

PERIODIZATION, MODERNITY, NATION: BENJAMIN BETWEEN RENAISSANCE AND BAROQUE

Jane O. Newman

'The history of this age and its taste is still very obscure.'
(Johann Friedrich Herder on the Baroque, cited in Benjamin 1977: 167)

I. Periodization, Modernity, Nation

Herder's claim already more than two hundred years ago that the history of the Baroque was 'obscure' (the German reads: 'im Dunkeln', in the dark) is just as appropriate in our early twenty-first century as it was in his day, this in spite of the enormous amount of attention devoted by literary, art historical, and art theoretical scholars to both the period (c. 1550-1700) and its styles in the intervening years. Walter Benjamin was one of those engaged in the debates about the Baroque that were conducted with particular intensity beginning in the last decades of the nineteenth century and on into the early part of the twentieth century. The period and the concept are in fact at the centre of his (in)famously obscure *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama* (1928), which Benjamin often referred to as his 'Barockbuch', as, for example, in a letter to Gershom Scholem of 19 February, 1925 (Benjamin 1993: I, 374). Debates about the Baroque spread from the German-speaking countries of central Europe into the United States along with many of the European émigrés who found their new academic homes and livelihoods there during and after World War II. (Benjamin was of course not among them, having taken his own life in 1940 as he fled the Gestapo.) In their new home, these debates flowered in both explicit and implicit dialogue with the heavily ideological celebrations of the value of studying the Renaissance in the Cold War 'New World', celebrations also conducted by immigrant scholars with the help of 'indigenous' colleagues familiar with the landscape of pre- and inter-war European academe (Newman 2006). The Baroque nevertheless disappeared from the scene quite abruptly beginning in the mid- to late 1970s. Ever since, Renaissance and Early Modern Studies, often seen as antithetical to one another (Marcus 1992), have joined forces to jostle it aside. Because these latter terms are the ones that dominate the complex politics of period nomenclature that organize much academic

discourse about the study of the late fifteenth through the early seventeenth centuries today, it is worth revisiting both the chronology and the substance of their rise to a position of dominance in their original context and then considering the role of 'northern Renaissance Studies' in our post- or (perhaps somewhat differently configured) neo-Cold War world, depending on where one stands. To what end do we still study the Renaissance and Early Modern (rather than the Baroque) today? What are the assumptions and consequences of doing so as a matter of place?

Issues of place ('northern') and period ('Renaissance' Studies) are often related. I address periodization first. Michel de Certeau has argued that historiography creates periods by 'selecting' between what can be *understood* and what must be *forgotten* in order to obtain...intelligibility' (4). Periods so constructed become 'reified' and 'self-evident' (Davis 2008: 10). The conditions under which they came into being are thus forgotten in turn, as is the ideological work of elision that periodization performs. De Certeau nevertheless notes that there are always 'shards created by the selection' process, 'remainders left aside by explication' which 'surviv[e]' and 'come back' to 'discreetly perturb... [the] system of interpretation' constructed by their repression (4). The example of the production of the 'Middle Ages' as a period is particularly revealing of both the work of elision and the return of the repressed that de Certeau describes, and has recently been the object of much welcome theorization. Scholars have pondered, for example, the ways in which the 'periodizing operation' has over and over again found in the medieval a counterpoint to the tempos and concerns of an 'enlightened' 'modernity' that characteristically uses its 'forgetting' of a devout Middle Ages to identify itself as marching ever forward in a 'telic' trajectory of rational progress (Davis 2008: 4). At the same time, the invocation of the medieval has functioned in and for post-modernity as a way of divesting the present of precisely such putative 'advances', of the 'baggage of humanism, capitalism,... and triumphalist individualism' (Holsinger 2005: 197), in other words, when it reaches back over the demon Enlightenment to find the origins of a post-modern 'now' free of an instrumentalizing modernity's downsides (Davis 2008: 5-6). (As much as the progressive narrative of 'forgetting' the Middle Ages may seem to be challenged here, it is still the ghost in the machine. In embracing the medieval as 'modernity['s] most consistently abjected... temporal other', the post-modern in fact finds in the pre-modern 'transformative' and energizing ways to (re)invent itself as the new custodian of 'redemptive' forms of mysticism, eroticism, irrationalism, and so on, inherited from a past previously silenced, but now reborn — Holsinger 2005: 5). The medieval past is neither 'simply inherited' nor 'patiently reconstructed' when it is 'translated' into the present in these ways. Rather, in both cases, it is 'invoked', 'called into being', and, 'summoned' as a 'relic' 'from another place', to become the centerpiece of a 'whole system of thought' that,

whether modern or post-modern, consumes and replaces it (Holsinger 2005: 202, 4).

