The Maritime Modernity of *Hamlet*

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> We go to gain a little patch of ground
> That hath in it no profit but the name.
> To pay five ducats, five, I would not farm it …
>
> Captain, Act IV, Scene IV

> For anything so o'erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and the body of the time his form and pressure.
>
> Hamlet, Act III, Scene II

> The ocean, overpeering of his list,
> Eats not the flats with more impetuous haste,
> Than young Laertes, in a riotous head
> O'er bears your officers. The rabble call him lord,
> And, as the world were now but to begin,
> Antiquity forgot, custom not known,
> The ratifiers and props of every word,
> They cry, "Choose we! Laertes shall be king!"
>
> Messenger, Act IV, Scene V

Deterritorialization I: The Melancholic Earth

Hamlet is a play with many travels—embassy and deportation, summon and passage, arrival and dispatch, entry and exit, by land or by sea. The constant physical movement and political agitation supply the underflow and overflow that now crumple now break onto the surface of dramatic utterances. Amidst the general commotion lies the secret heart of a clock that refuses to move. The clock stops between the chiming of a funeral and a wedding. Later on, it is only to be compelled to tick, and always at the hour of the other. That is, either dispossessed by absolute necessity, or appropriated through mimetic rivalry. Meanwhile, a whiling away, an idle tongue, a flight into no-time, into the utopia of play-time. Paradoxically, this play-time is born of and borne through by an element of anti-play. It is melancholy, that dark dumb core deep within the world as a glittering *vanitas*, the immutable that sits obstinate amongst the fickle and the transient like a monument, what the royal moralist calls honesty or conscience. This element of anti-play is that which abides

and endures in the flow of immediacy. It defies all mediation, transport, metaphor. It makes an attempt to resist the forgetfulness inherent in the ontology or biology of the play, and wills rather to remember, to promise, to bind the self to itself, the present to its past and both into a future, and many merry tales into one tragical history. Yet as a will to subsist in, not to carry out, it jealously guards its own ideality. Thus self-possessed, it would not let go, and in appearing to be a good sport, *is* not. It drives a wedge between seeming and being, rejecting the hypothesis of a contiguity and demanding rather the insurmountability of a chasm. The first utterance of Hamlet exceeding one line serves as a general prologue to all the prince's later antics, pronouncing a play against play:

> QUEEN: If it be,
> Why seems it so particular with thee?
> HAMLET:
> "Seems," madam? Nay it is. I know not "seems."
> 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
> Nor customary suits of solemn black,
> Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
> No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
> Nor the dejected havior of the visage,
> Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
> That can denote me truly. These indeed "seem,"
> For they are actions that a man might play;
> But I have that within which passes show,
> These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (1.2.75-86)

Hamlet. From The Works of Shakespeare. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1867

The intransigent mourner denotes and defines himself as a word is by its proper meaning, in this case the element of anti-play—"that within which passes show"—which he admits to have. And in a rather literal sense it is a having, a possession, a private property. The word/prince is urged to move on, by a woman with all her frailty of meaning, her innocent rhetoric, her unlimited transferability and re-marriageability, to metamorphose, to exchange meaning for metaphor, to be re-sired—into Claudius' son, a clouded sun. But the word refuses to be thus translated, loath to have its meaning thus bastardized. It *will* not enter the text of the world, *will* not surrender the ideality of meaning unto actions and actualities free then for all to appropriate and adulterate. That's why it sets about questing for certainty, which in its heart of hearts it knows to be the unattainable, so that it could be all the more justified in not acting on mere approximations, thus

forever secured in the self-possession of its ideality. Then it is indeed nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, than to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing, end them. For in the mind, an idea or ideal always is; carried out, it becomes something else, and is not. For the melancholic, being is coupled with ideality, non-being with actuality. Only in ideality are there sameness and identity of meaning. What the element of anti-play indicates is not a diseased will, but are two conflicting wills, one struggling outward, one inward, the former a pagan will of actualization, of cathartic vendetta, the latter a protestant will of idealization, of infinite retention rather than finite expulsion. This latter inward self-will makes substitute for attending to the actual by indulging in diversions of the possible. Rather than unified as a single will, it dabbles in the multiplicity of appearances. It creates instead representations, invents spectacles, stays illusions, deferring ethics for aesthetics.

