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Anthropocene Creatures

The notion of the Anthropocene has changed the ways we think about human life: human life is now also a geological force, a vulnerable species or only one part of ‘terraforming assemblages composed of humans, nonhuman species, and technics’.¹ These altered spatiotemporal parameters invite us to consider cultural memory, understood as the ways in which cultures confront the present through their ongoing reimagining of the past, in the context of other planetary storage systems and technologies of transmission; after all, we now know that the atmosphere, the cryosphere and the surface of the Earth are so many archives that record and preserve the deep history of the species. The entanglement of natural and human histories does not mean that the distinction between the human and the nonhuman collapses; rather, it means that neither the object nor the subject of cultural memory have ever been comfortably human. Cultural memory, in the Anthropocene, is no longer the preserve of the liberal humanist subject, a notion that, as this special issue argues, has remained endemic to cultural memory studies.

The disturbed agency and intensified vulnerability of human life in the Anthropocene can be understood as a form of ‘creatureliness’. While the (relatively limited) uptake of this notion in the domain of animal studies emphasizes ‘the condition of exposure and finitude that affects all living bodies whatever they are’,² it is especially the work of Eric Santner at the crossroads of political theology, psychoanalysis and cultural history that has underlined that this condition affects human life in a particularly intense way. Human vulnerability, for Santner, is never only a biological condition, as it is amplified by an intense awareness of the fragility of the social, cultural, economic and religious forms that orient and sustain our lives.³ None of these forms ever adequately contain human desires and anxieties, and they instead end up generating insistent but elusive pressures of their own that they can never hope to absorb.

If creatureliness, for Santner, emerges through life’s exposure to sovereign power, the radical distribution and disunification of sovereignty in the Anthropocene has made creatureliness a more pluriform affliction.⁴ Creatureliness in the Anthropocene needs to factor in geological and biological

unsettlements that Santner's problematic humanism underestimates. Such an updated form of Anthropocene creatureliness, which emphasizes the intersection of biological, geological, social and psychological pressures, is intimated in Julia Reinhard Lupton's work on Shakespeare. Lupton connects creatureliness to the relations 'between animate things in general and their realization in the form of humanity' as well as to spatial disorientations: the creature, she notes, is 'adrift between the cosmos in its vast totality [...] and the particular worlds defined by culture and nation'.⁵ Against Santner's human exceptionalism, then, Lupton's work underlines creaturely life's exposure to other life forms and to a destabilized Earth. This update is particularly pertinent in the Anthropocene, which has often been taken to annul 'all "our" concepts of horizon, milieu, ethos and polity'.⁶ Particularly categories that we tend to associate with modernity – democracy, the nation, the human subject, freedom – are challenged; for one thing, the Anthropocene gives the lie to the idea that the modern subject is the sole agent of history and that the Earth is only a passive resource.⁷ Santner notes that it is especially 'at such natural historical fissures or caesuras in the space of meaning' that the creaturely dimension of human existence becomes inescapable.⁸ In a shift that Santner's work does not anticipate, the Anthropocene makes these natural historical fissures also a geological and biological reality, as the human species is now faced with the prospect of its possible extinction and as the Earth morphs beyond the moderations of the Holocene.

Lupton's work not only begins to imagine a form of creatureliness attuned to the Anthropocene, it also presents this imagining as an intervention in cultural memory. Through her focus on Shakespeare, Lupton returns to an early modern archive that chronicles the emergence of the modern subject. Her retrieval of this archive remembers modernity differently: as an anxious effort to police the borders between the human and the nonhuman, as a tenuous balancing act between human agency and the forces and afflictions that assault it. The return to early modernity reminds us that Anthropocene creatureliness has a history. A cultural memory studies sensitive to the human's creaturely dislocations, I propose, can help us gain purchase on the challenges of the Anthropocene by recovering archives that record past moments when human life was affected by a particularly dramatic reorganization of its relation to the Earth. Drawing on theoretical resources from the fields of ecocriticism, critical animal studies, literary studies and political theology, such a creaturely cultural memory studies can recover a hidden history of creaturely dislocation to confront present disturbances. In this way, it can unsettle the one-to-one relation between *cultural* and *human* memory.