As revealing as contemporary critical periodization theory has been of the stakes involved in the role that the Middle Ages have been asked to play in the story of modernity, it has not yet addressed the full range of dyads in whose toils the medieval as the origin of the un-modern has classically been caught. Nor has the role of location, or place, been assessed in relation to these pairs. One of the most salient examples of why it is necessary to think period and place together of course involves the well-known claim that it was in fact the Renaissance (rather than an Enlightened 'modernity') that first broke with the Middle Ages and, in so doing, became what Jakob Burckhardt in 1860 so famously called the 'mother' of modern civilization in 'Europe' (21-2). It was (and often still is) this Renaissance—cannily defined as taking a step backwards in order to 'progress' beyond the medieval by resuscitating and fulfilling the promise of antiquity in its inauguration of a new 'modern' age—that has driven the narrative of modernity just as much as (yet also in tandem with) the Enlightenment. When understood in this way, the European Renaissance participates in what Julia Lupton has called the 'typological' logic that is 'one of the foundational principles of modern periodization' (23), a logic based on a hermeneutics of imitation, emulation, and figuration, whereby, just as the New Testament and Christianity are said to both repeat and complete—and thus contain, supersede, and cancel out—the Old Testament and Judaism too, the Renaissance resurrects, repeats, and replaces antiquity. When we 'nationalize' the European Renaissance by studying it via a typological calculus operating only within the confines of and culminating in the literary and cultural traditions of a single nation-state, in departments and seminars of English, French, or Italian, for example, we sacralize the state's cultural production in a similar way. When, in other words, the Renaissance as a historiographically and institutionally produced period is asked to mark the accession of a national tradition to its 'modern' maturity, it is deployed in uncritical fashion to play a role not unlike the one that many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theorists of the vernacular asked their traditions to play in the first place—this in spite of both the 'secularizing' work that Renaissance humanism allegedly did and the border-felling, pan-European universalism of the 'Renaissance' traditions with which we all deal. Medievalist and theorist Kathleen Biddick aptly calls this kind of period logic 'supersessionary' (2). It is worth asking whether it was not some version of a supersessionary Renaissance that became the banner under which not only the nineteenth- and early twentieth century European nation-states and the Cold War U.S. (as the custodial inheritor of the traditions that the Europe of two world wars could no longer protect), but also many other world cultural traditions (such as the Arab, Harlem, and Maori Renaissances, and more recently, the continent-spanning 'African' Renaissance too—see Schildgen 2006 and Ngugi 2009) marched in the interest of finding a seat at the table of

'modernity'. Where is the project of a regionalist 'northern Renaissance' located with respect to such trends?

Burckhardt's 'modern' Renaissance in Europe was of course originally joined at the hip with another period in addition to the medieval, namely, the Baroque, in a somewhat differently configured, although similarly dyadic debate, by both Burckhardt himself and his student and friend, Heinrich Wölfflin, most famously in his *Renaissance and Baroque* (1888) (see Brown 1982 and Warnke 1991). It has often been argued (incorrectly, I think) that in the Renaissance-Baroque relation, Wölfflin set the former above, over, and against the latter by characterizing the Baroque as the Renaissance's 'decay', and in the process created the 'historiographical monstrosity' (Hampton 1991) that the Baroque has become. Quite understandably, it is this Baroque that is often thought of these days as an alternative to the progressive genealogies of modernity associated with the periods said to have both preceded and followed it, namely, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, as the post modern avant la lettre, so to speak (see Moser 2000). It is also this Baroque that has been aligned with the neo-Baroque of the Latin American 'margins' (see Beverly 1988). Such readings of the Baroque as iconoclastic (by Christine Buci-Glucksmann and Gilles Deleuze, among others) and anti-hegemonic of course often cast themselves as indebted to Benjamin's work. And yet, at its very birth moment as a historiographic category in and around the time when Benjamin was writing his 'Baroque book', the period he was studying was in fact never all that far from the Renaissance; indeed, it was most often locked in an uncomfortable embrace with it as both an epoch and style. Indeed, as much as many theorists seem to have protested their entwinement at the time, the immense amount of energy spent trying to determine the extent of the Baroque's 'resistan[ce] to [the] typological' model (Lupton 1996: 34-5), and thus its categorical difference from the Renaissance, testifies to the difficulty of discerning and defining that difference.