Mimesis I: The Mirror of Schema

The kinesthesis of life and nature arrested, the will-inward that retreats from the world wears play as its incognito, as the melancholic wears humour as his incognito. The trappings or the trap of play is animated by the element of anti-play, its movements released within the bounds of ideality. As playwright, director, chorus, jester, even student, courtier, imitator of mankind, the melancholic is superb, in his element. But he cannot be himself, cannot be the hero—he simply cannot be, not for the world. Unlike Narcissus who seeks his own reflection in the mirror of a brook, the melancholic holds the mirror up to human nature precisely to avert his own visage. His limbs are loosened only in mimesis, his tongue untied only in irony and satire. He needs the distance, a third object, that mirror of a schemata inserted between the transcendental and the impurities inherent in experiencing. Like Perseus who could not have cut off the Gorgon's head without the Pallas-sent shield and mirror, the melancholic cannot strike but through an intermediary, a hermeneutic medium of some sort where the inhibitive demands of his superegos are bracketed—a translucent veil that reflects and deflects at the same time, which removes the extra eye from King Oedipus, who according to the poet Hölderlin, had "an eye too many."[1] In the case of Prince Hamlet, he was able to make his strike at all because of the arras that separated him and that which the conscience thought to be lying behind. But Will Shake-spear would not have his Hamlet thus cheat his way out of passion's immediacy, so that time he gave him only a fool to kill. Up until this point, a psychosomatic dyspepsia has kept the passion veiled, action put off, expression deflected. The spirit rages inward, but cannot command the body to move. If we view the play as a dumb-show, a mime, and heed only the choreography of the body, we see that really not that much of physical movement issues from our hero in all but the last act of the play. Throughout the first four acts we sit back watching the body sulking and skulking, reading and retaining, observing and reserving, pacing and prattling, affecting and assuming, busy being a connoisseur of mankind and of

womankind, a chorus both by default and by design. During all this time a great deal of movement fusses around and past him. People come, people go. Not he. Twice there's been embassy from abroad; twice the young Fortinbras marches against the enemy of Norway. Laertes sails for France in the first act; not until three acts later has our hero too gone on the sea, and deported as well.

Deterritorialization II: The Kinetic Ocean

The sea does it. With his double will the melancholic invites disaster, courts it, waits just for it, for a necessity that would impose freedom upon him, thus to be spared his own responsibility for initiating a new beginning. The beginning is made in the end, in the final act, where the body, hitherto slow to move, exults in faring, leaping, fencing, being. Forgetting and thereby unwittingly transforming the spirit, the body is eventually at one with the latter, a destiny, an event. At length, like Hamlet the Senior, Hamlet is a man, take him for all in all, a hero, even a soldier, that last if only a dead one, buried thus. Held in an inertia both physiological and spiritual, the melancholic is incapable of self-movement, capable only of self-provocation, incapable of action, capable only of deed, incapable of freedom, capable only of necessity, incapable of sovereignty, capable only of sovereignty first deferred then going under. Once thus provoked, done for, necessitated, sped up, however, the metabolism is quickened, and he leaps across the chasm between seeming and being. The sluice lifted, the play is unbound from a restricted economy into a general one, where ideality is abolished and actualities—fatalities reign. From a play against play that remains painfully undecided about its own genre, it passes or plunges into a tragedy. The passage is made, the youth initiated, that is, in the original sense of having begun.

And how does the sea do it? Yet why on earth would the land not do? *Hamlet* is a play no less of elements than of humours. From the fifteenth century onward it has become increasingly misleading to speak of land, of *terra firma* in the Greco-Roman and feudal sense. The old *nomos* of the earth was challenged by the new freedom of the sea which demanded a separate and distinct global order. As the English isle became the "agency of the spatial turn to a new *nomos* of the earth"[2], territoriality disintegrates into insularity, land into island, and earth a sterile promontory:

> … I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises, and, indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'er-hanging firmament, this majestical roof, fretted with golden fire–why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors. What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable; in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals–and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? (2.2.299-313)

The speech is given in the ambiguous company of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. But if there is poison in jest, there's also earnestness in jest. The indolence therein voiced may be politic, but the ennui retains the dark kernel of truth. A comprehensive devaluation of elements occurs—earth, air, water, fire—all are not well. And worse still is the fifth element, that quint-essence of dust, man. *Hamlet* is known for a play of nothingness and nihilism, born of and residing in the interstice of time. What is less noted, and often trivially, is that the play also inherits and inhabits the cranny of fractured space. History becomes tragical as geography suffers the deterritorialization of its prefix. An ontological battle was being fought between the reformed Protestant sea and the Roman Catholic land. Earth undergoes a dissolution of solidity. It is atomized, divided to the point of being indivisible, no longer soil that holds together, but grains of dust that scatter. Man, this quintessence of dust, has become literally the individual. He is the singular among the plurality of things. While trying to be the legislator of the sea, he dissolves into the residuum of the earth, and *will* dissolve no further. This too, too sullied flesh would not melt, thaw, and resolve itself into a dew, for the Everlasting had fixed his canon 'gainst self-slaughter (1.2.132), so that dead or quick, a conscience remains, that earth-residuum as a result of yet resisting still the course of deterritorialization. On the other hand, from the conventional patriarchal standpoint of a protestant theatre, woman is represented as the essence-less. Given its ontological fluidity and capacity for metamorphosis, the element of water has always been favored as an apt metaphor for the image of femininity. Yet a woman traverses all elements without being thus denoted or defined by any. She is less than a word, though at the same time something more, in excess—a free floating vowel, ready to be paired and married—and re-paired and re-married—to just about any consonant. A word may very well insist upon its inwardness of meaning, but a vowel, in order to take upon any meaning at all has first to lose herself in a word. Her frailty is but the ability to fulfill a semantic expectation to partake of what definitions and meanings her word demands. The imperial jointress to the warlike state, the queenly vowel enables the usurpation or succession of a dynasty of meanings in a wordy text. It is precisely this capacity for movement, however, that joints as well as disjoints. It takes time out of joint, space as well. The aquatic agency of the feminine makes divisible each and every individual word, threatening to further deterritorialize the last earth-residuum, that conscience of a man.