For Lupton, Shakespeare's drama provides a privileged site for tracing the contours of a creaturely life that can resonate in the present. Drama, she notes, is 'the medium that most insistently stages [the] contest between the one and the many: between the one life worth living and the many lives that circle, support, and subtend it'.⁹ As 'the genre *par excellence* of plurality', drama stages the multiple forms of exposure and relatedness that the ascendancy of the liberal humanist subject had to disavow.¹⁰ Shakespeare has cus-

tomarily been associated with the advent of modernity and the emergence of the human. While few go as far as Harold Bloom's hyperbolic claim that Shakespeare 'invented the human as we continue to know it',¹¹ it is nevertheless customary to credit Shakespeare's plays with cementing the link between memory and personal, as well as national, identity.¹² What makes Shakespeare's work – or, in the case of this essay, episodes in its reception – a particularly promising resource for a creaturely cultural memory studies, then, is that it makes it possible to unforget the human creature at the very site where it was, on a dominant reading, erased by the consolidation of the modern subject and the modern nation.

The association between Shakespeare and personal, as well as national, identity has been especially significant in the German context. After Johann Gottfried Herder and the *Sturm und Drang* 'discovered Shakespeare for Germany' in the late eighteenth century,¹³ Shakespeare's works, and especially *Hamlet*, served as a conduit for the anxieties and hopes besetting Germany's belated nationhood and for the tenuous relations between culture and politics.¹⁴ For Herder, Shakespeare's break with ancient and classicist theatrical conventions showcases the 'freedom and self-determination' that German aesthetics will come to ascribe to art – and to extend to the modern individual and the nation.¹⁵ When Jacob Burckhardt, in the late nineteenth century, casts the Renaissance – and the Baroque as its more properly German variant¹⁶ – as 'the beginnings of the accession of the sovereign state to its "modern" maturity',¹⁷ Shakespeare comes to occupy a crucial place in that maturation. And if the foundation of the nation in 1870 officially spells the end of the anxious identification between Germany and the irresolute figure of Hamlet, Andreas Höfele has shown that Shakespeare's work in more subterranean ways continued to animate anxieties over German personhood and nationhood for most of the twentieth century.¹⁸

Remarkably, it is in the context of this 'German Shakespeare' that we see the most elaborate engagement with the notion of creatureliness (*das Kreatürliche*). In the work of Erich Auerbach, Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt, concerns over spatial and existential dislocation are articulated through engagements with the work of Shakespeare, which in all three cases draw on figures of creatureliness. All three intervene in the German cultural memory of Shakespeare to retrieve moments of dislocation and creaturely abandonment. For Auerbach, Benjamin and Schmitt alike, Shakespeare's stage exposes beleaguered political, economic, cultural, religious and social forms to the disturbances and excitations that beset the early modern reorganization of the Earth. Less interested in philological accuracy than in foregrounding the creaturely dimension of the life Shakespeare stages, these authors open up national cultural memory to bewildering encounters with earthly realities that undermine the discreteness of the individual, the nation and the human alike. As comparable disturbances afflicted the lives of these authors, their returns to Shakespeare do not forge a memorial continuity, but rather explore the half-hidden affinities between different historical moments of spatial reorientation. This, I argue, makes their work a vital

archive for attuning cultural memory studies to the creatureliness that marks the Anthropocene.

Auerbach's Earth

Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* is widely recognized as an intervention in German – and even European – cultural memory. Written in Istanbul during the Second World War, the book highlights the productive historical interactions between Germanic and Romance literature at a time when these cultures are at war, and it affirms the powers of literary language and cultural difference at a time when these achievements are under threat. What has been less widely observed is that it figures the geopolitical dislocations it engages in terms of creatureliness – a creatureliness it also observes in Shakespeare. Auerbach's wartime work, and most notably his return to the early modern precedents of modern realism, are propelled by the pressures of a rapidly self-cancelling global order – what Auerbach, in a letter to Walter Benjamin in 1937, called 'a new International of triviality' and a vapid 'culture of Esperanto', and which he later sees perpetuating itself during the Cold War.¹⁹ *Mimesis*, that is, is a missive from an increasingly destabilized Earth, and its intervention in cultural memory retrieves a creaturely archive that can help make sense of these disorientations.

