In the last prewar summer of 1913, Benjamin wrote to his friend Franz Sachs about a visit to the Basel art museum with his mother. The young university student describes, in somewhat puzzling fashion, his viewing there of the “originals of some of the most famous of Dürer’s graphic oeuvre: The Knight, Death, and the Devil, Melancholy, Jerome and many others. . . . Now, for the first time, I understand Dürer’s power, and the Melancholy above all is an inexpressibly deep and expressive piece.” Benjamin also describes works by Holbein and Grünewald. It may well have been this sheer accumulation of great German art or, perhaps, the “inexpressibly . . . expressive” nature of Dürer’s Melencolia I (1514) itself that caused Benjamin to conclude: “I am getting closer and closer to the German art of the Renaissance, just as I noticed, when I was in Paris, that I was moved by the Italian art of the early Renaissance too” (Briefe 1: 76).

Benjamin’s association of the “Renaissance” with the triumvirate of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century German artists—Dürer, Holbein, and Grünewald—is interesting, as is their apparent capacity (in his mind) to rival the early Italian Renaissance for his attention. Celebrating Dürer in particular in this way was consonant with assessments of the artist in general during the prewar years. Along with Martin Luther (1483–1546), the famous Dürer (1471–1528) had long been understood as one of the great German “cultural heroes” and original “prince of artists,” never
more so in fact than after 1871. Indeed, a veritable industry of Dürer scholarship had emerged in and directly after that quadricentennial jubilee year of his birth, the same year as the parallel birth of the unified German state (see Bialostocki). The Dürer jubilee was only to be rivaled by the Luther celebrations in 1883, which likewise feted the modern afterlife of Reformation-era achievements on the national stage. Dürer commemoration peaked with the appearance in 1905 of a monograph on the artist by the famous Heinrich Wölfflin, in which Dürer is celebrated as the one who, in his alleged progress from "primitive" woodcuts to "refined" (Albrecht Dürer 206–8) copper-plate engravings like the Melencolia I — the image that Benjamin saw — demonstrated how German "Renaissance" art could compete with its illustrious Italian twin. In the context of the debacle of the war, it is only logical that Wölfflin's 1905 book was already in its third printing thirteen years later (1918). Like the widespread Reformation-jubilee programs of 1917, which I discuss below, the republication of Wölfflin's book may have been meant to boost morale in those dark days. In any case, its popularity signaled that the nation needed a cultural heritage of which it could be proud, perhaps particularly vis-à-vis the Italians, who had abandoned their position in the Triple Alliance in 1915. Ten years later and thus in the same year that Benjamin's Tragic Drama book appeared — which was also the year of yet another anniversary, this time the four-hundredth anniversary of the great artist's death — Wölfflin was still as moved by Dürer's art as Benjamin had been in Basel, and described it as exemplifying a "German way of seeing the world" (Wölfflin 1918, qtd. in Bialostocki 313). By this time, Dürer's work — and specifically the Melencolia I engraving — had nevertheless come to represent a somewhat different "Renaissance" for Benjamin, one that "anticipated" (G: 1.1: 319; E: 140) the Baroque, to be sure, but also one that "bequeathed as inheritance" (320; 142) to it a version of German melancholy that could no longer be celebrated in so unconditional a way. This was the version of melancholy that the "images and figures" of the German Baroque tragic drama — with its "crude stage" (335; 158) — dedicated to "Dürer's winged spirit of melancholy," as Benjamin writes. Hence, Dürer's image no longer figures as part of an equation linked to the Renaissance. Rather, it now belongs to the specifically German equivalent thereof, namely the Reformation.

In this chapter, I examine Benjamin's discussion of Baroque melancholy in the Tragic Drama book in dialogue with this other "Renaissance," the rebirth, that is, of several key figures and doctrines of the Lutheran Reformation in Germany in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The association is one that Benjamin himself indicates is worth pursuing, when he writes at the very beginning of the so-called melancholy chapter: "The great German dramatists of the baroque..."
were Lutherans” (G: 1.1: 317; E: 138). I argue that it is against the backdrop of a specifically “Lutheran” melancholy that his famously obscure observations on the allegorical logic of Baroque emblematics can be best understood, particularly as they offer a commentary on the (in)ability of a highly confessionalized, yet also militant German state—whose traditions the revival of the study of the Baroque had meant to celebrate—to redeem itself in the face of the dismal modernity it had created as it entered World War I. This most “modern” of wars had been undertaken under the banner of a Lutheran “war theology” (Kriegstheologie), which was the subject of much debate at the time. The destruction permitted by the absolute separation of the sacred and the profane realms into the “two kingdoms” of God and of Man, for which Luther had called, was difficult to honor in the postwar period as having contributed to anything that could be understood as the nation’s rebirth. I explore first the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century confessional “battle for civilization” (Kulturkampf) in Germany out of which war theology developed. I then turn to a short story about Shakespeare’s Hamlet that was written and published during these same years. Benjamin used this story by the scholar Rochus von Liliencron in the Tragic Drama book as an additional source for his reading of the play about the melancholic Danish prince as the “best”—or at least most representative—example of the “Lutheran” tragic drama. Understanding Liliencron’s version of Hamlet as part of a commentary on war theology explains how Benjamin could see Shakespeare’s play in this light.

Confessionalization, conventionally understood as the creation of uniform social and political groupings in bounded territories, or states, with these normative identities based in the routinization and standardization of collective religious observance, had begun in the second half of the sixteenth century in the German-speaking central European territories. By the late nineteenth century, the characterization of socially, politically, and geographically homogeneous groups as either Catholic or Protestant had led to a “battle for civilization” between the two traditional branches of German Christianity, and thus to considerable unrest in a newly unified polity eager to identify itself as a harmonious nation-state. Many of those who identified heavily with the state apparatus in the hegemonic north were committed to a Pan-German confessional uniformity that favored Protestantism. Written during the first phase of this battle, Liliencron’s Hamlet novella was entitled “Die siebente Todsünde” (The Seventh Deadly Sin) and had originally appeared in 1877 in Über Land und Meer (Across Land and Sea), one of the myriad literary feuilletons published in Germany at the time. Reissued at the beginning of the new century—and thus just as a second wave of the Kulturkampf was sweeping the nation—in the volume that Benjamin cites (1903), the story has Lutheran undertones that make clear its place in the confessionalization narrative and explain its resonance within Benjamin’s identifiably Lutheran version of the melancholy Danish prince. Curiously, in the story, Liliencron has his characters tutored by a wizened old mage who instructs them in the dangerous economic and political, spiritual
Melancholy Germans

and artistic consequences of succumbing to indolence by referring to a volume on the seven deadly sins by the seventeenth-century Jesuit Aegidius Albertinus. The Protestant Liliencron would have been familiar with the Albertinus volume his character cites, as he had edited and reissued it in 1884 as part of a larger plan for creating a more or less ecumenical cultural history of the German nation in the direct aftermath of the unification of Germany in 1871. His critique of the Jesuit’s stance as old-fashioned in his introduction to that volume nevertheless makes it clear which side Liliencron was on. In the first section of this chapter, I read both the Albertinus editorial project and the Hamlet novella as part of an effort to settle the differences caused by confessional tensions—even if they both ultimately encouraged the identification of Germany as solidly Lutheran. Benjamin bases his claims about Baroque melancholy in the Tragic Drama book on details from both of these Liliencron texts; the commentary he offers on the ways that sixteenth-century Lutheran doctrine had been “reborn” in the seventeenth century is colored by them and sheds light on his assessment of the implications for Germany of a further materialization of confessional doctrine in his own modern world.

Although Benjamin was an avid consumer of the German feuilletons and, after the failure of his habilitation project, in fact partially supported himself by publishing in them, it is unlikely that he read Liliencron’s novella in the 1877 number of Across Land and Sea. Rather, he probably saw the reference to the story in its 1903 reissued version in an essay by the art and cultural historian Aby Warburg that was published in 1920. Benjamin appears to have encountered Warburg’s essay, “Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeiten” (Pagan-Ancient Prognostication in Word and Image in Luther’s Day), fairly late in his research for the Tragic Drama book. The essay was nevertheless decisive for his argument about the Renaissance of Lutheranism in both the seventeenth and early twentieth centuries, as his repeated citation of it makes clear. Benjamin ultimately differed, however, from Warburg on the ideological and political implications of the positions inherited from the Reformation era, an era conceived of by both scholars as the origin of German modernity. The relationship that Reformed astrological science created between the spiritual and profane “kingdoms,” between the transcendent-divine and the immanent-secular worlds, is the subject of Warburg’s essay; his argument there and Benjamin’s response to it in the Tragic Drama book are the subject of the second section of this chapter. Benjamin was ultimately skeptical of Warburg’s version of Luther’s “two kingdoms doctrine” and of the art historian’s somewhat desperate celebration of the Renaissance-like promise of a “heroic” German reason’s power to save Man from his melancholic immersion in the detritus of this world. Warburg had first worked on his article at the low point of World War I. Benjamin’s postwar response does not underestimate, indeed, is in part predicated on the same kind of logic. Yet the way to live with the chasm that Lutheran theology—and its rebirth in modern times—had created between this world and the next, and thus with the melancholy possibility of nonredemption in
this life or, conversely, redemption only in the next, receives a very different reading in the Tragic Drama book. Which version of the Reformation-era doctrine of the two kingdoms had been revived in the texts of the Baroque, and how this doctrine related to understanding how Man was to live in the here and now of an even more modern German world, were the questions that concerned Benjamin most.