The melancholic is weary of moving, for speed *per se* has been demoralized by the fluidity of desire of the imperial adulteress. "To post/with such dexterity to incestuous sheets" (1.2.158), speed is moralized by the royal misogynist and misanthropist into something "most wicked" (1.2.157). Against this fluidity of speedy and immediate passage are posited a willed intransigence. It harbors a hostility toward the flimsy, passable moment, a fetish upon continuity and constancy inwardly built-up, and a partiality to the works of time. On land the melancholic is infinitely patient—patient even in and despite his impatience. The performative contradiction of such patient

impatience is expressed through an odd proliferation of chatter, distractions and substitutes—anything but the main. The enforced movement upon the stationary body by the sea-voyage makes spirit rash, conscience forgetful. Cut short as an actor in the middle of one of his endless rehearsals for actions, the melancholic is suddenly projected onto the shadowless realm where the agent, his acts and their effects all come crushing down in and as a single unity. Snatched from his hand is that piece of looking-glass that carries for him the image of the deed. The hour of necessity having not time enough for becoming, a sword is thrust into the empty hand that held a moment ago the mirror, whereupon the melancholic *is* the hero, and the hero *is* the deed itself. Indeed the deed is no sooner a doing than something done, no sooner a becoming than a having-been. The dynamic corporeality actualizes the violence of a deed long ideated and hitherto disembodied.

Deterritorialization III: Water Unbound

This psychosomatic change was effectuated on the first night at sea. He that on royal ground heaved the profoundest sigh, "to die, to sleep, no more" (3.1.60-61), could not find sleep on the lawless sea. For there was "a kind of fighting" (5.2.4) in the heart "worse than mutinies in the bilboes" (5.2.6). A final deterritorialization thus took place of the last earth-residuum, conscience, which heretofore "does make cowards of us all" (3.1.83). And enterprises of great pitch and moment, on the contended sea and out of its contending waves their currents surge forth anew, and regain the name of action. It is curious to witness this moment where a protestant theatre surpasses and sublates itself. Abolished over the ridges of the towering waves is the intentionality of the agent and with it that correspondence of freedom and responsibility. Sown into this sea-field the moment is no longer the passable and passage into the future, but the supra-historical now that breaks furrows of time. So the sea has done it, as only the sea, and no inland water-paths would have done it. To be sure, on a certain level Hamlet's ship did continue in the vein of the medieval and Renaissance practice of the *stultifera navis*, or *Narrenschiff*, the ship of fools. For the territoriality of a geo-centric, land-locked order was itself qualified and bound by the errant aquatic element. Long before this feudal territoriality started to disintegrate in the course of deterritorialization with the rise of the modern Leviathan, it had fallen to the lot of the mad to lead an itinerant existence:

> … water brought its own dark symbolic charge, carrying away, but purifying too. Navigation brought man face to face with the uncertainty of destiny, where each is left to himself and every departure might always be the last. The madman on his crazy boat sets sail for the other world, and it is from the other world that he comes when he disembarks. This enforced navigation is both rigorous division and absolute Passage, serving to underline in real and imaginary terms the liminal situation of the mad in medieval society.[3]

The voyage out and back of the mad prince retains a semblance of and resemblance to this medieval experience of *Narrenschiff*. What transports the journey into the modern is not what has happened on the high sea—that rigorous division and absolute Passage afore-quoted—but how it has happened in a play which till then nothing had really happened. *Hamlet* is a play where nothing happens but through substitution and mis-recognition. Thus it invents the modern tragic through a mournful celebration of errors and failures. In Aeschylean and Sophoclean tragedies things happen *via* an opposite route, i.e. classically, cathartically, necessarily, through identification and recognition. The hero greets his downfall purified, a sacrificial victim, ready to ascend to the realm of the sacred. In Euripidean, Senecan, and Shakespearean tragedies, happenings are blunders, accidents, missteps. The hero is never ready, but always out of time, either too early or too late, until finally crashing right into the closing jaws of a necessity that really did not have to be—a heap of the unnecessary and the contingent that has grown skyward. Only then is the hero ready, satisfied and actualized by disaster. Such readiness is not for the infinite and the divine, but for the finite, the impure, the world. The hero is not cleansed through his suffering to be an offering to the gods, but is dragged ever deeper into the mire of finitude to be choked therewith. The modern tragic is not clean. Water cannot, as it once did for the medieval madman, purify a Hamlet. All great Neptune's ocean cannot wash him clean, for the butt of tragedy is precisely the prince's excessive cleanliness that bars his intercourse with the world. The sea is there rather to make him unclean. What the ritual passage on the sea accomplished is not to purify, but to cure the hero of the purity of ideality and induce him toward expression. It transformed the infinite and indefinite in-streaming of inwardness into definite and finite actualities that are necessarily impure and imperfect.