I argue here that while Benjamin's inter-war project may be understood as trying to disentangle the Renaissance and the Baroque from one another in the case of German literature in particular, it often falls short of this goal. Its failures, or, if that is too strong, the struggle it enacts over the imbrication of the two periods is revealing of just how complicated it was (and still is) to disrupt the alignment of the Baroque with a Renaissance-like supersessionary model of the nation in the highly volatile contexts in which debates about periodization often occur. Such projects are in the end handicapped by the irreducible forward thrust of the figurative agenda that is at the heart of the period logic that emerges when the ideology of the nation is under duress; the power of the Baroque to offer a critical political perspective is hobbled as a result. This is not to conclude that the Baroque can never function as a challenge to a typologically framed and localized Renaissance. But both the timing and outcome of Benjamin's attempt at period theorization in the *Tragic Drama* book call attention to the ways in which, although

originally developed from a place of critique, even heterodox period concepts like the Baroque (and the post-modern, the post-colonial, and so on) tend to collapse into essentialism when yoked together with a politics of place. Examining at close range how period and place intersected in the case of Benjamin's German Baroque may provide an interesting purchase from which to observe the regionalist project of a 'northern Renaissance' as a possible alternative.

II. Benjamin and the Baroque

The *Tragic Drama* book was '[c]onceptualized', as Benjamin writes on the dedicatory page, in 1916, just one year after Heinrich Wölfflin published his famous *Principles of Art History*, in which the distinction between the two periods and styles that he had already theorized in his *Renaissance and Baroque* (1888) was articulated and illustrated in exhaustive detail. It is thus no surprise to discover that Benjamin took on a similar project when he embarked on his analysis of the contest between what he saw as a problematically 'progressive' version of the Baroque represented as the 'German Renaissance', on the one hand, and a recursive and thus potentially disruptive 'German Baroque', on the other, intending to crown the latter as the ultimate victor. He did so, moreover, as part of a subtle argument about the dangers of using periods to conceive of a specifically German modernity whose identity could only lie in the fulfilment of a kind of figural period logic, with past and foreign cultural achievements both absorbed and outdone by the nation's present glory. The full title of the *Tragic Drama* book is after all *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, which many scholars forget. Benjamin's 'natural history' of the 'form of the [German] *Trauerspiel*' (Benjamin 1977: 47, 53), which he understands as an un-Renaissance-like 'process of restoration' that is always 'imperfect and incomplete' (45), thus presented itself as a challenge to the notion of a hegemonic place from the very start.

Benjamin's *Tragic Drama* book theorizes the 'origin' ('Ursprung') rather than the 'genesis' ('Entstehung') of the German Baroque (45). The terms—and especially 'origin', which resonates here in complex counterpoint with Nietzsche's concept of the 'birth' ('Geburt') of tragedy—have occasioned much discussion and debate, very little of it about the issue of periodization, however. That the text can—and should—be read as part of a conversation at the time about how to conceive of literary historical phenomena in a new way becomes clear when we consider the many ways in which it engages with the work of a whole host of contemporary literary and art historians and art theorists, many of whom were worrying at precisely these issues. The *Tragic Drama* book was just one volume, in other words, in what we can imagine as 'Benjamin's Library', in literal terms, the holdings of Baroque-era texts and secondary studies of the Baroque in the Prussian State Library on Unter den Linden in Berlin, where he did much of his research for the book, and more figuratively, the greater archive of books and journals in which can be found the discussions that yielded the questions he poses in its pages.