The obscure theory of allegory developed in the last chapter of The Origin of the German Tragic Drama may also be understood against the background of the issue of confessionalization, in terms of the question, that is, of whether or not Germany had in fact fulfilled its “ancient,” Reformation-era politico-theological mission when it was reborn into secular modernity. According to Benjamin, this was the context in which to analyze the figurative economy that governed Baroque emblems. Emblems were two- or multi-part visual texts designed to teach their beholders to read images and words, things and the more abstract significance embedded in and represented by them, together. As such (and even though there were surely as many Catholic as Protestant emblem books and emblemaitsts), emblems figured the difficult relationship between the two Lutheran kingdoms of God and of Man when they culled fragments and “ruins” from the “creaturely” realm and asked readers to intuit their greater meaning. At stake was whether access to this meaning could be guaranteed in the here and now, and, if so, by what means? The emblems often had accompanying verse that pointed the reader in the correct direction; did this mean the reader could or could not, should or should not, come up with the relation on his or her own? At what price would the grace of insight into a larger purpose (understood in the originally Lutheran sense of the term) be bestowed on the melancholic German citizen and state in both early modern and modern times? The final section of this chapter takes up these questions as they drive the literalization of the politics of allegory visible in one of the crudest of the “crude” (G: 1.1: 335; E: 158) German tragic dramas that Benjamin discusses in his “Baroque book,” namely Andreas Gryphius’s Catharina von Georgien (Catharine of Georgia) (1657).

Gryphius’s play tells the story of a woman ruler who gives up both her earthly crown and her life for the sake of redemption in God’s kingdom; it stages in grim detail— and thus comments metatheatrically on— the situation that Benjamin describes when he writes that it is “martyrdom . . . [that] prepares the body of the living person for emblematic purposes” (G: 1.1: 391; E: 217). The scenes in which Catharine is described as being brutally tortured to death by a power-hungry, lust-driven, and ultimately raving mad tyrant, and yet is represented as exiting history peacefully and with her eyes trained on the beyond, explain Benjamin’s surely ambivalent statement that the “allegorization of the physical” can take place only in terms of the corpse. He writes: “Only thus, as corpses,” can the characters of the tragic drama “enter into the homeland of allegory” (391–92; 217). This is of course a bitter pill to swallow for those who must continue to live in the world— and yet also the lesson that the plays of the German Baroque seem to have taught Benjamin
to acknowledge, namely that redemption, indeed, spiritual rebirth, can really happen only in some other place, if it happens at all. As much as the celebration of the Renaissance of the German nation in the Baroque was the underlying subtext of Benjamin’s book, then, what becomes visible in the actual texts of the “Lutheran” tragic drama, to which he refers so often in the Tragic Drama book, is that there is ultimately no guarantee of an unambiguous sense of progress beyond tragedy in this world. Redemption and rebirth come only rarely. And if they were to come for post–World War I Germany, they would come unannounced and undeserved.

**Benjamin’s Hamlet in the Crosshairs of War Theology**

In chapter 2, I argued that the volumes of the dramatic texts on the shelves of Benjamin’s libraries were both literally and figuratively arranged in such a way as to form a celebratory narrative about the stability of a national cultural heritage. They represented a continuous tradition and “lineage of the German tragic drama” (G: 1.1: 307; E: 128) that reached not only back to medieval texts, but also out to absorb a Shakespeare considered German since the nineteenth century and rebaptized as such during the war. Benjamin’s claims that he is interested in what makes the tragic drama “specifically German” alongside his inclusion of both Shakespeare’s and Calderón’s plays as the best exemplars, “the perfected artistic form” (260; 81), of “the baroque tragic drama,” can be understood in this light. The Shakespeare play that was the most “German” of them all was *Hamlet*, as I have explained, and it is perhaps for this reason that it is the most frequently cited of Shakespeare’s plays in the Tragic Drama book. In addition to reading the play about the melancholic Danish prince in German translation in the Ulrici edition and alluding to the work of authors who had christened Shakespeare as both Baroque and part of Germany’s cultural patrimony during the war, Benjamin’s Tragic Drama book contains references to a further version of the *Hamlet* story that was caught up in debates about the rebirth of a particular brand of Lutheranism in German national politics during both the run-up to 1914 and the war itself. It is the implications of this peculiarly German version of melancholic Protestantism for the prince—and in turn for the nation—that Benjamin underscores in his reading of the tale.

Benjamin cites Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* twice in the second chapter of the Tragic Drama book. The first citation occurs in his discussion of the prevalence of “dream visions” and “the impact of ghosts” in the plays of the Baroque (G: 1.1: 313–14; E: 134–35); the second follows directly upon the claim about the Lutheran identity of the “great German playwrights of the Baroque” (317; 138). In both cases, the

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2. Shakespeare scholars often associate with the play the Calvinism that was historically linked on the continent with its Swiss and French instantiations. They see in *Hamlet*’s “fall of a sparrow” speech (5.2.219–24), for example, evidence of a dialogue with the English (Scottish) Calvinism of King James. For an excellent overview, see Curran; Hoff.
quotes play a cat-and-mouse game of logic at the level of the sentence with references to the specifically German dramatic traditions that are Benjamin’s concern. In the first case, Hamlet’s famous “‘Tis now the very witching time of night” speech (3.2.380–91), rendered in German—“Nun ist die wahre Spükezeit der Nacht” (314; 135)—follows a series of references to plays by the German playwrights Gryphius and Lohenstein, as I have noted, whose names are given in association with the titles of their plays. The quote is then followed by a citation from the Viennese Stranitzky’s Die Gestürzte Tyrannay in der Person deß Messinischen Wütterichs Pelifonte (Tyranny Overthrown in the Person of the Messinian Brute Pelifonte). H ere neither play title nor the identity of the playwright is introduced in the text, although they are given in the notes. W hile accompanied by a footnote to the edition after which he cites Hamlet’s speech, Benjamin’s nonattribution of the unforgettable “witching time” lines to the Bard here, sandwiched in between quotes from and references to the “Germans,” could perhaps be forgiven, because of their manifest fame. Yet their position—and also that they are quoted in German—suggests that the citations from Hamlet are meant to provide additional support for Benjamin’s claims about “the drama of the German Protestants” (G: 1.1: 276; E: 98; emphasis added) in its “classical Baroque” form “in Germany” (312; 133). L ike the Protestant German Baroque plays, in other words, Shakespeare’s play is indebted to the world of spirits and thus signals the power of a providential kind of “fate” to rule this world. B y means of such textual gymnastics, Shakespeare’s hero takes on a confessionally German role.

The second citation from Hamlet plays a similar role. It follows hard upon the opening of the second section of the second chapter, at the beginning of which the Baroque playwrights are identified as “Lutheran.” A nd it occurs in a series of claims about the evacuation of sacred meaning from the secular and profane world dictated by the great Reformer’s doctrine of faith and grace: Benjamin writes: “E ven in Luther himself, the last two decades of whose life were filled with an increasing heaviness of soul, there are signs of a reaction against the assault on good works” (G: 1.1: 317; E: 138). T he description of Luther’s heaviness of heart is immediately supported with an (again) only belatedly attributed quote from Shakespeare’s play (4.4.33–39), once more quoted in German: “‘W hat is a man, / If his chief good and market of his time / Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more’. . . . T hese words of H amlet contain both the philosophy of Wittenberg and a protest against it” (G: 1.1: 317; E: 138). T he strange ventriloquizing of Luther by the at least notionally English Hamlet in this sequence is repeated, finally, at a textually less visible level in Benjamin’s famously puzzling argument at the very end of the melancholy section, where the figure of Hamlet is said to have been uniquely able to capture the “dichotomy between the neo-antique and the medieval light in which the baroque saw the melancholic.” T he very “Germany” that is at the center of the “Baroque book” “was not the country which was able to do this” (334; 157), however; Ger- man, in other words, was not able to either capture or transcend the essence of the
Baroque contradiction, or duality, between the medieval and the neoantique versions of melancholy, Benjamin claims. Rather—or, perhaps better, nevertheless—the Englishman's “Wittenbergian” version of a melancholic Christian Dane could: “Only Shakespeare was capable . . . of striking Christian sparks from the baroque rigidity of the melancholic.” Coyly quoting the Bard in a further unattributed and diacritically unmarked line, Benjamin writes: “The rest is silence” (335; 158).

In spite of Benjamin’s disavowal of the German Baroque here, the repeated centrality to his argument of a nationalized and confessionalized Hamlet testifies to the issues that were at the center of his interest in the period that he repeatedly calls the “century of religious wars” (G: 1.1: 245; E: 65) and the “age of the wars of religion” (256; 76). The 1877 German-language edition of Shakespeare after which Benjamin quotes Shakespeare’s play, edited by Hermann Ulrici and discussed in chapter 2, itself arose out of a vexed context that makes it possible to understand these references to the “wars of religion” in more than one way, as referring, that is, to both the early modern and the modern ages of confessional conflict in Europe. Even more revealing of this later context is a further Protestant version of the Danish prince that is referenced in connection with his famous melancholy just a few sentences later, when Benjamin refers to an early twentieth-century novella, “Die siebente Todsünde” (The Seventh Deadly Sin), originally written and published in a popular feuilleton, Über Land und Meer (Across Land and Sea), by the eminent scholar Rochus von Liliencron in 1877, and reprinted in 1903 in book form: “If the profound insight with which Rochus von Liliencron recognized the ascendancy of Saturn and marks of acedia in Hamlet is not to be deprived of its finest object, then this drama will also be recognized as the unique spectacle in which these things are overcome in the spirit of Christianity” (335; 158). Serendipitously published in exactly the same year, both Ulrici’s Shakespeare edition and Liliencron’s Hamlet novella emerged out of a period of confessional controversy that was tearing the relatively young nation of Germany apart. The denial in the Tragic Drama book that the German tradition could deal effectively with religious discord of this more recent vintage alerts us to Benjamin’s familiarity with these tensions. German cultural Protestantism (Kulturprotestantismus), liberal nationalist Protestantism, had gone a dangerously long way in helping to define a united Germany as a Leitkultur (dominant culture) by the time both Ulrici and Liliencron were active in the late nineteenth century. It was this Protestant Germany that had gone to war in 1914 in ways of which the young Benjamin had strongly disapproved.