Mimesis II: Sovereignty Mocked

The sea that thus transformed the economy of the hero and of the play is a modern sea. No longer marking the unchanging perimeter of the land or tracing the perpetual exterior of a geo-centric order, it waxes and wanes as a mobile, variable X that determines and undermines the value of the infirm terra. The pace of the play accelerated by the change of climature, a tragic velocity was gathered during the nocturnal restlessness on board. A crescendo occurred the next day as a pirate ship gave chase to the ship of fools. Rash but not ready, our hero was compelled into a self at the hour of the other. Compulsion rather than spontaneity occasioned the leap of transition from one ontological sphere to another, from seeming to being, from that which is for another to that which is for and in itself. Thus did the rite of passage lurch into a mocking parable of sovereignty. A prince is the likeness of sovereignty, but not sovereignty itself. He is "our chiefest courtier" (1.2.117), to quote the king who was not the king. Hamlet is a mock sovereign, and it mocks sovereignty to come into its own through an unwary chain of doubling—of comparisons, equivocations, substitutions. However improvised and emergent, the action on board proceeded by

the crooked path of stealth, deception and stratagem. One stole into the cabin, pocket-lifted the commission, faked the letter and sealed with the elder's signet, "the changeling never known" (5.2.53). The deed was done and yet not done. It was done as the seeds of time were sown by the restless melancholic. The passage was to be their growth and his. The deed was yet to be done as its roots were separated from its shoots by the sea-passage between one isle and another, between the mythic court of Denmark and the Elizabethan London playhouse. While Rosencrantz and Guildenstern go to 't, *it* was not reported until the very closing scene when its author himself was dead and no longer there to witness the completion of a deed begun in time and not finished but with time, curtain fallen, farewell bidden. A deed in the pagan sense is the lightning that strikes and is no more. It is born and dies at the same instant. It dies with the dead, not forgotten, but unremembered. As such it has no claim or pretense to history. The protestant prince reformed this pagan sense of the deed by injecting an element of time into the instantaneous. This element of time unfurls as a breathing and a spacing, a deferral and an expectation, making the deed both more and less than what it is. The interim of the passage sublimates the deed into a history. The distance, both temporal and topographical, between the deed and its history drives a wedge into the pressing walls of mimetic desire on the one side, and the will on the other. The proximity and connivance of these two are the devil's argument of this protestant play. This wedge of distanciation orders the economy of the play, and its removal challenges and re-orders the dramatic economy. The second moment makes the protestant play a tragedy, the first makes the tragedy a modern one.

An epic unity of speech and action was sabotaged on the silent night on board where speech was bracketed and writing both unleashed and temporized the violence of the deed. The inertia of melancholy was interrupted, but only mimetically, in a serial and brakeless substitution of writ with writing, seal with signet, of the high priest in charge of the ceremony with the sacrificial victim. The luckless pair became the surrogate and double of the hero. By the subtle sleight of hand, once again the melancholic prince had successfully evaded direct, forward violence—or again put it off, and into reserve. But the tempo of patient, politic violence was no sooner achieved than disrupted. By an inner compulsion it was achieved, by an external one it was disrupted. For the next day a pirate ship "of very warlike appointment" (4.6.16) pursued the ship of fools. Finding themselves "too slow of sail" (4.6.17), the motley crew put on a "compelled valor" (4.6.18), and in the grapple the prince of fools alone boarded the pillaging vessel. The nocturnal chain of substitution was continued in broad daylight, likewise the billowy movement of doubling, in a sea-fight unsought and gratis. Not only the hero, but the ship itself was pirated. The expeditious exchange of the ship of fools with the pirate ship tempts the modern reader to lend this rather gratuitous shift a symbolic charge both tragic and humorous. It is tragic because the substitution is no less than one of the feudal with the modern, the perpetually liminal with the return of the repressed, the thwarted monarch with the