On the face of it, the structure of *Mimesis* – twenty chapters ranging chronologically from Homer and the Old Testament to Virginia Woolf – suggests a supersessionist account of modernity, while the book's sustained focus on 'reality' (*Wirklichkeit*) may seem to cast the history of Western literature as a story of gradual enlightenment. Yet the details of Auerbach's account reveal a much more chequered picture. The modern conquest of 'triumphant earthly life' and of human autonomy in Boccaccio, Rabelais and Montaigne is shadowed by a less confidently humanist undercurrent.²⁰ It is in the chapters on Dante, Antoine de la Sale and Shakespeare, which frame and interrupt those on the early modern humanists, that creaturely forces disturb what may initially seem like a smooth and humanizing progression. Crucially, they do so under the pressure of territorial reorientations. These disturbances first surface in Auerbach's reading of Dante – the central figure in Auerbach's career, as he is in *Mimesis*. Dante, for Auerbach, presents not only the culmination of an integrated Christian world, but also an almost involuntary breakthrough to a (literally) godforsaken earthly existence. Indeed, if it is 'the Christian idea of the indestructibility of the entire human individual' that powers Dante's realism, the sheer reality of the 'earthly beings and passions' his work evokes is so powerful it in one stroke abandons that framework.²¹ Instead of an orderly Christian world, we get 'a direct experience of life which overwhelms everything else [...] an illumination of man's impulses and passions which leads us to share in them without restraint'.²² Dante's earthly realism rivets human life to the body and excites it to involuntary sympathy; it generates an excess of vitality that no cosmic order is able to contain. It is impossible to miss the echoes between Dante's Earth and the

planetary reorientation that afflicts Auerbach and inspires his intervention in German cultural memory. It is this echo, I propose, that a creaturely cultural memory studies can amplify in the Anthropocene.

If this creaturely excess is neatly humanized in the work of Boccaccio, Rabelais and Montaigne, it resurfaces in the work of the obscure fifteenth-century Franco-Burgundian writer Antoine de la Sale, composed in the context of the Hundred Years' War.²³ It is here that *Mimesis* uses the term 'creatural' (*kreatürlich*; both 'creaturely' and 'creatural' are customary and equivalent translations) for the first time to characterize de la Sale's emphasis on 'crass effects' and on 'excess and crude degeneracy' – elements that express 'man's subjection to suffering and transitoriness'.²⁴ De la Sale's 'unconcealed creatural realism' (*hüllenlose kreatürliche Realistik*) insists that underneath the human's 'class insignia' there is 'nothing but the flesh'.²⁵ For Auerbach, as for Benjamin, creaturely life is generated when cultural conventions and social structures break down and the human is abandoned to its earthly vulnerability.

Mimesis's Shakespeare continues the alliance between territorial upheaval and creaturely exposure. For Auerbach, Shakespeare's characters are adrift between a medieval faith that no longer functions and a modern individualism that has not yet arrived. Shakespeare's world changes 'by leaps and bounds', and his drama is a record of these ruptures and displacements. It is decidedly *not* a celebration of human diversity; for Auerbach, Shakespeare lacks an egalitarian impulse, and his outlook is 'altogether aristocratic'.²⁶ Rather than the 'magical and polyphonic cosmic coherence' that the Renaissance officially celebrates, then, Shakespeare's 'physical-creatural' lives are haunted by 'the spirits of the dead and other supernatural beings', by ghosts and witches, by the 'silly and senile';²⁷ Shakespeare's world is a shifty and leaky assemblage that is 'perpetually reengendering itself out of the most varied forces'.²⁸ Pervaded by '[a]n immense system of sympathy', it perpetuates the unrestrained emotive participation that Dante's *Inferno* released and that cannot be contained by the structures and strictures of Renaissance humanism; his work offers '[t]he dynamic throbbing of elemental forces', not the elevation of the human.²⁹

If Dante, against his best intentions, already intimates a radical rupture with a theological *Weltbild*, Auerbach underlines that Shakespeare adds a geopolitical spin to that sense of perplexity: his world was upset by 'the effect of the great discoveries which abruptly widened the cultural and geographical horizon and hence also men's conception of possible forms of human life'.³⁰ Auerbach notes that 'the secret forces of life' that Shakespeare unleashes are later contained by 'restrictive countermovements' such as Protestantism, the Counterreformation, science or absolutism – the official face of modernity.³¹ Still, these forces persist as a hidden undercurrent that connects Shakespeare's early modernity to Auerbach's – and, as we will see, Benjamin's and Schmitt's – present as different chapters in the history of creaturely life and of the human's shifting relation to the Earth.