The context out of which Ulrici’s and Liliencron’s—and thus Benjamin’s—German Protestant versions of Hamlet arose was that of the extraordinarily complex politico-confessional situation in the Reich at the end and turn of the century, when the confessions and their relation to German identity were not casual topics. Benjamin’s references to Reformation-era Protestantism and its afterlife in the Baroque were embedded in the late nineteenth-century struggle between the Christian denominations known as the “battle for civilization” (Kulturkampf, c. 1860–90).
and in its early twentieth-century revival during the “second battle for civilization” (zweiter Kulturkampf, c. 1907–14) as well. The main sentiments of those involved in these contests can be heard in 1862 in the words of a founding member of the liberal Association of Protestants, Daniel Schenkel, for example: “We say with the very deepest conviction: The entire cultural progress of the peoples of our century rests on the basis of religious, moral, and spiritual freedom, and for that very reason, on Protestantism” (12). Schenkel’s position on the role in Germany’s “progress” of Lutheran (rather than Reformed, or Calvinist) Protestantism in particular was made more precise several years later by Wilhelm Scherer, the first official holder of a university chair in German literary history, who wrote in 1874, just three years after the unification of Germany: “Luther’s Bible was the decisive foundational act of a unified German culture and language. It was the act that created what we today call our nation. We associate our national unity with Luther just as Italy associates its national unity with Dante. Luther’s Bible is our Divine Comedy.”

That the grand achievements of statist modernization in Germany were understood in the post-1871 unified nation as coterminous with a specific denomination of Protestantism and its foundational figures, doctrines, and texts is manifest in such words. The actions undertaken subsequently to ensure the necessary confessional “cleansing” of non-Protestants from Germany make it clear that these sentiments were more than mere talk. Laws were passed in the 1870s restricting the citizenship rights of Jesuit teachers and priests, for example, and bishops who did not comply with the so-called May Laws were imprisoned; in 1891 one Carl Fey even eerily writes of the “racial darkness” (Rassendunkel) of the Catholic peoples, who did not belong in the German land. Although most of these laws were officially rescinded by the early twentieth century, the renewed energy of what one historian has called the “furoe protestanticus” (H. Smith 151) of a still ideologically potent second “battle for civilization” can still be heard in the words of a position paper written for the Protestant Union in Berlin in 1913: “The spiritual and moral development of all of Germany, including her Catholics, rests upon . . . the German Christianity of the Bible and the Reformation.”

The nation-rending confessional conflicts of these “wars for civilization” during the preceding fifty years had to be subordinated to the patriotic need for an ideologically and militarily unified “fortress Germania” after the declaration of more literal hostilities in 1914 (see H. Smith 165; Brakelmann). Church support of the bellicose nation nevertheless often remained overtly affiliated with the Lutheran legacy, as the title of Wilhelm Walther’s 1914 book, Deutschlands Schwert durch

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3. See H. Smith 19–49 and 141–65. I am grateful to Professor Helmut Smith for providing me with the original German of some of his archival documents.
4. Scherer 45–70, here 55.
5. See H. Smith 41 and 54.
Luther geweiht (Germany's Sword as Consecrated by Luther), indicates in no uncertain terms. In theory, it was the historical Lutheran doctrine of “cujus regio, ejus religio” that in 1555 had yoked what theologian Paul Althaus calls “Christ's kingdom” and the “kingdom of the world”—and thus spiritual concerns and political jurisdiction and power—together in the first place. In practice, the war theology of the modern and homogeneous confessional state only “amplified” . . . themes that were already well defined in Protestant thinking” by “framing” the actual war “in light of divine will and German destiny” (Chickering 125). Some of the best-known Protestant theologians went on to endorse the upsurge of militarism across the nation, creating the fraught wartime and postwar debates about Lutheranism with which Benjamin would have been familiar, in all likelihood primarily through his friend the Protestant theologian Florens Christian Rang. One of the most famous contemporary theologians, Karl Barth, writes of his “horror” at seeing “nearly all of my German teachers” as signatories of “the horrendous manifesto of the 93 German intellectuals, who, before the entire world, closed ranks with the wartime political agenda of Kaiser Wilhelm II and his Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg” (see Barth 293). Barth’s version of what he in fact seems to have been the first to christen as Luther’s “two kingdoms doctrine” (zwei Reiche Lehre) involved a decisively antiliberal Protestant stance, a more or less radical refusal of the immanence of God in the world, and thus of the notion that one could ally God’s will or plan with any human (i.e., statist or military) agendas at all. The position led him later to help draft the so-called Declaration of Barmen of 1934, which rejected the jurisdiction or influence of National Socialism on German Christianity—over which God alone, in his absolute transcendence, ruled. Ninety-three prominent intellectuals, among them the Protestant theologians Adolf von Harnack and Reinhold Seeberg, who saw the two kingdoms as more firmly bound together, nevertheless did sign on in support of the war in 1914, seeing in the nation’s military efforts the fulfillment of God’s plan on the ground.

7. Walther explains the “divinely legitimated right” (1) that the Germans have to fight the war with the claim “The war is God’s will” (11). On the two kingdoms, see Althaus 40.
8. Rang initially supported the prowar conservative nationalist position but after 1920 turned vehemently against the militarism of the German state. See his treatise Deutsche Bauhütte, with a “Zuschrift” by Benjamin (185–86). For another reading of the relation of Rang’s Deutsche Bauhütte to Benjamin’s Tragic Drama book, see Steiner, “Traurige Spiele” 46–47.
9. See Estes 38 on Barth’s naming of the two kingdoms theory. I return to this Lutheran doctrine below.
10. The signatories of the manifesto may be viewed at http://www.nernst.de/kulturwelt.htm.
theory that lurked beneath the surface of the thoughts of Barth’s contemporary
and sometime colleague and friend the German Lutheran theologian Friedrich
Gogarten, for example. In 1924, Gogarten had maintained that “all institutions
and functions of human life, such as marriage, school, the state, the economy, art,
and science,” must be recognized as ephemeral, as they are merely the products
of the creaturely, human “subject,” “the I.” Only by “opening one’s eyes” for the
“Thou” of divine reality can the real “law of things” be recognized and the limited (un)reality of such institutions be “destroyed” (see Gogarten 371). That most
modern Protestants had made their peace with the de facto reality and authority
of the power of inauthentic “institutions” does indeed call for action, according to
Gogarten, but only in terms of one’s theological politics (rather than in terms of the
state’s political theology). 11 Above all, one’s eyes must always be kept trained on the
absolute otherness of God.

The consequence of this mystical optic was a turning away from the world; it by
no means demanded activist resistance to the state (although it did result in such re-
sistance in the case of Barth). Rather, it was premised, in good Lutheran fashion, on
waiting for God to bridge the gap between his own transcendence and the human
world by means of revelation, or grace. The position was well within the original
logic of what Gogarten calls the “Protestantism of the Reformers” (346). Luther
had acknowledged the rights of secular power in his (in)famous “Widder die stür-
menden Bawren” (Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants) of
1525, for example. There, he condemns the peasants’ struggles outright as so much
“rebellion,” reminding the perpetrators that they are absolutely subject, “with their
bodies and goods,” to the “law of this world,” “for baptism does not make men free
in body and property, but [only] in soul.” Conversely, the ruler “sins” in the eyes
of God if he “does not fulfill his duties,” if he does not “immediately reach for his
sword” to put down the rebels, in other words (Luther 70–72). It was statements
like these that earned Luther—and the confession that went by his name—the
reputation of encouraging blanket “subordination . . . to the state” (Van Dülmen
207). Applied to Germany’s wartime adversaries, the idea that the nation’s secu-
lar military machine could carry out God’s will by any means necessary permitted
atrocities like the infamous “Rape of Belgium,” with its anti-Catholic, “battle-for-
civilization” hue to occur. It was all part of God’s plan for Germany’s “Holy War”
(Strachan 1116–17).

In his Protestant Ethic, Max Weber famously describes the disjunction between
the two kingdoms that permits this kind of runaway autonomy of the secular as
the doctrine of the “absolute transcendentality of God” (60–61). For him, as for
Benjamin, Calvinism fills the vacuum with honest work. Early in the Tragic Drama
book, Benjamin refers to a similar absence of any “eschatology” (G: 1.1: 246; E: 66)

11. Compare Gogarten 347, for example.
as characteristic of a specifically Lutheran Baroque, however, and distinguishes its world from that of its Reformed twin. For the Lutherans, he writes in a more or less historically accurate assessment that also resonates with Barthian-Gogartian themes, “the hereafter is emptied out of everything which contains the slightest breath of this world.” It is this same “vacuum” (246; 66) that, in the later melancholy section, results from the “empty world” of Lutheranism’s “desecularization” (or resacralization) of religion, and thereby creates the challengingly “antinomic” relation of religious people to “the everyday” and “secular life.” The challenge is less for the actual “people,” Benjamin explains, who respond to life in a desacralized world with “a sense of obedience.” Rather, the “melancholy” that wells up under this Lutheran sky occurs primarily “in the great” (317; 138). Turning to the melancholy figure of the most proximate “great” personage in a similar state of helpless nonage, namely Prince Hamlet, may well have seemed the natural next step for Benjamin, particularly if he considered Hamlet a Lutheran. That the entire discussion that follows is centered on the figure of Melancholy, who, as captured in Dürer’s etching, is, in Rang’s later words, the “female” model for Hamlet as the “male figure of melancholy,” suggests that it was a Hamlet of just this Lutheran sort of which Benjamin was thinking. Benjamin’s citation of Hamlet’s words after the Ulrici edition confirms that his Dane spoke German. The references to Lilencron’s novella about Hamlet suggest the prince had been “reborn” as a Lutheran in additional ways too.