The dimensions of this archive are marked by Benjamin's citations in both the body of his text and in the extensive notes that accompany it. Reconstructing several representative dialogues between his 'Baroque book' and the arguments of those of Benjamin's interlocutors who periodized specifically on behalf of the German nation around the same time may help reveal not only how confusing such debates about periodization were, but also how his recalcitrant theory of 'origin' may have been developed in response to them. And yet, while Benjamin's decision to involve himself in these debates may be understood as opportune, his final position in them was far from clear. Indeed, between 1871 and the 'triumphant' coming into being of a German 'nation' in the wake of the Franco-Prussian war, on the one hand, and that nation's definitive defeat in 1918, on the other, finding an answer to the question about exactly when Germany's 'modernity' could be said to have started, and whether the havoc it had wrought on both itself and its neighbors could actually be understood as advancing civilization or not, was no easy task. Some years later, in 1931, Benjamin wrote that his 'conception of history' was decisively 'against the possibility of an evolutionary and universal[izing] component in history' (Benjamin 1986: 442-3). The *Tragic Drama* book, completed in the post-war hunger years, is clearly skeptical about the implications of progressivist claims about a possible 'Renaissance' of Germany in the Baroque. It nevertheless does not always succeed in removing the latter period from the narrative of national fulfilment into which it had already been scripted at the time.

In 1935, just seven years after Benjamin's book on the German tragic drama appeared, the Parisian publishing house of Gallimard released a slim volume entitled *On the Baroque* by the Spanish philosopher and man of letters, Eugenio d'Ors. D'Ors's whimsical meditation captures the shape of the debates about the period at the time. At the end of the preface, for example, D'Ors characterizes his book as a 'fairy tale' (15) about his love affair with the Baroque. The term appears not to have been chosen lightly; d'Ors writes that 'Baroquism has something of a fatal femininity, a siren-like prestige, about it' (11). In addition to its un-manly anti-classicism, it may have been the seductive fecundity of the period that appealed to him, a fecundity that d'Ors inventories in an idiosyncratic chart, entitled 'Genre: *Barocchus*', midway through the book (161). There, in Linnean fashion, he indicates that the Baroque is far more than an 'oddly shaped pearl' or 'the fourth mode of the second figure in the scholastic nomenclature of syllogisms' that René Wellek would famously cite, but then reject, as possible definitions some ten years later in his 'The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship' (1946). Rather, d'Ors's Baroque spills out over the borders of the categories discussed by Wellek (and repeated more recently by Moser 2000: 78-9) and wanders (to extend d'Ors's sexualizing metaphors) promiscuously throughout cultural history, appearing as the 'Barocchus macedonius' and the 'Barocchus romanus', the 'Barocchus buddhicus' and the 'Barocchus tridentius, sive romanus, sive jesuiticus' in turn. According to

d'Ors's chart, there have been no fewer than 20 'species' of the Baroque since the 'prehistoric' 'Barocchus pristinus' 'among the savages' (162). The chart ends with version 22, the 'Barocchus posteabellicus' of d'Ors's—and Benjamin's—own immediate, wartime and post-Great War time (171). For d'Ors, the Baroque was thus less a specific period than a 'constant of culture' (99) adamantly liberated from a particular sequence and place. The claim is reminiscent of Nietzsche's description, in his *Human, All too Human* of 1879, of 'Baroque style' as a 'timeless phenomenon that periodically recurs' (see Barner 1975: 569) in ways that are clearly antithetical to the progressivist typological model.

Undertaken in a study originally intended as an academic thesis, Benjamin's 'love affair' with the Baroque a decade earlier was somewhat more staid than d'Ors's. It nevertheless also did battle—although ultimately with somewhat less success—with literary historical attempts to integrate the period that since Gottsched had been much maligned in the German tradition into a supersessionist model. The political, ideological, and aesthetic categories involved in such teleological constructions of literary history as a 'national' project were objects of particularly intense scrutiny in Germany beginning in the years after 1871. Petra Boden has shown that the often nationalistically inflected academic reform programs undertaken with greatest vigor in late nineteenth-century Germany benefited a curious collection of maverick periods, including Romanticism, Biedermeier, and the Baroque. Many of the scholars whose work Benjamin cites in the *Tragic Drama* book were caught up in such efforts and contributed in various fashions to a constellation of discourses which, up through the 1910s and 1920s, did not find the period 'obscure', 'marginal', or heterodox in ways that many students of Benjamin (and sometimes Benjamin himself) might have preferred. Rather, the Baroque was understood by many at the time as a privileged and even 'fashionable' (Walzel 1917: 42) object of study, a field in the midst of its 'heroic' phase (Voßkamp 1991: 684) and 'golden years' (Alweyn 1965: 9) at the time. The celebration of the Baroque in the early twentieth century in both academic and more popular work, which Benjamin identifies early on in the *Tragic Drama* book as a 'sentimental [but] nevertheless positive tendency' (54), helps explain how it was possible for him to have considered it a legitimate object of study in the first place—even as the narratives into which it was sutured by virtue of such endorsements also gave him pause.