Walter Benjamin's engagement with Shakespeare dates back to 1925, when he wrote his failed *Habilitationsschrift*, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, which was finally published in 1928. That book's preoccupation with Shakespeare is in one sense surprising: the book is officially dedicated to the *German* Baroque, and it studies the *Trauerspiel* (as opposed to the more prestigious genre of tragedy) as a distinctly German genre. The book participates in a remarkable campaign (mainly inspired by Jacob Burckhardt and Heinrich Wölfflin) in German intellectual life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that evokes the Baroque as the quintessentially German variant of the Renaissance – as equally glorious, but decidedly less reliant on Italian (that is, non-German) sources.³² Still, the inclusion of Shakespeare – and especially the prominent mobilization of *Hamlet* – is less surprising when we consider it as an intervention in German cultural memory and situate it in relation to the massive effort, since the late eighteenth century, to recast that play as at heart a German one.³³ While Benjamin is acutely aware of these German traditions of Baroque and Shakespeare scholarship, his book resists all associations of national uplift. It paints the Baroque world as one of pure immanence, in which human creatures are hopelessly abandoned by the divine. In the world of the *Trauerspiel*, even the sovereign is 'confined to the world of creation; he is the lord of creatures, but he remains a creature'.³⁴ The spatial and existential shifts that distress Benjamin's world, then, consist in a movement of *contraction* that reduces the world to the globe, to the stage or to the court (the setting of most *Trauerspiele*). What has disappeared from Benjamin's 'emphatically "mundane", earth-bound, corporeal' Baroque world is any transcendent dimension.

Benjamin's typically short allusions to *Hamlet* are dispersed through his notoriously idiosyncratic text. His most extensive discussion reveals the affinity between Benjamin's take on the play's 'tortured worldliness' and the eerie vitality of Dante's underworld that Auerbach evokes (and it is such affinities that a creaturely cultural memory studies can make visible through its principled focus on archives that record moments of terrestrial disorientation).³⁵ One difference between the traditional tragic hero and the characters of a *Trauerspiel* like *Hamlet*, for Benjamin, is that the latter can never really die: 'Whereas the tragic hero, in his "immortality", does not save his life, but only his name, in death the characters of the *Trauerspiel* lose only the name-bearing individuality [*die benannte Individualität*], and not the vitality [*Lebenskraft*] of their role'.³⁶ The death of Hamlet, then, in no way 'mark[s] the end of an epoch' as it is removed from all tragic necessity and is merely the consequence of 'a completely external accident'.³⁷ There is nothing transformative in this death, as it is merely the random encounter of a human creature and one of the 'fateful stage-properties' that crowd the Baroque scene.³⁸ For Benjamin, creatureliness not only signals a fatal removal from transcendent meaning, but also a helpless exposure to earthly things: 'Once human life has sunk into the merely creaturely [*in den Verband des bloßen kreatürlichen*], even the life of apparently dead objects secures power over it'.³⁹ Instead of a

human order overseen by divine authority, the Baroque is a deranged world that oscillates between objects that 'tower [...] oppressively over the horizon' and an unruly cast of 'dreams, ghostly apparitions, the terrors of the end'.⁴⁰ *Hamlet's* creatureliness, then, is a measure of human life's proximity to both the subhuman and the supernatural others that crowd the Earth.

Benjamin underscores the irredeemably earthbound character of Baroque life: '[I]t is the world of the wretched or vainglorious creature [*der elenden oder prangenden Kreatur*]'.⁴¹ The prominence of *Hamlet* in Benjamin's study of a German genre reflects his conviction that *Hamlet*, unlike the German instances of the genre, at least hints at an immanent solution to the loss of transcendence; it 'contain[s] both the philosophy of Wittenberg', which decrees the insignificance of earthly life, 'and a protest against it'.⁴² While German *Trauerspiele* remain stuck in an allegorical mode that is fatally abstract and whose figures are lifeless and petrified, Shakespeare manages to maintain the tension between the allegorical and what Benjamin calls the 'elemental': 'Every elemental utterance of the creature acquires significance from its allegorical existence, and everything allegorical acquires emphasis from the elemental aspect of the world of the senses'.⁴³ *Hamlet*, unlike other Baroque characters, is somehow 'capable of striking Christian sparks from the Baroque rigidity of the melancholic'.⁴⁴ While this partial uplift does not redeem the Baroque's creaturely condition, it does make creaturely life more than a purely abject existence. *Hamlet*, for Benjamin, emblemizes the *Trauerspiel* book's intimation of an ethically and affectively more positive form of creatureliness: creatureliness as an attitude that 'respond[s] to what traditionally falls outside the boundaries of the human subject' and that attends to the exposure that plagues that subject.⁴⁵ For Benjamin, as for Auerbach, Shakespeare's spin to human creatureliness counts as an achievement that an officially humanist and democratic modernity has obliterated; Benjamin's intervention in Germany's national, even nationalist, cultural memory of Shakespeare, like that of Auerbach, is an attempt to retrieve creatureliness for a different cultural memory with which to confront the present.