As noted above, directly after his claim that it was the orthodoxies of “Lutheranism” that led to the melancholy of “great men,” Benjamin cites Hamlet’s famous “What is a man . . . ?” speech (4.4.33–39), and does so after the German translation he found in an edition of the play that was the updated edition of the 1825–33 Schlegel-Tieck translation, edited by Hermann Ulrici in 1876–77. As I showed in chapter 2, the distinction is not negligible; the republication of the Schlegel-Tieck translation under Ulrici’s wing occurred in the second—and nationalist—half of the nineteenth century, and thus also placed Ulrici’s Shakespeare squarely in the path of the “battle for civilization,” with its relentless endorsement of a Protestant identity for the nation. That the German Hamlet Benjamin inherited from him is specifically Lutheran also peeks out from between the nearly very last lines of the melancholy section, when Benjamin refers to Hamlet as a “child of Saturn” (G: 1.1: 335; E: 158). The astrological and humoral—rather than confessional—origins of his melancholy seem to be given priority here. According to ancient, medieval, and Renaissance lore, that is, about which Benjamin learned in the work of the Warburgian scholars Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, as well as in the work of Aby Warburg himself, those born under the sign of Saturn are constitutionally

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predisposed to a debilitating melancholy (326; 148). According to Benjamin, the Baroque inherited from these earlier periods their explanation of the origins of “melancholy” (320; 142). The melancholic is characterized by a soul only weakly illuminated by the cold light of the furthest planet and by a dry and heavy “earthiness” and depressive nature inherited from Saturn as the monstrous archaic golden age deity Cronus. The Saturnine individual mirrors the god; potentially fertile, he is nevertheless nearly fatally afflicted with an excess of heavy black bile in the spleen, with a tendency to cleave to the earth, and also, potentially, with the mortal sin of sloth (acedia) in the face of a cold, cruel, and unredeemable world. Saturnine and Lutheran melancholy intersect and overlap here, for Benjamin had earlier characterized this very same kind of “heavy” melancholy as the effect of “Wittenbergian philosophy” (317; 138), with the result being a specifically German humanity caught in the immanence of a mournful world.

For many German readers of Shakespeare, the premier “offspring of Saturn” had of course long been the melancholy prince, Hamlet. For Benjamin, however, Hamlet’s best face as a German melancholic was precisely not the one famously described by the revolutionary poet Ferdinand Freiligrath, who coined the phrase “Germany is Hamlet” “to castigate the political inactivity of German intellectuals” in 1844 (H abicht, “Shakespeare Celebrations” 453). Rather, at this point, Benjamin appears to believe that the actions of another Hamlet represented better chances for the nation’s figurative redemption, namely the Lutheran Hamlet that had been created by Rochus von Liliencron. Liliencron had more accurately read the “marks of aedea in Hamlet’s features,” Benjamin writes; this Hamlet breaks the chains of melancholy by which he is confined precisely by using them to hoist himself up into the “Christian” sphere (G: 1.1: 335; E: 158). A note leads to the source of this claim: Liliencron’s 1877 novella, “Die siebente Todsünde” (The Seventh Deadly Sin). The seventh deadly sin is the same aedea, melancholy, and sloth that Benjamin followed the Warburgians in describing. Liliencron’s novella in fact turns out not to be about the actual Shakespearean character, but rather about a series of Hamlet surrogates, including the “comely melancholy young man” named Sir Arthur (“Die siebente Todsünde” 108) and his friend, the fictional Shakespeare, who is the protagonist of the tale. In the course of the novella, the Bard must shake Sir Arthur from a debilitating lethargy induced by any number of factors that drag him down into the world. His noble leisure, his humanistic studies, a lawsuit over his familial inheritance, and confusion about his love affair with “Miss Ellen Addington”—Sir Arthur is unable to master, or transcend, any of these creaturely challenges.

14. For Benjamin’s citations of the Warburgians’ work, see below.
15. Parenthetical references in the text are to Liliencron’s novella “Die siebente Todsünde” in the Duncker und Humblot edition published in Leipzig in 1903. In that edition, Liliencron’s novella is dated from 1876 on the title page. It was first published in the 1877 issue of Über Land und und Meer (Across Land and and Sea), number 38.
He initially avoids—in good Lutheran (rather than Calvinist) fashion—any “healthy activity” (109) at all in the world, as Liliencron’s narrator has his Shakespeare observe. Yet he also does not yet have his eyes trained on the beyond in any redemptive way. This is not yet a dialectical theology that sees in the other kingdom a path to redemption from the woes of this world.

And indeed, Sir Arthur wastes away for most of Liliencron’s story, storming in and out of both his beloved’s garden and Shakespeare’s atelier (where Shakespeare is working on rewriting Hamlet, the first version of which had flopped at the opening of the novella), fleeing both his beloved’s attentions and his friend’s ministrations in a series of tumultuous, melancholic scenes. Liliencron’s Shakespeare, by contrast, first uses the figure of Sir Arthur as a model for a successful rewriting of his play and then deploys the rewrite and a command performance of the play, with Sir Arthur in attendance, to save his young friend’s psyche and soul. In the novella, the diagnosis of Arthur as a melancholic—and, just as importantly, the solution to Shakespeare’s own intellectual fatigue vis-à-vis his work on the Hamlet script—is based on the account of the seven deadly sins in a manuscript shown to Shakespeare by a character known as the “old Master,” a wizened old scholar who feeds the Bard “material for learning” to make up for the “education” he feels he lacks (“Die siebente Todsünde” 119). This particular manuscript is by one of the “old Master’s” former students, Aegidius Albertinus, and is entitled “Lucifer’s Infernal Chase” (121–23). After the “old Master” recites long sections of the book about aedea and the distance of the melancholic from God’s goodness and grace aloud to Shakespeare (158–61), the playwright proceeds to catch up his quill and in no time completes what turns out to be the spectacularly successful revision.

Excerpting Aegidius Albertinus’s Lucifer’s Königreich und Seelengejaidt (Lucifer’s Kingdom and Pursuit of Souls) (1616) for use in his novella would have been easy for Liliencron, as he was the editor of the Albertinus facsimile edition in Kürschner’s series, Deutsche National-Litteratur (German National Literature), published in 1884. Liliencron cites his edition of the Baroque Albertinus text in the foreword to his 1903 republication of the Hamlet novella; numerous quotes from this foreword appear in Benjamin’s Tragic Drama book as well. Liliencron was nevertheless much more famous as the founder and general editor of the multivolume Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie (General German Biography) than as a writer of novellas. Beginning in 1869, he was the prime mover behind this monumental collection of information about the cultural history of German arts, sciences, and letters under the sponsorship of the Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Bavarian Academy of Sciences). Although Liliencron retired in 1907 after fifty-three volumes of the Biography had been completed, the years of his engagement with the project, whose purview he describes in a letter to Leopold von Ranke as being “the entire history of the nation contained in its political, scientific, artistic, and industrial development,” overlapped almost exactly with the decades of the “battle for
civilization” described above.\textsuperscript{16} It is probably significant that Liliencr\-\-on came from a pro-Prussian German (rather than Danish) family in Schleswig-Hol\-\-stein and was a good Protestant. Yet he saw it as his scholarly duty to be ecumenical and spent considerable time, his biographer, Anton Bettelheim, claims, working—in what Bettelheim calls the context of the “fateful turn” for the soon-to-be-un\-\-ified nation in 1871—to have scholars from both sides of the confessional aisle (Catholic and Protestant) collaborate in their work on the Biography.\textsuperscript{17} It is nevertheless difficult to consider that project as anything other than the attempt to create—by peaceful means in book form—the confessional unity, if not also homogeneous cultural tra\-\-dition, for the young nation that the Protestant majority sought to impose by law.

The introduction of the Albertinus text from which Benjamin quotes supports this thesis. Even as Liliencron glosses over Albertinus’s problematic identity as a “student of the Jesuits” (and thus as “a zealous representative of the reactionary Catholicism of that period”), for example, and emphasizes that the book is most importantly “the work of a popular [volkstümlich] writer,” he also makes clear that the “learnedness” of this Ur-German “primitive” author stood diametrically opposed to “modern trends.” Indeed, according to Liliencron, Albertinus had sought to cancel out the gains of humanism and the Reformation all at once by turning back “the clock of Man’s spirit several centuries” (Liliencron, Einleitung, v, i, and xx–xxi). Given his dismissal of Albertinus and of the Jesuit’s extraordinary empha\-\-sis in his book on the value of Catholic “penance” as a model for “modern” intellectual progress, it is significant that Liliencron has the perhaps more compelling of the two Hamlets of his novella—the charismatic character of Shakespeare—listen to the “old Master” quote Albertinus, to be sure, but also finally shake off his melancholy writer’s block by means of a curious amalgamation of Calvinist hard work on the script and Lutheran belief in God’s grace. “Feel the hand of God,” Liliencron’s Shakespeare thunders at Sir Arthur (“Die siebente Todsünde” 177), when Arthur morosely tells him he has lost the inheritance case and thus become more slothful than ever. In Sir Arthur’s legal defeat and hard times in the world, Liliencron’s Shakespeare sees the possibility of redemption for his friend, whom he encourages in the same breath to have an almost Lutheran faith in the unseen love of “Miss Ellen” (179), which emanates from a kingdom beyond.