resigned avenger. It is humorous because despite the historical and dramatic significance, all seem less, lighter, and a size smaller than what one would otherwise expect in a high tale. Piracy stood as the crucial and pivotal moment in this mimetic constitution of sovereignty. It leaves a birthmark of irony on the rising Leviathan. The modern prince not only lived on borrowed lives, but also on borrowed time. For him and his realm, fate is not necessary, but is composed of the unnecessary, and no less fatal for all its miscarried possibilities. The hero speculates vainly beyond the here and now, is caught by it from behind, its tether round his neck. In a protestant play, neither contemplation nor action, but observation and speculation make the subject of dramatic representation. In a protestant play where it has surpassed itself and been sublated into a modern tragedy, no longer observation or speculation, but their limits are probed, challenged, rapidly undone. Classically, tragedy trades in necessity and comedy in possibility. The modern tragic, however, flounders between chance or fate on the one hand, and speculation and providence, on the other. From night to day, from one ship to the other was a passage from rashness to readiness, from "praised be rashness" (5.2.7) to "the readiness is all" (5.2.224).

Deterritorialization IV: Water Inbound

The word was awakened to its own innate metaphoric impulse on the polyvalent sea. The trip of metaphor and metamorphosis mediates between the ontological spheres of being and seeming. Overnight are flooded all categories hitherto intransigently upheld. Upon the hero's return the gates of inwardness are flung wide open at the world. Expression is no longer inhibited, but at times gushes forth incontinent. All the prince's public outpourings are concentrated after his passage and disembarkation, crammed into the final act of the play. Before, only private faces in public places: in one's own company, soliloquies; in men's company, irony; and an aggressive opacity in and against the presence of the fair sex. After, profuse effusions at the graveyard, free ranting and grave-leaping, mourning bravado that, to quote our royal playwright, "out-Herods Herod" (3.2.14), and that certainly outdoes a Hamlet. Indeed four acts earlier manners less intemperate were scornfully dubbed "suits and trappings of woe" (1.2.86) by the melancholic prince among his very first lines on stage. Expression serves as an indicator that the element of earth, with all its disintegrating solidity and vainly willed intransigence, had been dealt a final death blow on the high sea. Immediately following the passage is fittingly set the scene at the graveyard, where the earthen element underwent a symbolic burial in its de-territorialized, sandy, atomistic state. There it was expertly mourned for by diggers and jokers in dirge and merriment. The rite of passage of the prince of fools runs parallel to another passage, another intercourse with water, where:

> There is a willow grows askant the brook,
> That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.
> …

There on the pendant boughs her coronet weeds
Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke,
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. (4.7.166-175)

Not the outbound sea, but the landlocked water-path of a brook holds this other passage—"from nature to eternity" (1.2.73), one might as well quote the queen, as she thus described the unnatural passage of her late husband. But neither nature attended nor eternity awaited the mortal impasse of the late king or the honest maid. The murdered and un-repented lingered in purgatory, the self-slaughtered received maimed rites. They had not passed, but both were intercepted at the fringe of mortality. Only the reformed, protestant sea issues the passport, if not into eternity, at least into modernity. While the open sea carried the restless melancholic over the hedge of his own inwardness, the inbound brook could do nothing but draw the chaste maid deeper into hers. As it happens, Hamlet goes back, Ophelia goes under:

… Her clothes spread wide,
And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up,
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds,
As one incapable of her own distress
Or like a creature native and endued
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death. (4.7.175-182)

The first word we heard the prince address his love was: Nymph—Ophelia is the nymph, but a river nymph, not a sea nymph. Mermaid-like, she is none, and though she chants, it is no Siren's song. This one must not seduce, so she sinks. As marriageable a vowel as the imperial jointress, and no less beauteous than the Majesty of Denmark, she was made to remember, to promise, to stay where and what she is—daughter, sister, maid. The inwardness of an unwedded O is not the inwardness of a melancholic word that refuses to disclose. Hers is a smothered outwardness collapsed inward and arrested in a willed impenetrability. The vowel of O is exhorted not to give herself to the word, but to subsist in and by herself. In her the aquatic element renounces its metaphoric and metamorphic fluidity and submits to an enforced solidity, all frozen up. The elegies Ophelia distractedly offered after her father was slain by her lover were filled with figures of solid water, of ice and snow, and paradoxically, of cold chastity overthrown. Her madness both echoes and contrasts with the antics of Hamlet, as later her passage his. Hers is an opaque, non-presentable madness that offends the world and scandalizes its stage. His is a translucent, reflective, self-reflective, representable folly that woos the world in its very offense.

If, as we've noted from the very beginning, the melancholic prince epitomizes the element of anti-play, so does the rueful maid—but quite differently, not in the inverse form of a play against play, rather of anti-play pure and simple. Neither is this stern, lusterless element the purity and simplicity of a fair maid, but a metaphysical purity and simplicity that pertains to the manner in which truth is postulated in a protestant scheme of things. In the body of Ophelia clash the two poles of this moral worldview, lies and truth, fairness and honesty. The melancholic taunts, are you fair? Are you honest? She is both. Upon her sex are ditched all garments, paints, and costumes of lies. Upon her person is unloaded all the graveness of a truth substantive, non-composite, in-expressible.

