perspective. In that sense, the difference between early modern and present-day mass media phenomena is a real one, but the present-day mass media industry may be regarded as a continuation of the corresponding cultural constellation emerging in the early modern age.

2.—There is, in my view, yet another factor which might be taken into consideration when attempting to account for both the uncontestable differences and the overall similarities between early modern and present-day instances of mass media. I will try to introduce my corresponding reflections by referring to a performative practice<sup>411</sup> broadly disseminated by electronic media and especially popular in our time: top-tier club soccer matches,<sup>412</sup> in particular championships. As is familiar to everyone who from time to time watches such games on television, it is not only the game proper that is broadcast, but also

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**411** I am conscious of the fact that my above deliberations (pp. 164–170) imply that it would be problematic to categorize soccer games as mediations; but as a widely known example of performance practices broadcast by the present-day mass media, they might be useful for producing a concrete idea of the historical evolution I will be characterizing in the following.

**412** Within North American contexts, baseball, football, or basketball games would be analogous phenomena.

a wide variety of ancillary material whose sole purpose is to convey the impression of intense emotion to individual viewers sitting in front of their TVs in the privacy of their homes. This is partly achieved by the notoriously hyperbolic commentary of sportscasters. More theatrical still are their cries of joy, disappointment, outrage, or affliction accompanying the fates of key players as they score goals, miss, receive a penalty flag, or writhe on the turf due to injury. In addition, there is the recording and subsequent display of the scenes taking place amongst the audience attending the match in the stadium. Over the years, these masses of direct spectators have literally been trained to display an extremely high, even exuberant degree of emotionality: shouting, weeping, standing up “spontaneously” from their seats, hugging each other, etc., etc. One could argue that the loss of direct involvement typical of electronic media is compensated by the fact that viewers at home are integrated into the on-screen spectacle, where the combination of the highly stylized, choreographed competition between opposing teams, the quasi-staged unruly behavior on the part of spectators in the stadium, and other visual and auditory effects of heightened emotionality stimulate a concomitant emotional reaction in the home viewers, thereby overcoming to a considerable extent the “distance effect” of the TV medium. In this way, the emotional participation of the home viewer in a championship football match today may be equated with—or at least compared to—that of an early modern playgoer.

As for soap operas, films shot for display in movie theaters, etc., there is no comparable means of enhancing affective identification. It would require a separate analysis to substantiate what I can only present as a personal impression here: it seems to me that popular film and TV today is constructed with an even greater attention to scenes of emotional tension than was the case in early modern or even modern plays (or films). Portraying in graphic detail the death of the beloved of the hero or heroine, complete with the latter’s reaction to viewing the tragedy, was as uncommon in early modern performance culture as it is frequent in present-day Hollywood blockbusters.<sup>413</sup> Where this will lead—if my hypothesis is correct: heightened degrees of mediation and the subsequent loss of potential “direct” involvement are compensated for by increasing the intrinsic emotionality of the performances in question—remains to be seen.

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**413** I am thinking of *Titanic*, but many similar examples might be named as well.