A vocabulary of melancholy and divine grace, of faith in invisible love, and of “the light of wisdom” defeating “the night of madness” (“Die siebente Todsünde” 180) fills the final pages of the Liliencron novella to which Benjamin refers. By the end, the hold of the old Jesuit lore of melancholy—represented by the Albertinus citations—on both of the now more-or-less Lutheran Hamlet stand-ins has been broken for good. It is no wonder that Benjamin saw in (Liliencron’s) Hamlet a “spectator of the grace of God,” and it is more than possible that the Shakespeare

\textsuperscript{16} Liliencron’s letter to Ranke is quoted in Bettelheim 157.

\textsuperscript{17} See Bettelheim 164–65.
to whom Benjamin attributes the ability to strike “a Christian spark” out of the Baroque “rigidity of the melancholic” (G: 1.1: 335; E: 158) was the Shakespeare of Liliencron’s tale. Against this background, it may seem curious that Benjamin repeatedly denies that any German could see his way clear to this kind of “Christian” redemption, for both of the Shakespeares—Ulrici’s and Liliencron’s—whom he recruits to the cause of an ironically Lutheran rebellion against a Wittenbergian sense of resignation and hopelessness were “German.” And in his novelistic German version of Hamlet, Liliencron has even created something like a hyper-Lutheran who defeats his confessionally induced melancholy by fleeing into it.

While depicted in a more or less redemptive scenario in Benjamin’s Tragic Drama book, the intensification of the Lutheran stance visible in the actions of Liliencron’s Hamlet may nevertheless have also had another side. For one thing, it sounds quite a bit like Gogarten’s theory of commitment to the realm of the “Thou.” As for Gogarten, so here too “rebellion” seems, in good Lutheran fashion, to remain a strictly spiritual affair. Enacted in the heart or, in Liliencron’s novella, on a fictionalized stage and amid an intimate circle of friends in Shakespeare’s workshop, the move beyond melancholy in any case occurs at a good distance from the consolidating secular powers of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century German state as they lurked beneath the cover of faith. The elision of any link between the individual’s spiritual and creative redemption and the kingdom of Man may well have been precisely the problem a Lutheran Hamlet presented for Benjamin. Indeed, by distinguishing this version of the “overcoming” of melancholy from the “crude theater” of the German playwrights (G: 1.1: 335; E: 158), he may have been suggesting that a better Germany—or at least the Germany prefigured in the world of the actual Baroque tragic dramas as opposed to these Shakespearean worlds—would or should stand firm and confront “existence” directly as “a rubbish heap of partial, inauthentic actions” (318; 139), rather than turning away from the very forces that created them.

Benjamin acknowledges the real “rubbish heap” produced by the Germans in post–World War I Europe in his “reply” to the more or less eirenic, and yet also deadly serious Deutsche Bauhütte (German Builders’ Guild) text by his friend Rang in 1924. In that book, the Protestant theologian suggests that, as a way of saving its “spiritual life” and the soul of the nation, Germany must take responsibility for the “war damages” and “the destroyed lives of civilians” inflicted on France and Belgium by the German military during the war by paying reparations to those countries for the destruction (14–15). Benjamin had had doubts about Rang’s “analysis” of the situation, he writes in his “reply,” but these doubts had in large part been erased by the text that Rang wrote. Benjamin now (somewhat implausibly of course) has hopes that Rang’s plan will have an “effect” (Zuschrift 185) and be made a reality. In this context, Benjamin’s acknowledgment in the Tragic Drama book that the German playwrights of the Baroque, and Lohenstein and Gryphius in particular, had in fact had important “political duties” in their time (G: 1.1: 236;
E: 56) is significant. It may not be by chance that much of Benjamin’s analysis of the German plays turns on just how engaged their princely protagonists do or do not stay with the detritus that surrounds them. In the distance Benjamin claims to find between (Liliencron’s) Hamlet and the German Baroque tragic dramas, he may have been trying to locate the possibility of a different kind of Renaissance for the nation in the vision of a real “rebellion” against the “Wittenbergian philosophy” that had partially driven the war. Other intellectuals, whose work he admired, had endorsed a version of Lutherman melancholic thinking that had yoked the state and the divine realms together in fateful ways, however. This made Benjamin’s task more difficult. In the Tragic Drama book, he seems to have settled for a position of critique.

Reforming the Baroque: Benjamin on Warburg on Luther

Among the holdings of the Warburg Institute Archives in London may be found five hand-drawn sketches by the famously eccentric art and cultural historian Aby Warburg (1866–1929), which suggest how he was to illustrate a lecture that he eventually held in 1918. The topic of the talk is indicated by the heading scrawled at the top right of one of the drawings: “Luther’s Birthday” (Luthers Geburtsdatum, or “Luther’s date of birth”). Originally planned for early 1917 as part of the four-hundred-year jubilee of the Reformation organized by the Gesellschaft für Hamburgische Geschichte (Society for the History of Hamburg), the talk was postponed several times, not only because of Warburg’s ongoing research into his topic, but also because of the lack of coal to heat the venue (Wedepohl 351). Jubilee celebrations of the Reformation in Germany had been highly political, secular affairs since as early as 1617 (Burkhardt 276–77). This celebration, during the “turnip winter” of 1916–17, one of the coldest winters in Germany on record, was no exception; it presented an obvious opportunity, in the face of hunger and disillusionment both in the trenches and on the home front, to engage in a rousing (if compensatory) wartime celebration of the Rankean “Luther-to-Bismarck” “hegemonic narrative” of “how [the] modern German [state] came to be” (Brady, “Protestant Reformation” 11)—the very same narrative that war theology sought to tell.

Like Benjamin’s later work in the Tragic Drama book, the Jewish Warburg’s interest in 1917 in a topic related to Luther and to Germany’s “national” religion was neither new nor idiosyncratic for more or less assimilated members of his faith. In two essays entitled “Deutschtum und Judentum” (Germanness and Jewishness) (1915 and 1916), Hermann Cohen, for example, argues—in a far more localized form of Jacob Burckhardt’s assessment of the birth of “modern” Europe in the

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18. The sketches may be found in the holdings of the Warburg Institute Archive (WIA), III.90.2, F. 63–67. The title and date are on F. 63.
The bulk of Warburg's argument in the "prognostication" essay addresses the visual and literal rhetorics of astral determinism in both learned and popular materials from the Reformation period. According to these materials, the starry conjunctions dominant at the time of Luther's birth could be read as either challenging or supporting the Reformation's theological and, just as important, its political aims. Technically speaking, the historical two kingdoms theory was as implicated in this argument as it was in the war theological debates described above, particularly insofar as the astrological teachings of the learned Philip Melanchthon, the praeceptor Germaniae and friend and companion of Luther, were concerned. These teachings are at the center of the first part of the Warburg essay to which Benjamin so often refers, where Warburg addresses the impact of these same astral forces on the world as it is visible in the work of the equally celebrated early modern symbol of Germanness, Albrecht Dürer. Warburg's reading of Dürer's Melancholia I here reminds us of Benjamin's interest in the image as a part of the "German Renaissance" in art. Warburg's preliminary "Luther's Birthday" sketch of

19. Cohen 242. The Jewish support for this reading of the Lutheran era may make Benjamin's interest in it equally understandable. On the "dialctics of assimilation" of Protestantism by the early twentieth-century Jewish intelligentsia, including Cohen and Cassirer, see Liebeschütz 230–31.

20. Gombrich indicates in his famous "intellectual biography" of the art historian that Warburg had in fact sought to get involved in the "patriotic" war as early as 1914 by traveling to Italy to meet with Italian art historical colleagues and found a journal designed to encourage them to support staying the course as part of the Triple Alliance. In 1915, when the Italians broke with the alliance, Warburg symbolically broke with them, turning away from his interest in Italian art to the art of another "period of crisis" for the nation, namely the Reformation, finding Germany's Renaissance in it (Gombrich, Aby Warburg 207). See Strachan 142 on the "war enthusiasm" of urban intellectuals.

21. The so-called German Renaissance in art that the "Dürerzeit" (time of Dürer's activity) was said to represent was celebrated in nationalistic terms during the war just as enthusiastically as was Luther's Reformation era. See K. Aufmann on the "nationalist sentiments" (30) and the deployment of the idea of a "German Renaissance" for "national unification in the nineteenth century" and for "purposes of political propaganda... during the 1914-18 war" (192).
how he intended to illustrate the lecture seems to offer a direct theorization of how he—and subsequently, Benjamin—would have the parallelisms between his Reformation-era subject and the “rebirth” of its significance in the wartime context of his presentation understood. The hasty drawing indicates that he intends to display all of his multiple and mutually illuminating visual materials (astrological nativity charts, prophecy pamphlets, the Dürer engraving) simultaneously rather than as a sequence; this way the web of both literal and figurative citations, of parallels and similarities between and among them, could be recognized by the viewing audience all at once. The technique is at the conceptual heart of what subsequently became known as Warburg’s signature concept of the “Wanderstraßen” (highways or itineraries), along which a globe-trotting pictorial unconscious traveled from east to west and back again, as well as between and among the regimes of high visual culture and its more quotidian equivalents. In the Luther lecture, the “highway” in question is also the one that ran from the early modern into the modern wartime years, in which the politico-theological issues on which Warburg wanted to focus were as intimately involved with a culture of astrology as they had been in Reformation times.