Mimesis III: Mirroring the Non-mimetic

How can water itself be drowned? Native and endued unto that element, the nymph is not pulled to muddy death, but by mud to death and to death alone. She is dragged by the dregs of de-territorialized earth and its deadly weight to be undone in her native element. With desperate hand fordoing her own life, Ophelia in fact dies another's death. Like Lady Macbeth, she has contracted the conscience of another and has to die in his stead. The melancholic jester bears his earth-residuum of a conscience on his ship of fools to the salty water, and comes back rid of all that nonsense—though swiftly supplied with new ones aplenty, one must say. It is the honest and earnest maid that stays inland, faithful to the de-territorialized earth and drowned with the graveness of all that resists play. As the element of anti-play pure and simple, the unwedded O signifies the non-mimetic, non-comparative, non-relative, and non-metaphorical. Thus she signifies in one breath both absolute substance and absolute nothingness. Desisting the grip-less movements of metaphors and metamorphosis, she alone stands the ground of the identity of meaning in this protestant drama. That's why at its very verge of turning into a tragedy, where the last patch of ground is being carried away by the sporting sea waves, this improbable duality of fairness and honesty must go under. And this she does, submitting to the full weight of truth conceived as self-sameness and liternalness, a protestant hermeneutics of truth that is essentially hopeful and hence non-tragic.

Ophelia dies a muddy death, which means a double death, of and for two elements, earth and water, the former in place of the prince of fools, the latter in place of the protesting lady. De-territorialized, earth scatters as dust, pulls as mud, and cracks as clay. De-territorializing, water floods as the sea, weeps as the brook, hardens as ice and snow, drowns as tears. A third element, air, though playing a less concrete role in this play of elements, is more structural among their interplay. Invisible and intangible, it serves the medium of seeing and hearing. An apparent nothingness, it apparates as the ghost, blasts as the wind, plays as music, breathes as word and prayer, withholds as secret. It appears and disappears, nips and promises, aspires and expires. As the drama approaches its edge of transformation, the disengaged O is being given less and less air, allotted fewer and fewer lines of speech, then a fitful

burst of songs, and silence. This silence is re-appropriated by language by none other than the beauteous Majesty of Denmark, who gives the epic report of the death of the beauteous Ophelia, who dies as her double. From the queen we hear not the song, but the report of the song—told, not sung. But before this final reclamation of the impressed and in-expressible by language, speech had been less and less able to afford the mode of expression for the repressed vowel, until expression itself goes under in the absolute inwardness of a wordless, world-less anti-play. The path of language thus tread is one from brief exchange into muteness, out onto elegies and lauds, terminating in asphyxiation. This inwardness of the absolute anti-play is gathered into a pressed vacuum and threatens to collapse the walls of language from within.

Deterritorialization V: Wind of Sail

Throughout the play, inwardness in general has been represented as un-utterable and un-translatable. But in the form of conscience, it is treated as by no means un-transmissible, and in fact contagious, at once a mode and an object of imitation. As a mirror it passes from the hand of the melancholic prince to the courtly stage of a mousetrap, capturing the conscience of the king and producing one out of the queen, until deposited permanently in the corseted bosom of an unuttered O. Its luminous visibility is reflected in the glassy stream. Its earthen solidity weighs on the floating vowel that cannot be wedded to a sea-going word, and has therefore to go under in and by itself in the landlocked brook. A last sigh does not escape the vowel, but goes unheard, out of the air, beneath the water, into muddy earth. Pronunciation as such is demonized because of the easy and generous movement of the mellifluous vowel. A windpipe controls the custom passage between the inner and the outer. Up toward its enforced deportation on the outbound ship, the melancholic word had been striding the threshold of the inner and the outer, the ideal and the actual, its meaning and world's text. In and by itself it could not cross the border over into the world. Neither was it able to withdraw entirely from the world, but kept pricking it with one foot. On the tip of a held tongue, the word would not be pronounced, its depth of meaning would not be forward sounded. Solitary, unprovoked, it aspired and aspirated, but vainly, expiring away as does the familiar flute or pipe in a *vanitas* still life. Blocked by the earth-residuum of a conscience, the passage of inwardness was not be aired by utterance until wind filled the sail and drove it seaward. By its gust of sailing wind, the element of air whipped up the spirited sea-passage that de-territorialized and re-normalized the earth.