Both Benjamin and Auerbach directly engage with the central role of Shakespeare in German cultural memory: in the case of Auerbach, most obviously through a discussion of Goethe's famous use of *Hamlet* in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*,⁴⁶ and in the case of Benjamin, through 'the repeated centrality to his argument of a nationalized and confessionalized *Hamlet*'.⁴⁷ Still, their Shakespeares are not in any sense strictly German. When Benjamin ends his book by marshalling the achievements of Shakespeare and the Spanish playwright Calderón, this cannot but be a reminder of the comparative misery and impotence of the German *Trauerspiel*. Shakespeare and Calderón may find partial solutions to the Baroque's creaturely abandonment, but these solutions may not be available to the very nation that has yet defined itself through the Baroque. Auerbach and Benjamin's interventions in Germany's cultural memory of Shakespeare are acts of dispossession: they make Shakespeare unavailable as a national possession, and turn him into a site of memory where the recalibration of the relation between the national and the

terrestrial is staged and exposed. As a further recalibration of that relation is now underway, their elaborations of creatureliness are a vital resource for developing an understanding of human life beyond humanism.

Schmitt's Tragedy

Carl Schmitt is not a theorist of creatureliness so much as of sovereignty. Yet the point of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*-book, which is particularly relevant in light of the disunification of sovereignty in the Anthropocene, is that even the sovereign is never immune from creatureliness. In December 1930, Benjamin wrote a short letter to the 'Esteemed Professor Schmitt' in which he acknowledges Schmitt's great influence on the *Trauerspiel* book.⁴⁸ Schmitt directly engages with Benjamin's book in the second appendix to a lecture on *Hamlet* that Schmitt held at the *Volkshochschule* in Düsseldorf in 1955. Entitled *Hamlet or Hecuba: The Intrusion of the Time into the Play*, this lecture reopens the self-enclosed, shrunken world of Benjamin's Baroque to the 'intrusion' (*Embruch*) of historical forces. It is because *Hamlet* carries the imprint of world-historical events that, for Schmitt, it counts as a genuine tragedy rather than 'just another *Trauerspiel* subject to the relativism and subjectivism of the modern age'.⁴⁹ Remarkably, these world-historical developments again involve a radically changing world order – the reorganization of what Schmitt, in a study from 1950, called 'the *Nomos* of the Earth'.

The relation between *Hamlet or Hecuba* and *The Nomos of the Earth* has to a large extent escaped critical notice, and Schmitt himself only acknowledges it in a single footnote.⁵⁰ Bringing the two works together, however, makes it possible to gauge the intimate relationship between Shakespeare, terrestrial reorganization and Schmitt's postwar world.⁵¹ For Schmitt, the notion of *nomos* foregrounds the close connections between altered experiences of space and the particular forms of life that must absorb the pressures of such changes: it names 'the decisive connection between order and orientation'; it is 'a constitutive act of spatial ordering'.⁵² For Schmitt, both the 'completely deteriorated situation' of postwar Europe and *Hamlet's* post-medieval and pre-Westphalian early modernity testify to the troubled displacement of an earlier *nomos* (and given Schmitt's Nazi past, one can certainly question his principled focus on geopolitical imaginaries rather than human responsibility).⁵³ Relating the impact of the recalibrated earthliness he observes around him to the history encoded in *Hamlet*, Schmitt's *Hamlet or Hecuba* is a clear, if problematic, engagement with German cultural memory, linking the aftermath of the Second World War and the reorganization of Europe to an earlier crisis of transmission provoked by the spasms of global change.