Recent scholarship has shown that beginning in 1914, Warburg began to be consumed, almost to the exclusion of his earlier academic work, with the compilation of what has come to be known as his Kriegskartothek (war card catalog), his wartime collection of citations of newspaper and magazine articles from the German and foreign press. The seventy-two file boxes into which the citations were carefully sorted were ordered by topic—“Aberglaube, Prophezeiungen” (Superstition, Prophecies), “Verhalten im Kampf” (Behavior during Battle), “De figuris coelis metereologiisque” (On Meteorological Events), “Deutschland: Religion, Ethik” (Germany: Religion and Ethics)—and track the resurgence of various kinds of magical thinking in association with war-related themes in the World War I years. The rise in astrological thought in particular—as well as in occultism, spiritualism, and other “irrational” belief systems—may have been represented after the end of hostilities as a kind of desperate response to the horrible and horribly uncontrollable rationalization of the means of destruction. But the note cards in the “war card catalog” confirm that there was a widespread conviction at the time that such beliefs and practices were effective, as when it was reported that soldiers were carrying amulets into battle, hoping to be protected by them from the industrially enabled carnage of the trenches, and that troops were being made—and had requested—to march through or near the village where a notorious female visionary

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22. On the “Wanderstraßen” concept, see McEwan 15–16.
23. According to Carl Christian Bry in his 1924 book, Verkappte Religionen: Kritik des kollektiven Wahns (Hidden Religions: A Critique of Collective Delusion), for example, myriad forms of such beliefs abounded. Arnold F. Stolzenberg agreed in a 1928 issue of the journal Das evangelische Deutschland (Protestant Germany). Everything and anything seems to have been acceptable leading up to and during the war, Stolzenberg writes, as long as it could “bridge the abyss that has opened up between the Here and the Beyond.” Bry and Stolzenberg are quoted in Winkle 262–63.
claimed to have spoken with the Virgin Mary and several saints. Warburg's collection also included references to articles in the press about the emergence of an active medium industry, with practitioners promising those left behind the possibility of renewed contact with their war dead, as well as about numerous prophecies of possible dates for successful military engagements and even the end of the war, based on readings of favorable or malevolent conjunctions of the stars. By 1918, there are said to have been over ninety thousand items in the war catalog, an indication of the "frenzy" with which Warburg pursued his task (Schwartz 50–51). He considered collecting these materials a way of charting "seismograph[ically]" the various forms of religio-magical thinking rampant at the time of the "catastrophe for Germany" of the war.

Both the categories into which Warburg sorted his evidence and the popular provenance of the materials he was assembling were not unlike those associated with many of the Reformation-era documents at the heart of his "Luther's Birthday" talk, the research for which was consuming him at exactly the same time. In the article based on the lecture, he investigates the response of Luther and his coterie to the huge numbers of popular polemical pamphlets about astrology and single-sheet imprints, with their prognostications and prophecies, primarily of imminent disasters, both naturally and divinely caused, that were circulating throughout the tense years of the "pamphlet wars" of the early Reformation (1521–25). Warburg's interest in pursuing the historical origins of the logic behind the parallel practices he could observe in his own time is clear. Because, moreover, these practices belonged to the same highly confessionalized culture, Warburg is able to link materials associated with the very focused topic of his occasional lecture, namely the manipulation of Luther's nativity charts by his enemies and friends (hence, "Luther's birthday"), with these larger prognosticatory trends and expand on their relevance for understanding the role of astrological thinking in both the early modern and the modern worlds. The "headline images" (513) in which Warburg was interested were part of a larger culture of early modern print and news, indeed, of the flood of "politico-intellectual propaganda texts" (490), he writes, which fed the hungry market of the "sensational press" (510–11) during the Reformation years. Like the contemporary materials assembled in the war catalog, the documents that Warburg examines in his lecture emanated from a highly politicized landscape in which the religio-magical and the confessional-secular were closely intertwined.
First among the many texts and images that Warburg discusses in his essay is what was, in 1917-18, an unknown 1531 letter from Melanchthon to the astrologer Johann Carion. According to Warburg, Melanchthon’s letter reveals that he believed in the legitimacy of on-the-ground political reasoning based on the appearance of a “comet that appears to be in Cancer,” as well as on a variety of prophecies by “a wench from Kitzingen,” “a citizen from Schmalkalden,” and “a Belgian virgin” (494), all of which Melanchthon then relates in the letter to a discussion of the Danish king Christian’s and the emperor Charles V’s impending military moves and the even more local and pressing issue of the support of some of the German princes and electors for the anti-imperial League of Schmalkalden. The discourses of the allegedly supernatural and magical and a highly rationalized calculus of state are clearly cozy bedfellows here, the intimate exchange between them made easier by a reading of wondrous signs of various sorts. The role of the divine is, however, in no way downplayed. For example, Warburg quotes Melanchthon as concluding with regard to the prophecies in particular: “Overall I think that there is some great movement in the offing and I pray to God that he influences this event to turn out well, such that both the church and the state are well served” (494). The belief that the astrologically determined and the political-secular realms intersect is captured in these words, which thus testify not to a superstitious “primitive” culture, but rather to what Robert Scribner has called the “one-way” Lutheran logic of “sacred action,” which “flows from the divine to the human” spheres (268) rather than the other way around. The transcendental divine causality and kingdom behind the movement of heavenly bodies may well be something that men, as fallen creatures on earth, can only imperfectly understand. But if the border between the two realms represented by the starry canopy, for example, is recognized as connecting rather than setting them apart, then trained astrologers and prophecy readers can see God’s political intentions for the profane Protestant world in his signs.

As transparent as this kind of political instrumentalization of astrological thinking may appear, it was not unrelated to doctrinal issues central to both historical Lutheranism and to battle-for-civilization contests over “denominational ideology” that had been and continued to be fought over the soul of the modern German state (Graf 31). Luther’s two kingdoms theory is again of special interest in this regard. Its terms make clear the intimate relationship between only notionally transcendent religious forces and Man’s sociopolitical life, which allowed divinely mandated and controlled events to unfold with regularity in the “kingdom” of the here and now.28 The Reformer’s own thinking on the topic was notoriously complex, and desperate attempts to clarify which phase of his thoughts on the issue related most aptly to any number of the “fateful” events of subsequent German

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28. Luther uses at least two German terms to refer to these two “kingdoms” in his work: Reich (realm, kingdom) and Regiment (ruled jurisdiction, government). See Thompson 164 and 165–73.
history have abounded over the years. But the fundamental parameters of the two kingdoms theory have always been clear. They articulate a model of two “orders of government through which God exercises his lordship over mankind,” the “kingdom” and “government of God” and “Christ,” on the one hand, and the “worldly,” or secular, government, on the other (Thompson 166–67). Luther himself seems to have believed that, even though they were by definition separate, a certain kind of traffic between the two kingdoms was a binding norm. In the still pastorally inflected “Von weltlicher Obrigkeit, wie weit man ihr Gehorsam schuldig sei” (Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed) (1523), for example, he argues that, for the “real Christian,” Man’s salvation lies in the hands of God alone; in this respect, his “government” has jurisdiction over the most important of Man’s duties, namely “righteousness.” The “kingdom of this world” plays no small role in the achievement of this singular purpose, however. For one thing, the worldly kingdom’s agents—kings, princes, earthly magistrates—always already exist in the world only “by God’s will and ordinance.” They thus in effect function semiautomously as guarantors of the “external peace” that permits the pursuit of the “teachings of Christ.” While the key point here is the interlocking and parallel logic of the two systems, with the divine kingdom on top, it is not surprising that Luther’s original argument, namely that the “civil law and sword” represented crucial forms of “divine service,” later emerged to support claims about wartime Germany’s sacred Protestant mission.

It is in this context that we may understand the role of a “Lutheran” astrology in the Reformation era. Beginning already in the 1520s, when Luther and Melanchthon began formulating their ideas, insight into astral patterns functioned as one of the ways in which the ordinatio divina (divine order, or government) that transcended human understanding could in fact be discerned by denizens of the earthly realm (Althaus 44). In Melanchthon’s mind in particular, the two orders were actually linked via the stars; astrology could thus help “reveal, by decoding signs, the original design of God’s providence” in the realm above. Melanchthon’s related interest in astronomy belonged, in turn, to a “Lutheran” natural philosophy, whereby knowledge of the celestial bodies, for example, could give “insight into God’s intended order for the world” (Methuen 394). God’s kingdom may thus be invisible, otherworldly, and transcendent. But by the logic of a Lutheran “sidereal speculation,” the “inner worldly” realm was not irrevocably cut off from God’s blueprint for mankind, etched as it was into—and thus visible in—the starry patterns above. Like their early twentieth-century avatars, rulers of early modern

29. Althaus, referring in 1957 to the role the two kingdoms theory played in the National Socialist period, suggests that the doctrine has had a “fateful” impact on German history for “centuries” (40).
31. See Caroti; Kusukawa; Methuen; and Fink-Jensen. The quote here is from Caroti 113.
32. On the various forms of “sidereal speculation” that abounded in the Reformation era, see Barnes, here 132.
confessionalizing territories had had good reason to be invested in maintaining belief in (and yet also themselves managing) the dissemination of confessionalized lore about the role of the astral forces, as it helped these rulers control how the populace negotiated their economic, social, and political lives. Lutheran princes and cities have in fact been characterized as particularly “hospitable” to astrological thinking. In turn, reliance among their subjects on astrological almanacs and calendars belonged to a “set of [all-consuming, meaningful] coherent practices,” including recourse to such “sacral objects” as “church bells” as “apotropaic[ally]” capable of “protect[ing] against storms and lightning,” and “hymnals” and “prayers books” treated as containers of “healing . . . power” that could also help produce a good crop. The phenomenon of infantrymen carrying amulets into the trenches and making pilgrimages to local blessed sites four hundred years later does not seem so very different from such early modern practices. Warburg’s interest in such behaviors thus makes a kind of historical sense. In both cases, the “worldly” kingdom was endowed with a “highly charged sacrality” emanating from some higher will. As in the Reformation era, so too in the early twentieth century, “all secular events, social, political, and economic, could have cosmic significance” (Scribner 269). The outbreak of interest in astrology and the occult at the height of World War I coincides logically, in other words, with the Protestant war theology officially associated with it. Warburg’s wartime interest in Lutheran astrology—and Benjamin’s interest in Warburg’s essay in turn—should be read in this context.