As opaque as the first twenty pages of the *Tragic Drama* book are—Benjamin himself was in all likelihood referring to them when he wrote to Scholem on 19 February, 1925 that parts of the Epistemo-Critical Prologue were 'an outrageous Chutzpa' (Benjamin 1993: I, 372)—they were not the reason for the recommendation by university personnel in Frankfurt that Benjamin withdraw it from consideration as his *Habilitation*, or thesis, the acceptance of which would have permitted him to offer university lectures. These pages were not handed in with the rest of the study; rather, they appeared only later in the version of the

book published in 1928. Without them, the *Tragic Drama* book begins, in the section identified by the running header at the top of the page, 'The Dismissal and Misunderstanding of Baroque Tragedy' ('Barocktragödie'), with an old-fashioned, or at least conventional, overview of the 'previous history of the German literary Baroque' (48). The strategic (mis)use of the term 'tragedy' in the header to explain existing misinterpretations of what Benjamin insists is not Renaissance-like 'tragedy', but, rather, Baroque 'tragic drama' ('Trauerspiel'), points to one of the main targets of his complaints about prior scholarship writ large, namely its failure to differentiate between the imitative culture of the Renaissance, with its typological beholdenness to ancient tragedy, and the 'new' forms of Baroque 'Trauerspiel'. While Benjamin may have sought later to distance himself from the tribe of academics who chose not to accept him, the methodological and theoretical issues which he engages, not only in these more traditional, or 'profane' (Hanssen 1998: 45) parts of the Prologue, but also in the apparently more unorthodox opening pages that he added later, suggest that both sections may be read as dialoguing with the most important debates about the Baroque circulating among scholars at the time.

Benjamin's more or less workmanly overview of recent scholarship in the final section of the Epistemo-Critical Prologue begins by noting the considerable barriers erected already in the grand narratives of nineteenth-century German literary history to understanding the period of the Baroque and its plays. Without going into detail, he reports, for example, the suspicion on the part of the proto-Romantic and nationalist 'philologists of the school of Grimm and Lachmann' of the dramatic texts authored by the 'educated bureaucrat[ic]' class to which the German Baroque authors and playwrights (Martin Opitz, Andreas Gryphius, and Daniel Caspar von Lohenstein, among others) belonged, texts deemed by these mid-to-late nineteenth century scholars to not have been sufficiently devoted to excavating the achievements of the German *Volk* to be the models for a coming German nation (48). Because 'Baroque drama' was interested in neither 'German legend' nor 'German history', Benjamin writes, it was necessarily at odds with this era and kind of work (49), whose major charge Herbert Jaumann has subsequently described as having been to call for a 'pious and piety-provoking' reading of the tradition of German literature (227). It was these literary historians whose practices blocked an 'objective appreciation' of the Baroque (51), he writes, since they saw it as the primary duty of the 'German Poet' to 'administer' ('verwalten') the nation's indigenous 'cultural capital' (Fohrmann 1991: 586). By definition, neither the highly complex and learned texts of the Baroque nor their non-'*völkisch*' and cosmopolitan authors could rise to this task. It is only ironic, then, that at the end of the chapter Benjamin notes in defence of the Baroque 'men of letters' (55) that they, unlike their modern counterparts, were in fact highly successful servants of the state. Indeed, the 'literature in Germany in the seventeenth century' was central to the more or less patriotic 'rebirth' of the 'nation' (55-6),

even if no such 'nation' existed at the time. In spite of his dismissal of the '[o]lder research', the rhetoric that emerges in Benjamin's comments on the Baroque here thus seems to characterize the period as a kind of substitute Renaissance in spite of itself, especially in terms of its place of pride in a nascent economy of national culture.