The golden age of navigation was not a century of steamships. Elizabethan England had not subdued the ocean with wondrous techné, but still wooed it with its fleet of spars and canvas. Together the sea and the wind played upon man, contending which is the mightier.[4] At once humbled by the elements and thus emboldened, the melancholic word that had hitherto refused to give itself away submitted to being thus played upon on the high sea. Until the voyage out, however, the prince of fools with his variety of antics had ever reserved and preserved in double speech. With

insinuation and figuration his anti-play plays yet against play. Charging at the twin knaves that were to marshal him to knavery, the prince expostulated:

> You would play upon me, you would seem to know my stops, you would pluck out the heart of my mystery, you would sound me from the lowest to the top of my compass; and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak. 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me. (3.2.369-377)

Melancholic is the fool's heart of mystery. Beneath and conditioning the facility and superficiality of play is the depth and gravity of anti-play. Lies and truth, vanity and mortality, fairness and honesty, metaphor and meaning, appearance and inwardness—their dialectic interplay constitutes the structural duplicity of this protestant play and of a protestant sense of play. Doubled into the phenomenal and the noumenal, the earth is nonetheless left hanging off this improbable duality by the little patch of ground, that earth-residuum of a conscience. It is the wind and the sea that tear down barriers and undo categories, strip away trappings and lay bare what remains thereof. The result and aftermath of such expression and expenditure is a nakedness that has nothing to lose, and rid of all former speculation, is at last prepared to stake all, risk all, give all. Both physicality and temporality are being adjusted to a tragic key. Of the power that be, the repressed word notified his return, announcing to be "set naked on your kingdom" (4.7.44). Such nakedness re-conceives the ontology of play from one of protestant divided-ness toward that of a tragic totality where the inner is the outer and the outer is the inner.

Mimesis IV: Rome Re-incarnated?

Toward—that is, not there after all. The tragical historie of Hamlet, prince of Denmarke does not end in a thoroughly expressed tragic totality. The restricted economy of a protestant play has been liberated after the sea-passage, but as all liberations, it does not culminate in freedom or in anything really, but slumps into some ordinary mess, some charming anticlimax. A contingent series of mimetically unleashed violence offers the semblance of a denouement. Rivalry brings on an escalation of passions misfired and actions miscarried, and then alas, Laertes dies, and having thus been deprived of the other as a necessary provocateur, our mock sovereign at once loses all impetus to pursue further deeds. What play is it that ends with all dead yet not without that imperative of an exchange of forgiveness between the dying? Answer: a modern tragedy—modern in its pretense to or scruple of reconciliation, tragic in the tenuity of its intent as of its effect, and in the radical finitude of man being the beast and the sovereign. As a modern tragedy, *Hamlet* grows out of the seed of a protestant drama. It challenges its own protestant genealogy by seeking its Roman origin in a republic attempt of suicide and of founding.

Drinking what remains of the pearled cup, the hero expedites his death and orders to live on in others' breath, and what for?

> O, God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
> Things stand thus unknown, shall I leave behind
> me!
> If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
> Absent thee from felicity awhile
> And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
> To tell my story. (5.2.348-352)

This last note does not conclude in a tragic key a play that purports to be a tragedy, but in an epic, well, mock epic one. What do those last words of a Christian prince actually say, a wish to be redeemed by language and by language only, a need for civic immortality? The world is never to know. It knows only what it is told, but more, what it wants to know. Horatio, witness, remembrancer, chronicler, whose name has to it a strong Latin ring, its anagram claiming the office of historian, lives to tell the story—but whose, indeed? His narration, like a Homer's or a Virgil's, neither laments nor mourns; but unlike theirs, it shall not recount the words and deeds of heroes from the pedestal of the victor, but shall tell:

> Of carnal, bloody and unnatural acts,
> Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
> Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
> And, in this upshot, purposes mistook,
> Fall'n on th' inventors' heads. (5.2.385-389)

For the high purpose of a founding tale in the classical manner, the melancholic conscience of a protestant prince would have been subject to a re-interpretation as not private but public, not religious but civic, as Brutus' against Caesar. It would have befitted a Fortinbras to have the protestant prince not sanctified as a martyr, or bewailed as a victim, but praised and hailed as a hero and a soldier in the battle against tyranny and for the cause of the republic. As part of the legitimation and justification process of the new regime, the stately burial of the unwarlike prince nonetheless cannot but betray a strong sense of tragic irony. But not only that. For this burial serves at the same time also a rite of founding upon the ruins of the *ancien régime*. And for that the mode and the content of Horatio's epic delivery are not untinged with their own air of irony. An epic irony, if it shall come to that. While by the deeds of a Hamlet our playwright may be said to have reinvented the modern tragic, by the words of the survivor-historian he gestures toward something like a reinvention of the modern epic. This modern epic is modeled after Rome, that "most high and palmy state of Rome/a little ere the mightiest Julius fell" (1.1.113-114).