In the first part of the “prognostication” essay, Warburg takes Melanchthon’s letter to Carion, on the one hand, and, more importantly for his argument, the struggles that Melanchthon had with Luther over the nativity chart drawn by the Italian (and Catholic) astrologer Lucas Gauricus, on the other, as a sign of the penetration of astrological thinking deep into the heart of Reformation politics. In the Gauricus chart (Warburg fig. 123)—the only version of which we have dates from 1552, but which Warburg surmises is from around 1532, when Gauricus visited Wittenberg—the date of Luther’s birth is postponed until 1484 (instead of the conventionally agreed upon year of 1483), and his nativity placed on a day and at an exact time when the conjunction of the planets Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn had occurred. The year 1484 had long been predicted by astrologers to be a year in which, according to Warburg, “a new era in the development of western religion [would] begin” (500). The most widely disseminated version of this prediction had been in one Johann Lichtenberger’s prognostication pamphlet, which, first published in Latin

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33. Lutheranism’s reception of astrological thinking has been called particularly “hospitable” (Calvin disdained it for both theological and sociopolitical reasons), and astrology described as “integral to the formation of a Lutheran confessional culture,” part and parcel of the “evangelical movement[s]’” “mass exercise in propaganda . . . for the faith.” See Dixon; the quotes here are from Barnes 131; and Dixon 413 and 416. On Calvin’s concerns that astrological prognostication of disastrous events could lead to rampant social unrest, see Barnes 135.

34. See Brady, “ ‘Confessionalization’” 12, on the abundance of “coherent practices.” For the examples of Protestant “sacred” objects and rituals, see Scribner 269–70.
in 1490, had circulated widely before being translated into German and printed in Wittenberg in 1527. According to Warburg, Lichtenberger was following an earlier pamphlet of the Dutch Paulus von Middelburg in predicting “the appearance of a religious man, who [would] provoke an ecclesiastical revolution” (514) in the fall of 1484. Moving Luther’s birth to that year thus made a great deal of sense. That many agreed at the time is quite clear in the names “Luther” and “Melanchthon” scrawled above the monk figures in a 1492 illustrated edition of Lichtenberger that Warburg consulted in the Hamburg State and University Library (Warburg fig. 137). Warburg identifies the words as “written in an old hand that most likely belonged to the sixteenth century” (516).

The details of the Latin text that accompanied the Catholic Gauricus’s early sixteenth-century nativity chart for Luther invested the changed date with a more profoundly threatening significance: the man born on that day would be a “sacrilegious heretic,” “a most bitter enemy to the Christian religion” (Warburg fig. 123). The much predicted “revolution” is cast negatively here as a way of stirring up opposition to the Reformer by focusing on the intersection of the heavy planet, Saturn, with that of the dangerous planet, Mars, on his day of birth. This particular conjunction of other planets with Saturn was especially problematic in Warburg’s reasoning because of the legacy of *Saturnfürchtigkeit* (“fear of Saturnine influences,” 505–8), identified with both the homophagic god of antiquity and the planet whose great distance from earth, flat light, and slow movement led it to be identified, in the discourses of medieval humoral psychology and theology alike, not only with both literal and spiritual lethargy, sluggishness, and sin (*acedia*), but also, in the sixteenth-century mass media, with threatening meteorological disasters of all kinds, including the torrential rainfall and flooding predicted for 1524. It was this same “fear of Saturn” that had afflicted Liliencron’s Hamlet.

Warburg is fascinated by the way a wide selection of visual print culture fed the astrological hysteria associated with this particular prediction during the early modern period, and includes numerous examples in his text (Warburg figs. 131, 132, 133). Here again, parallels to his work in the war catalog abound. In response to Gauricus’s chart, he explains, the position of the stars at the time of Luther’s birth was—at Melanchthon’s prompting—analyzed and recalculated, recalculated and analyzed, over and over again by several scholars belonging to the Reformer’s inner circle; a series of carefully drawn alternatives to it was produced by Carion, Johann Pfeyl, and the “official” Wittenberg astrologer, Erasmus Reinhold (Warburg fig. 124). (Warburg reports that Melanchthon even went so far as to interview Luther’s mother to get the exact details of the hour and minute at which her by-then famous son first saw the light, 501.) These charts acknowledge and adopt the new year and date (namely 22 October 1484) of Luther’s birth from Gauricus but tamper with the exact time of day in order to place Jupiter and Saturn at a careful remove from the sphere of Mars at the time of the Reformer’s birth (502–4). In this way, Luther’s nativity is deftly pushed out of the path of a potentially threatening astral conjunction even as his association with the now optimistically interpreted prediction about the
birth of a “religious revolutionary” in 1484 (502) is preserved. Because God’s plans for German reform were understood to be everywhere legible in the heavens, Melanchthon and company were able to work deftly—and devoutly—with the lore of astral enchantment to ensure a correct reading that supported and celebrated their confessional program on the ground.

Warburg notes that Luther initially thought very little of this kind of magical thinking; “Es ist ein dreck mit irer kunst,” he writes in the earthy vernacular of Table Talk, loosely translated: “Your [astrological] art is a load of crap” (500). He claims that his birth date and time were exclusively of God’s doing: “That which occurs by virtue of God’s will and is his work we ought not to attribute to the power of the stars” (504–5). This is a nearly willful misreading of Melanchthon’s efforts of course, which were in fact designed to use astrology to have Luther’s reforms represent the fulfillment of God’s plan. Warburg indicates that he sees what must have nevertheless ultimately been a secret accord between the two men on the point when he quotes the obviously astrologically informed Reformer, again in Table Talk, commenting on his own “identity as a child of Saturn”: “Ego Martinus Luther sum infelissimis astris natus, fortassis sub Saturno” (I Martin Luther was born under the most unlucky stars, perhaps even under Saturn) (505). In a cunning foreword to the 1527 German edition of Lichtenberger’s prognostication pamphlet attributed to Luther, moreover, which Warburg reproduces in full in an appendix (545–50), Luther is allowed to unpack at length his own understanding of “the natural ‘art’, or science, of the stars” (546) as a kind of sacred astrology along Melanchthonian lines. There Luther recommends that people attend to the prophecies contained in the booklet not because Lichtenberger has issued them, but rather because “the signs in the sky and on earth are surely not mistaken. They are God’s and His angels’ work” (549). With such citations, Warburg establishes the links between the otherworldly and the mundane embedded in Luther’s thinking, as well as his perhaps politically canny complicity with his partner’s logic of a confessionally enchanted world (both above and below) that Melanchthon’s brand of Protestant astrology could explain and shape.

The other iconically German figure of this same period in whom Warburg is interested, Albrecht Dürer, responded to the pressures of a world permeated by what Warburg calls the multiple “creaturely” determinisms associated with this kind of astrological thinking (528, 530) with even greater clarity and force than the former monk.35 A reading of Dürer’s Melencolia I that is heavily indebted to a densely researched

35. The German term K reatur, “the world of the flesh,” refers to Man’s world; Max Weber (60, for example) and, more famously, Benjamin (see below) use the same term as Warburg to refer to Man’s life in the world.
article on the engraving published in 1903–4 by “my late friend Carl [sic] Giehlow[,] who left us too early” (526) (an article that Benjamin also cites at great length), Warburg tracks how ancient astral theories distinguished between good and bad Saturnine influences on the body, and argues that the struggle between them informed Dürer’s planning of the image. That these ancient theories had migrated, via Marsilio Ficino and the so-called Picatrix text, into the northern humanist court context of Maximilian I (526–28) and become accessible to “northern” humanists and artists there, was the thrust of Karl Giehlow’s learned piece. The argument is important at a submerged level for Warburg’s wartime claims about the specifically German provenance of these elements of the great artist’s work. Warburg also—and not surprisingly—gives his reading of Dürer’s image a specifically “Lutheran” twist, noting that Melanchthon himself acknowledged Dürer’s achievement in the engraving in two places in his De anima text (529).

According to Warburg, Dürer’s Melancholy resists the power of the stars to determine what Warburg calls Man’s “creaturely sublunar fate” (528), a fate that could cause Melancholy to lay aside the tools of any activity at all, such as those visible at her feet. Her ability to do so, indeed, to become a “thinking, working human being” (528) not unlike Liliencron’s Shakespeare, is enabled precisely by Lutheran astrologics; she looks up (as she is shown to be doing in the Dürer etching) into and is inspired by God’s plan, whose light illuminates the world below by means of the comet shown in the upper left-hand corner of the image. Protected by a belief in the legibility of God’s will in the stars, this Melancholy becomes “heroic” for Warburg as an agent of her own redemption. Following Melanchthon’s original extension of astrology into astronomy, Warburg then goes on to claim that astrology works hand in hand with mathematical reasoning (indicated by the compass in Melancholy’s hand) to guarantee an accurate reading of the divine signs. The comet with a rising not falling tail, in the upper left, simulates the grace that links God’s world with that of an autonomous Man. Lutheran astral magic thus functions here as an efficient conduit between the two kingdoms, and Warburg celebrates the fact in no uncertain terms.