Nevertheless, it is precisely the more recent wave of apologetic scholarship about the Baroque with which Benjamin would do battle in the Prologue, first of all because its arguments about the 'Aristotelianization' of dramatic form fall back into a critical vocabulary associated with the historical Renaissance proper; the plays of the age that followed it become evidence of a 'distort[ed]', un-modern, and 'incompetent renaissance of tragedy' (50) as a result. Moreover, explicitly defending the Baroque as an extension of the Renaissance in this way, as several scholars had done, ultimately involved the German literary tradition in what Benjamin identifies as a narrative of period 'necessity' ('Notwendigkeit') (52-3) not unrelated to the problematic 'typological' model that Lupton describes. Representative of these two kinds of damaging literary historical and literary critical trends are, for Benjamin, *Seneca and German Renaissance Drama* (1907) by the well-known Germanist Paul Stachel (1880-1919), which was one of the first close studies of the texts of the Silesian playwrights that are in fact the focus of Benjamin's book, and the much more recent *German Baroque Poetry: Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo* (1924), by Herbert Cysarz (1896-1985) who, a specialist on the Baroque and a soon-to-be-geese-stepping member of National Socialist academe (see Becher), should be seen as Benjamin's perverse *doppelgänger*. (In spite of his disagreements with Cysarz in the Prologue, Benjamin goes on to cite the former's 1924 book on the Baroque—that was ironically his (Cysarz's) successful *Habilitation*—over and over again in the *Tragic Drama* book.)

Stachel's and Cysarz's books bracket the decades during which the field of Baroque Studies was in its 'golden years'. Even though Benjamin dismisses them together here (50-3), the two scholars' approaches to the Baroque were nevertheless as methodologically different from one another as were their authors. Parts of Stachel's book had in fact been written in 1904 as his doctoral dissertation in Berlin under Erich Schmidt (1853-1913), master of the old-style philology that Benjamin condemned (see Höppner 1998). By contrast, twenty years later, Cysarz had just completed his doctoral work in Vienna under the guidance of Walter Brecht, who was later to serve as the liaison between Benjamin and Hugo von Hofmannsthal in arranging for Hofmannsthal to publish the third section of the second chapter of the tragic drama book in Hofmannsthal's *New German Essays* (*Neue Deutsche Beiträge*) in 1927. What Stachel and Cysarz shared is nevertheless clear from the titles of their books, namely, a belief that the best defence of the texts of the Baroque was a good offence. Their common weapon was precisely the one

that Benjamin rejects, namely the association of the German Baroque with the Renaissance within a national frame.

Stachel's *Seneca and German Renaissance Drama* performs this supersessionist move the most overtly by offering as a more or less backhanded defence of the drama of the German Baroque the claim that it belongs to and participates in a continuous lineage of Senecan tragedy from the plays of the Roman master through the French and Dutch Humanist school drama of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This genealogical scenario is the familiar one that animates what we might actually want to consider the fundamentally counter-figural (and thus less than energizing) narratives of the vernacular Renaissances in general, which found legitimacy in the work of the Moderns only as the by-product of their dependency on the Ancients. While Stachel must in some sense apologize that it is the 'unnatural monster' (2) of Seneca whose work is the decisive factor in linking the Germans to the past in this way, his opening statement in fact claims that the Germans thereby achieved a kind of 'modern' legitimacy in the same way as prior critics had shown Elizabethan as well as French and Dutch drama to have done, namely, by demonstrating their 'Renaissance' side as a matter of structural indebtedness. Indeed, the more the German tragic dramas can be said to resemble the plays not just of Seneca and Sophocles, for example, but also of Shakespeare, Vondel, Corneille, and Jean de Mairet, the more legitimately 'Renaissance' they become. Although 'latecomers' to the imitator party, so to speak, the Germans thus acquire stature in this argument not merely by mimicking the Ancients, but also by joining the ranks of prior inheritor cultures. To seal this typological deal, Stachel invokes the example of Martin Opitz who, as author of the first vernacular poetics in German (1624), is said to have brought 'the classicistic Renaissance' to Germany with his translation of Seneca's *The Trojan Women* into German in 1636. Here, 'all that is Roman' is 'teutonified' ('germanisiert'), according to Stachel, and 'the ancient world view replaced by the modern' (187). The designation of Opitz as both 'classicistic' and 'modern' reveals the paradoxically progressivist underpinnings of his Baroque-as-Renaissance dependency theory. It is thus that Stachel quite logically (although Benjamin claims mistakenly) uses the term 'tragedy' (rather than 'tragic drama', or *Trauerspiel*) to refer to the individual German plays; his closing arguments describe Andreas Gryphius's creation of a specifically German 'tragic form' (274), for example, and Daniel Caspar von Lohenstein's plays as contributions to the tradition of 'German tragedy of the seventeenth century' (324) as well. This collapsing of 'tragic drama' into 'tragedy' is the critical narrative in which Benjamin seeks to intervene by mercilessly critiquing it, both here in the Prologue and in the first section of Chapter Two of the *Tragic Drama* book, 'Tragedy and Trauerspiel', where he develops a methodology that relies on the work of scholars such as Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff and Kurt Latte to help him keep ancient tragedy and the 'modern' tragic drama firmly apart. The fact that Benjamin's argument in Chapter