Schmitt's idiosyncratic reading of *Hamlet* asserts that the play is structurally (rather than only thematically) shaped by historical changes that were both specific and epochal.⁵⁴ The 'intrusion' Schmitt talks about is to be distinguished from two less significant ways in which history impacts art: through 'mere *allusions*' (nothing more substantial than winks to the audience) or

through ‘true *mirrorings*’ (in which ‘a contemporary event or figure appears in the drama as in a mirror’, but in a way that has only local, not structural, effects).⁵⁵ Schmitt rejects merely psychological interpretations of Hamlet’s infamous indecisiveness, and instead shifts attention to the way historical forces affect the human body and psyche (an approach that also moves beyond ‘[a] nothing-but-historical perspective’,⁵⁶ and brings it in the orbit of cultural memory). Schmitt explains that Shakespeare’s play can so acutely register historical disturbances because of the contiguity between the Elizabethan stage and the real world. Shakespeare wrote ‘for his concrete and immediate London public’, and because of the ‘Baroque theatricalization of life’ the vitality of the theatre and the theatricality of life reinforce one another.⁵⁷ Because of this intimate intermingling between play and reality, for Schmitt *Hamlet’s* famous play within the play does *not* count as the moment when the artificiality of the play is showcased, but rather as the moment when the very *reality* of play, theatre and artifice is asserted. It is the moment when ‘a core of historical actuality and historical presence’ strikes in all its intensity.⁵⁸ What puts pressure on customary dramatic forms – especially the tradition of the revenge play – is, Schmitt writes, ‘a realistic core of the most intense contemporary significance and timeliness’.⁵⁹ Schmitt’s reading of Shakespeare, then, shares with that of Auerbach and Benjamin the paradoxical combination of acute insistence and transhistorical relevance – a relevance that makes these interventions part of the archive of a creaturely cultural memory studies.

Hamlet’s persistent elusiveness, for Schmitt, has to do with two closely related ‘irruptions’ – elements the play can only register but not digest. The first irruption concerns the anxieties besetting the succession of the childless Queen Elizabeth at the time the play was written. The expected successor, the later James I, was the son of Mary Stuart, whose husband was murdered; while Protestants generally believed Mary to be guilty of the murder, most of her Catholic supporters assumed her innocence. The upshot of this situation is that *Hamlet* can neither alienate its (overwhelmingly Protestant) audience nor the future king, and that it becomes, Schmitt writes, ‘unclear and inhibited as a result’.⁶⁰ This is reflected in the play’s sustained equivocation over the role of Hamlet’s mother in the murder of the old king. The play neither accuses nor exculpates the queen, even though this issue is crucial for the revenge plot. As this indecision sabotages the plot, this shows that ‘a concretely determined inhibition and concern prevails here, a genuine taboo’.⁶¹

This taboo leads to a second irruption – a second place where historical compulsion distorts customary forms. The forms in question here are those of ‘Greek tragedy and Nordic legend’, both of which dictate a revenge plot.⁶² In *Hamlet*, this expectation is derailed by what Schmitt calls ‘the *Hamletization of the avenger*’ – a process in which reflection leads to ‘the deformation and refraction’ of the character of the hero in the face of the disabling complexity of the historical circumstances in which he finds himself.⁶³ Hamlet, in Schmitt’s reading, loses all autonomy to historical forces beyond his comprehension; at the same time, he is denied the comfort of indifference because his

paralysis is intensified by his fateful hyperreflexivity (which more customary readings see as a measure of his exemplary humanity):⁶⁴ '[T]he peculiar proximity of the human to the animal at the very point of their radical difference'.⁶⁵ Even if Schmitt does not use the term, Hamlet emerges in his reading as a figure of creatureliness, just as the other royals in the play appear as diminished sovereignties.

Like Auerbach and Benjamin, Schmitt mobilizes Shakespeare to retrieve forces that disturb the customary account of the modern rise of individualism and liberal democracy. *Hamlet*, for Schmitt, not only registers 'precise historical facts', but this punctual crisis indicates a 'gradual epochal transition' into modernity and thus has a long-lasting subterranean relevance.⁶⁶ *Hamlet*, for Schmitt, records both a religious rift and a geopolitical reorientation (a combination we also encountered in Auerbach's Shakespeare), which result in a '*failure of mediation*', as 'certain kinds of structuring frameworks [...] have fallen away or become incapacitated'.⁶⁷ As such, Hamlet becomes 'a figure of fissure, who, at the level of collective memory, records and bears witness to the fractures caused by religious civil war and shifting geopolitical orientation'.⁶⁸ On the side of religion, the salient fact is that James, the future king who himself engaged in disputes over the theological basis of the monarchy, is caught 'between his Catholic mother and her Protestant enemies';⁶⁹ in this way, *Hamlet* is at the centre of religious schisms that will seal the end of the medieval world picture and will demand new 'secure forms' to navigate an altered reality.⁷⁰