Horatio was keenly aware of the analogy and voiced it quite eagerly in his opening night-watch. The analogy goes further and deeper, until, with that typical pinch of Shakespearean irony, winds round and against itself. For if the rotten state of Denmark is consciously compared to that of Caesar's, the new state served by this founding rhetoric is not unlike that of Augustus, a burgeoning imperial Rome that ruled not without the pretense to a former republicanism. Yet it ultimately turns out to be Seneca's Rome that shapes the language and sentiments of the play, an overripe imperial Rome mirrored in the image of its own fall and decline. The Elizabethan English, with all their novel sea-craft and political agitation for the new, nonetheless dwelled at the foot of a long tale. The empire they were building was after and upon the ruins of the Roman Empire. This Roman model, be it republican, Augustan or imperial, differs qualitatively from the new Rome now being re-founded by the newly conquering or elected Fortinbras.

Deterritorialization VI: Pass and Passage

To re-enact Rome, meaning of course the republic: such has ever been the ambition of modern political philosophy and indeed of the French Revolution itself. But how are the moderns to re-enact the material condition under which the republic had once thrived? For Rome, the republic as a form of civic organization was not outgrown until the republic as a form of territoriality had metamorphosed into that of an empire, vast, continuous, limitless.[5] The expanded and metamorphosed territoriality of Rome posed a genuine question to the political form compatible with or adjustable to its thus changed geo-demographical condition. It was answered by fifteen centuries of Christianity. Whether or not this had been a satisfactory answer may partly be surmised from the late attempt of the Reformation to propose a different answer. This attempt to answer anew turns out to be raising a different question. This new question raised by Protestantism asks not the political form corresponding to an imperial territoriality, but rather inquires after the political consequences of the novel phenomenon of deterritorialization, and of a new kind of imperialism that emerged therewith. Out of the many state enterprise and privateering that went on at the high sea, the Leviathan rose not only as a de-territorialized polity, but also as a de-politicized maritime empire. The body politic is caught at the tangential point on the curve of its metamorphosis, where "the world were now but to begin, antiquity forgot, custom not known" (4.5.103-104). For such an Elizabethan England in the middle of its passage into a maritime imperial power, the question of succession begs the question of founding in both a theoretical and a practical sense. The uneasy princedom of a Hamlet explores the transitional or constitutive state of a maritime sovereignty in its political latency indistinguishable from political impotence. As much an end as it is a beginning, it is disclosed in its ability to succeed as little as it is able to found.

Succession presupposes a continuity of historical time; foundation presupposes a contiguity of historical space. The momentous dynamic of the course of

deterritorialization has both chased time out of joint and space out of locus. With time thus disjointed and space dislocated, neither succession nor foundation could be as they had always been conceived and experienced under the condition of a Roman territoriality. In the maritime emergence of modernity, both succession and foundation have sought a new mode of existence in the ontological potential contained in and unleashed by passing and passage. For in pass are folded and abridged both life and death, and a new life of the body politic. Parallel to the prince's sea-passage, Fortinbras asked quiet pass through the dominion of imperial Denmark to re-gain a little patch of ground from the Polack. The two passes run side by side, trotting the same disjointed historical time and treading the same fractured historical space, mirroring and interpreting each other, converging in the return of both princes. A double attempt could be said to have been made to regain the contiguity of historical space by regaining the ground and to restore the continuity of historical time by returning to Rome as the origin. The inter-imperial passage allows the de-territorializing force to be allied with and to become part of the re-territorializing force. The ambiguity of princedom is thus sorted out in this union of the two princes, where the death of the one means a civic afterlife in the other. Thus accomplished is the inconceivable task of succession as of foundation. From a protestant play to a modern tragedy, *Hamlet* is a potent parable for a mimetic, inter-imperial search for and constitution of a maritime sovereignty. Its end seems to promise a restoration of the order of time and a re-establishment of the *nomos* of the earth by the paradoxical founding of a new political body upon the unfathomable bottomless pit. The old is succeeded and the new founded, if only upon a pile of ghastly corpses, royal, laid low, once a high tale told, ready for a bravo and a *da capo*.

NOTES

1. Friedrich Hölderlin, “In Lovely Blue” in *Hymns and Fragments,* trans. Richard Sieburth (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 253.
2. Carl Schmitt, *Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G. L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press, 2003), 178.
3. Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (Routledge: London and New York, 1972), 11.
4. Joseph Conrad, the late nineteenth century sailor, admirer and story-teller of the great deep, thus notes the passing of the age of sailing-ships in his recollection: “The modern steamship advances upon a still and overshadowed sea with a pulsating tremor of her frame, an occasional clang in her depths, as if she had an iron heart in her iron body; with a thudding rhythm in her progress and the regular beat of her propeller, heard afar in the night with an august and plodding sound as of the march of an inevitable future. But in a gale, the silent machinery of a sailing-ship would catch not only the power, but the wild and exulting voice of the world’s soul.” See Joseph Conrad, *The Mirror of the Sea and A Personal Record* (Wordsworth Editions, 2008), 65.
5. Pierre Manent, *Metamorphoses of the City: On the Western Dynamic,* trans. Marc Lepain (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013), 137.