Two can be read in two ways, as an interruption of the Baroque-as-Renaissance construction, to be sure, but also as a supersessionary narrative of its own, such that the Baroque tragic drama can become the 'origin' of what Benjamin calls the 'non-renaissance' (59) of 'modern German drama' (60), shows how very hard it was to break free of the ideology of 'progress' once a specific national literature became involved.

Like Stachel's, Herbert Cysarz's engagement with the Baroque is his 1924 *German Baroque Poetry: Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo* aims to redeem the period in the face of its earlier detractors. Cysarz calls Wilhelm Scherer's famously dismissive rendering of the Baroque in the late nineteenth century a 'caricature' of the period in an earlier essay that became part of his book (1923: 243) and a 'perfidious distortion' in the book Benjamin cites (1924: 20, n.3). Even though he is committed more explicitly than Stachel to defining the Baroque as its own period, as an 'organic unity' (20), Cysarz does so by deploying tropes about the Baroque as Renaissance similar to the earlier scholar's and thus earns Benjamin's disdain just as Stachel did. 'The Baroque is our modern literature's first struggle with antiquity', Cysarz writes (1923: 245); elsewhere, it is 'an imitation of antiquity' (247), 'a systematic imitation of ancient linguistic art' (40), and a 'chain of receptions' (1924: 29) by poets who 'obediently go to the schools of Romance literatures and the Ancients' (7). Paradoxically, such claims are both overtly figural and anti-progressivist at one and the same time. Like all other 'Renaissance literatures', the German Baroque seeks only the 'imitation and trumping of the forms of antiquity' (1924: 95); yet, precisely in these terms, it can only fail to measure up. Indeed, the German Baroque is so Renaissance-like that it refuses 'originality at all costs' (128). In the end, Cysarz argues, even the often desperate attempts of the German poets of the seventeenth century to get beyond their 'antiquifying' (50, 75, 129, 153, 165) and imitative work must remain 'unsuccessful' (6); their 'powerlessness' (296) dooms them to stasis, he laments. – It would be difficult to characterize this way of 'redeeming' the German Baroque as anything other than the singularly 'negative valorization' of a failed 'pseudo-Renaissance' that Cysarz in fact admits that his assessment is (292).

Ironically, it may well have been Cysarz's interest in defining the properties of the Baroque in the 'sphere of German linguistic art' (1924: 14) in particular (properties that he claims derived from a German 'religious, national, and literary foundation', 51, and that Benjamin in fact himself goes on to privilege later in the *Tragic Drama* book) that led him (Cysarz) to introduce what is ultimately the progressivist stylistic and literary-historical logic to which Benjamin takes most exception at the end of the Epistemo-Critical Prologue. According to Benjamin, Cysarz sees the works of the Baroque merely as a 'preliminary stage' (Benjamin 1977: 52) in the story of German literature. For Benjamin, attempting to define the role of the Baroque as 'preparatory' (1924: 6) in this way by claiming that it had only a transitional role to play in the 'rebirth' of the German literary

tradition that culminated in Weimar Classicism, reveals where Cysarz's Renaissance really lies. For Cysarz, there is a nearly direct line of continuity, that is, between a quasi-Burckhardtian celebration of the individual in the Renaissance (1924: 5, n.1) and the 'individualism of the classical era' (35 and 209). The logical result of claims such as these is that the seventeenth-century German Baroque can in fact *not* be a Renaissance, but remains, rather, only a "proto" and "pseudo" form thereof (19, 21, 40, 274), with the final successful 'wedding' of the German tradition with antiquity occurring only later, 'toward the end of the eighteenth century' (291), in the works of the period that he goes on to call the German 'High Renaissance' by Goethe and Schiller. Seen in this way, Cysarz's Baroque is caught up in the same progressivist logic as the Renaissance proper and can thus function only as a 'means' to a 'modernizing' end, Benjamin writes (52). Benjamin had commented at length and somewhat condescendingly to Scholem that, as useful as he found some parts of the book by Cysarz as a 'rising Viennese academic', its confused logic in fact revealed that its author had succumbed to 'the vertiginous attraction' of the antithetical period of the Baroque itself (Benjamin 1993: I, 354). Cysarz's indecisiveness about which 'Renaissance' to measure the Baroque against—the historical or the Weimar classical—is a case in point. With Weimar Classicism functioning as the only authentic promoter of 'Renaissance ways' (1924: 269), according to Cysarz, the Baroque is in any case demoted to being a literary-historical and stylistic second-class citizen. The German tradition writ large is nevertheless redeemed, destined as it is by 'necessity' to achieve grander heights.