Schmitt's *Hamlet* is situated in what Eric Santner calls 'a structural interregnum in the history of governmentality in Europe'⁷¹ – a condition in which '[t]he originally terrestrial world' of medieval Christianity has been disrupted and in which what Schmitt calls 'the first *nomos* of the earth' has yet to be established.⁷² The geopolitical reorganization in which Shakespeare participates has to do with the shift from land to sea in the Age of Discovery, a shift of which England is the catalyst: in the century from 1588 to 1688, Schmitt writes, 'the island of England withdrew from the European continent and took the step from a terrestrial to a maritime existence'.⁷³ And while the nations of Europe adapted to the opening of the oceans through the elaboration a new *nomos* organized around state sovereignty, England only later set out on the trajectory toward statehood – it initially remained, in Schmitt's terms, 'barbaric'.⁷⁴ In the new *nomos* of the Earth, England leads a maritime rather than a terrestrial existence, and this means that it persists as a placeholder for dislocation and disorientation throughout modernity. This explains the secret affinity between *Hamlet* and Schmitt's own postwar present: the England whose global fate *Hamlet* registers embodies a principle of placelessness that later resurfaces in 'the total rootlessness of modern technology'.⁷⁵ England's destabilization of the terrestrial world in 'the first stage of the new planetary consciousness of space' sets it on a trajectory 'from one order of deterritorialization to another'.⁷⁶ The postwar world is, for Schmitt, another such phase of deterritorialization.

Conclusion: Anthropocene and/as Air War

Schmitt's imagined solution to the fateful disorganization of the postwar world insists that human life 'must be directed to the elemental orders of its terrestrial being here and now'.⁷⁷ This is interestingly different from Auerbach's rueful assessment, in his 1952 'Philology and *Weltliteratur*', that 'our philological home is the earth: it can no longer be the nation'.⁷⁸ Auerbach's statement envisions a productive interaction between the local and the planetary, even if it shares Schmitt's resistance to nomadic mobility and placelessness. It might well be an indication of a similar resistance that led Benjamin to affirm *Hamlet* as a partial solution to the excesses of Baroque melancholia. For Schmitt, the clearest index of the ongoing dissolution of the terrestrial order is the emergence of air war: air war signals the further disintegration of an already chaotic global order, in that it spells 'absolute disorientation' and a 'purely destructive character'.⁷⁹ It is as if the horizon that the fatally immanent reality of Benjamin's Baroque stage left evacuated is now occupied by an agency that compounds (rather than remedies) the disorientation besetting the Earth – a situation that the Anthropocene, in which the atmosphere and the climate become agents of human undoing, intensifies.

I have been arguing that the fragility and dislocation that currently go under the name of the Anthropocene have a history, and that these authors' interventions in cultural memory make that history available. Combining insights from the fields of animal studies, ecocriticism, literary studies and political theology, a cultural memory studies attuned to creatureliness can recover the half-hidden history of creatureliness and help make sense of the spatial dislocations and imbrications of human and nonhuman agencies that mark the Anthropocene present. Such a cultural memory studies would not only make available an alternative memory of modernity – a memory that, for one thing, would take seriously Bruno Latour's dictum that 'we have never been modern'. It would also remind us that the human creature has a future beyond the liberal humanist subject, and that that future has already begun.

Notes

¹ Woods, "Scale Critique," 134.

² Pick, "Interview," n.p.

³ Santner, *Royal Remains*, 5–6.

⁴ For the relation between sovereignty and the Anthropocene, see Folch, "Nature of Sovereignty" and Sands, "Gaia, Gender."

⁵ Lupton, "Creature Caliban," 2.

⁶ Colebrook, "Not Symbiosis, Not Now," 188.

⁷ Aravamudan, "Catachronism," 9.

⁸ Santner, *On Creaturely Life*, xv.

⁹ Lupton, *Thinking*, 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹ Bloom, *Shakespeare*, xviii. See Pettman, *Human Error*, 12–18 for a trenchant discus-

sion of Bloom's emphasis on 'self-overhearing' in his reading of Shakespeare.

¹² Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 55.

¹³ Benjamin, *Origin*, 228.

¹⁴ See Pfister, "Germany Is Hamlet."

¹⁵ Kottman, "Introduction," 4.

¹⁶ Newman, *Benjamin's Library*, 27 and 76.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁸ Höfele, *No Hamlets*.