It is Cysarz's classicizing logic and narrative of national necessity that are Benjamin's explicit target, both here in the Epistemo-Critical Prologue and in the second chapter of the *Tragic Drama* book, where he dismisses this kind of attempt to 'redeem' the Baroque as no more than 'apologetic excuse[s]' (53) for the period as 'a necessary transitional stage' (60) on the way to Weimar glory. It is only ironic, then, that the overall argument in Cysarz's *German Baroque Poetry* for the essentially Lutheran origins and nature of a northern Baroque (1924: 45), and the Viennese scholar's insistence on 'a deeply religious Lutheran spirituality' as the foundation of the 'aesthetic' achievements of the period (232, note 1), seem to have escaped Benjamin's attention. Cysarz's argument in fact parallels Baroque scholar Fritz Strich's in his (Strich's) article, 'Renaissance and Reformation', which had appeared in 1923 just several months after Cysarz's initial essay on the Baroque in the same journal. Benjamin knew and cites Strich's work throughout the *Tragic Drama* book. More importantly, Benjamin himself uses multiple references to the work of Aby Warburg and the so-called Warburg School to explain the rootedness of the allegorical nature of Baroque drama in specifically Lutheran sixteenth-century traditions later in the *Tragic Drama* book in Chapter Three, 'Allegory and Trauerspiel'. In both cases, the possibility of a German 'Renaissance' during both the Reformation and the Baroque era too depends heavily on Lutheran—and thus

German (rather than Reformed Swiss or French)—Protestantism. Memories of the recent and highly ideological quadricentennial jubilee of Luther's posting of his 95 Theses in 1517 at the height of the war may have helped this narrative along. (On the 1917 celebrations of Lutheranism, see Newman 2009.) In any case, what such claims make clear is that fleeing absorption into the progressivist narrative of an Italianate or Romance Renaissance did not protect Benjamin (and others) from finding in the Baroque a specifically national form of 'rebirth'.

III. Baroque Legacies

It might seem quite 'baroque'—in the sense of highly distorted or convoluted—to suggest that Benjamin's version of the period found a further and much more decisively nationalist afterlife in Nazi-era scholarship. The labyrinth of direct and indirect citations of Benjamin's *Tragic Drama* book in post-1933, Party-sponsored texts nevertheless reveals the uncomfortable truth that there seems to have been something quite acceptable to at least some National Socialist scholars in Benjamin's thought, which, like much intellectual labor from the late 1920s through the early 40s in German Literary Studies (*Germanistik*) in general and in German Baroque Literary Studies in particular, had its origins in the late nineteenth century and post-World War I disciplinary debates that I have traced here (see Newman 2007). That Benjamin's ideas about the Baroque are present in these texts at some important methodological and ideological as well as semantic levels serves as an illustration of what Wilhelm Voßkamp, building on the important work of Hans-Harald Müller, has designated as precisely the *absence* of a 'break in continuity' between studies of the Baroque of this earlier period and those of the Nazi years. Voßkamp argues that while some of the 'institutional assumptions' of German Literary Studies of course changed after 1933 (699), certain methodological and 'theoretical academic' premises did not (702). The discovery in post-1933 Nazi scholarship on the Baroque of both Benjamin's work and of ideas that it shared with work on the Baroque from the teens and the 20s confirms Voßkamp's point, which is indirectly also Benjamin's own in his definition of 'origin' as a combination of pre- and post-histories caught in the complex 'edd[ies]' of history (1977: 45). The Nazi contributions to Baroque Studies in which his work appears testify to some of the most extreme ends to which national periodization schemas can be put. Benjamin was perhaps wise to warn us that '[w]hen the idea absorbs a sequence of historical formulations', it need not be understood as 'do[ing] so... in order to construct a unity out of them' (46). As we consider the fate of period studies when they are associated with place, we would do well to remember his words.

University of California at Irvine

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