¹⁹ Barck, "Fragments," 82.

²⁰ Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 276.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 199–200.

²² *Ibid.*, 201–2.

²³ *Ibid.*, 232.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 246n1 and 247–49.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 236 and 247.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 315.

- ²⁷ Ibid., 313, 322, and 326
²⁸ Ibid., 324.
²⁹ Ibid., 324 and 328.
³⁰ Ibid., 321.
³¹ Ibid., 324.
³² Newman, *Benjamin's Library*, 5–7.
³³ Ibid., 116 and 125–6.
³⁴ Benjamin, *Origin*, 85.
³⁵ Steiner, "Introduction," 18.
³⁶ Benjamin, *Origin*, 136.
³⁷ Ibid., 136.
³⁸ Ibid., 137.
³⁹ Ibid., 132.
⁴⁰ Ibid., 134.
⁴¹ Ibid., 84.
⁴² Ibid., 138.
⁴³ Ibid., 228.
⁴⁴ Ibid., 228 and 158.
⁴⁵ Hanssen, *Other History*, 105; see also Weigel, *Walter Benjamin*, 12–14.
⁴⁶ Ibid., 329–30.
⁴⁷ Newman, *Benjamin's Library*, 145.
⁴⁸ Weber, "Taking Exception," 5.
⁴⁹ Strathausen, "Myth or Knowledge," 12.
⁵⁰ Rust, "Political Theology," 187; Schmitt, *Hamlet or Hecuba*, 64n51.
⁵¹ Schmitt's insistence on an instance that remains strictly exterior to the stifling immanence of Benjamin's Baroque has been read as an attempt to safeguard a stable outside from which sovereign decisions can be made. See Pye, "Contra Schmitt," 153; Trüstedt, "Hecuba against Hamlet," 99–100; and Weber, "Taking Exception." Katrin Trüstedt and Johannes Türk both emphasize that the exterior source of the tragic is itself not exempt from drift and conflict, even if Schmitt does not explicitly acknowledge this.
⁵² Schmitt, *Nomos*, 70–1.
⁵³ Ibid., 71. For a reading of *Hamlet or Hecuba* as Schmitt's 'apologia pro vita sua', see Kahn, "Hamlet or Hecuba."
⁵⁴ Höfele, *No Hamlets*, 249–75 explains that Schmitt's reading was much more out of sync with existing Shakespeare scholarship than he believed, while his insistence on the historical agency of the stage was more in line with existing German literary critical developments than he claimed.
⁵⁵ Schmitt, *Hamlet or Hecuba*, 22–23.
⁵⁶ Ibid., 9.
⁵⁷ Ibid., 41.
⁵⁸ Ibid., 44.
⁵⁹ Ibid., 43–44.
⁶⁰ Ibid., 18.
⁶¹ Ibid., 16.
⁶² Ibid.
⁶³ Ibid., 21–22.
⁶⁴ According to Schmitt's logic, Shakespeare is, as an author, similarly powerless in the face of historical compulsion; tragedy serves as 'the final and insurmountable limit of literary invention'. Schmitt, *Hamlet or Hecuba*, 45. As Carsten Strathausen writes, '[...] the emergence of tragic play is [...] depicted as a process without an author; it is literally an objective and subject-less event caused by history itself. Strathausen, "Myth or Knowledge," 13.
⁶⁵ Santner, *On Creaturely Life*, 12.
⁶⁶ Strathausen, "Myth or Knowledge," 18.
⁶⁷ Rust and Lupton, "Introduction," xlvii.
⁶⁸ Ibid., xxiv.
⁶⁹ Schmitt, *Hamlet or Hecuba*, 28.
⁷⁰ Ibid., 30.
⁷¹ Santner, *Royal Remains*, 155.
⁷² Schmitt, *Nomos*, 49.
⁷³ Schmitt, *Hamlet or Hecuba*, 64.
⁷⁴ Ibid., 65.
⁷⁵ Schmitt, *Nomos*, 49 and 178.
⁷⁶ Ibid., 86; Santner, *Royal Remains*, 155.
⁷⁷ Schmitt, *Nomos*, 39.
⁷⁸ Auerbach, "Philology and *Weltliteratur*," 17. See Porter, "Introduction" for an authoritative account of Auerbach's work that puts the notion of the 'earthly' at the heart of his achievement.
⁷⁹ Schmitt, *Nomos*, 320.

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