For Warburg, both Luther’s and Dürer’s legacies for Germany lie in the renaissance of the ability of the nation to fulfill a sacrally endorsed mission as it was inherited from the Reformation. It is thus not surprising that at the end of the section on Dürer, Warburg designates both the monk and the artist as “liberators,” heroes in the “battle for the inner intellectual and religious liberation of modern man” (531) that the Germans, on behalf of all of modernity, seem poised to win. Like the ultimate accord between Melanchthon and Luther on the divine nature of astrology,

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36. Karl Giehlow, “Dürers Stich ‘Melencolia I’ und der maximilianische Humanistenkreis.” The near simultaneity of the dates of Giehlow’s essay and Max Weber’s Protestant Ethic is uncanny and may not have gone unnoticed by, among others, Walter Benjamin. See below.
but even more so, Dürer’s image is a document of the gradual victory, Warburg writes, “of Germanness” (the grammar here is peculiar—“des Deutschen”) “in the battle against a pagan-cosmological fatalism” (529), a victory that finds its high point in the divinely “magical” force-field of the stars capable of acting as a kind of road map of God’s purpose. There has been much debate about the politically opportunistic or otherwise reactive shifts discernible in Melanchthon’s original stance on the two kingdoms doctrine; he has been accused of being at an unpardonable distance from a more Barthian version when, “bowing to the state,” he articulated his ideas about the cura religionis, the “oversight of the church,” being placed more firmly in the secular magistrates’ hands.37 H is astrological theory would nevertheless suggest that, with Luther, Melanchthon in fact believed deeply in the need to preserve continuity between the two realms so that the sublunar world could continue to be understood as controlled by the divine. In a beleaguered wartime Germany, Warburg seems willing to settle for the rebirth of something like this kind of connection between God’s will and the nation in the here and now.

Even if he does not explicitly rely on war theological claims, Warburg’s celebration of Lutheran and Reformation-era logic in his lecture reveals his conviction that in Germany the secular and the spiritual realms are sutured firmly together. That he believed in the cohabitation of modernity with something like divine magic at a kind of primordial level in the German unconscious is clear when he concludes his argument with a quote from that other great German, Goethe. In his “Materialien zur Geschichte der Farbenlehre” (Documents on the History of the Science of Color), Goethe had written (Warburg quotes him) that the intertwined nature of a rational science like mathematics with astrology, and thus the collaboration (rather than the contest) between noble reason and bleak fatalism, explain why “superstition” is in fact not at all uncommon “in the so-called enlightened centuries” (535). Warburg may strain, in other words, to offer Luther’s initial resistance to efforts to alter his date of birth, along with Dürer’s use of astrological symbols in Melencolia I, as testimony to the “history of the intellectual freedom of the modern European” (534). But it is really the Protestant Melanchthon and the great Goethe (who seems to be drafted here into service as an “enlightened” interpreter of Reformations thought to the modern world) who use reason to locate the astrological path that leads from God’s other-worldly kingdom to the human world of science in Man’s. Melanchthon and Goethe are thus the actual heroes for Germany in this jubilee-year talk.

It would be dishonest not to note that, as much in sync with the wartime celebrations of the German Protestant tradition as Warburg’s lecture may have been, in the published version he lets slip at the end that this history may ultimately have to be read as “tragic” (534), even doomed. What may be a postwar admission

37. Estes reviews the controversies (xii–xiv).
of this fact may not be by chance. In closing, Warburg refers to a figure from another Goethe text, namely Faust (534). In a talk planned for and given in the bleak years of 1917–18, when the German defeat was basically clear, this reference to the early modern conjurer is as legible as a commentary on contemporary events as Warburg's overall interest in political astrologics was. For Warburg, Faust is "the modern scientist" par excellence, who struggled valiantly, yet ultimately in vain, to conquer "an intellectual space of reason" (534) between magic and rationality. His failure may be why Warburg writes at the very beginning of the article that his remarks about the Reformation period could function as the first chapter of the "handbook" on "the un-freedom of modern superstitious man" that had yet to be written; 490. Why did Faust fail where Luther, Melanchthon, and Dürer did not? Perhaps it was because he mistakenly wagered with the devil instead of with God. Warburg does not give this reason, however, but closes, rather, with his famous claim: "Athens will of course always and repeatedly desire to be won back from Alexandria" (534). The peculiarly recursive grammar of this sentence—which suggests that an inborn German reason somehow takes pleasure in repeatedly experiencing itself in the dangerous embrace of astrological "magic," even as it also repeatedly does battle with the irrational in an effort to wrest itself free—nevertheless suggests that the struggle on the part of the "modern" nation's early modern surrogates, Luther, Dürer, and now Faust, to find a better link between God's plan and the here and now may ultimately turn out to have this same kind of tragic end.

Benjamin's version of these debates in the Tragic Drama book can be most compactly observed in his opening salvo in the melancholy chapter noted above: "The great German dramatists of the baroque were Lutherans" (G: 1.1: 317; E: 138). Klaus Garber has remarked on the implications of this claim (Rezeption und Ret tung 81–120). Benjamin's active correspondence about early modern religious history and doctrine with his close friend Rang during these years (indeed, Rang's death in 1924 meant, according to Benjamin, that the book had lost its only "real reader," Gesammelte Schriften 1.3: 883) suggests the context in which the implications of the volatile theopolitical conflicts of the early modern period for German modernity might have been presented to him. Benjamin's assertion of the "Lutheran" identity of the playwrights whose works are the main subject of his book is nevertheless curious, since it could be debated whether it is even true. After all, the lower nobility and patrician sponsors of the Baroque dramas about which he was writing may not have even been Lutherans, but rather crypto-Calvinists, leaving

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38. On Rang as a "collaborator" on the book, see the detailed inventory of exchanges between him and Benjamin, including letters from Rang, portions of which Benjamin included nearly verbatim in the book itself, in the notes to the German edition of the Tragic Drama book in volume 1.3 of Gesammelte Schriften, 884–95, here 887.
us to wonder about the confessional affiliation of the playwrights in their employ.\(^3\)

Benjamin may not have been aware of this wrinkle. Had he been, it would help explain the Weberian echoes in the passage that follows the opening statement quoted above, in which, without identifying it as such, it is the problem of how Lutheranism configured the two kingdoms theory that concerns Benjamin most. He writes:

> Whereas in the decades of the Counter-Reformation[,] Catholicism had penetrated secular life with all the power of its discipline, the relationship of Lutheranism to the everyday had always been antinomic. The rigorous morality of its teaching in respect of civic conduct stood in sharp contrast to its renunciation of ‘good works’. By denying the latter any special miraculous spiritual effect, making the soul dependent on grace through faith, and making the secular-political sphere a testing ground for a life that was only indirectly religious . . . it did, it is true, instill into people a strict sense of obedience to duty, but in its great men it produced [only] melancholy. . . . Human actions were deprived of all value. Something new arose: an empty world . . . a rubbish heap of . . . inauthentic actions. (G: 1.1: 317; E: 138–19)\(^4\)

The “Lutheran faith,” Benjamin continues in the Tragic Drama book, refused what he understood as the Calvinist solution to the gap between the transcendent and the mundane that a theological doctrine like the two kingdoms theory had to a certain extent itself opened up. Continuing to stare “the rubbish heap” of their “existence” directly in the face, and frozen in an “emptied world” (318; 139), Lutherans have to wait—and wait and wait—for God’s intervention through grace. Hence the “bleak rule of [their] melancholic distaste for life” (319; 140).

As a commentary on the disastrous economic and political situation in and for Germany, both on the home front and on the postwar world stage, after the promise that the nation was fulfilling the work of God has been irreparably broken, Benjamin’s words ring true. Instead of glorying in the possibility of a divine plan being revealed in the victories of war, Benjamin writes, the Lutheran Baroque of the post–Thirty Years’ War period was paralyzed by the same kind of “satanic entanglement” in history (G: 1.1: 320; E: 141–42) to which Germany had fallen victim at the outset of World War I. When he quotes Arthur Hübscher’s comments here that this is the reason that seventeenth-century “‘baroque nationalism’ was never associated with political action” and could never express itself as the “revolutionary will of Sturm und Drang or the Romantic war against the philistinism of state and public life” (320; 141) had done, Benjamin’s critique of both aggressive war theology

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\(^3\) On the confessional identity of the noble family that sponsored one of the major German Baroque playwrights about whom Benjamin writes, namely Daniel Casper von Lohenstein, see Newman, Intervention of Philology 30 and 122.

\(^4\) Max Weber writes in a similar way about an “inhumane” and “harsh” Calvinism that creates in Man a profound “inner loneliness” and “deep spiritual isolation” (60–61).
and the passivity of official Lutheranism, and its failure to do what was right for the nation, can be heard. Warburg's "prognostication" essay is quoted (sometimes footnoted, but sometimes not) countless times in this and the final chapter of Benjamin's book. It may have been what gave Benjamin the idea to understand the "empty world" (317; 139) as a Lutheran rather than a Calvinist dilemma, and then to use that sixteenth-century world to investigate the seventeenth-century interest in astrology as a way of tracking the more recent failure in Germany to develop a religious program in any more than a merely instrumental way.

Benjamin's ideas about the implications of an astrally organized early modern world linked to a Lutheran tradition differ significantly from Warburg's, then, and resemble more the precarious approach of a Barthian-Gogartian type, just as his more downbeat Baroque differs from the heroic German Renaissance that Warburg saw emerging out of the Reformation era. Benjamin continues: "The heritage of the Renaissance" from which "this age [the Baroque] derive[d its] material" concerned the "only indirectly religious life" and deepened the "contemplative paralysis" of its "great men" (G: 1.1: 317–20; E: 138–40). Benjamin is clearly referring here to the Dürer engraving that Warburg discussed, and the image in fact immediately makes an appearance, albeit in refashioned form: "It accords with this [i.e., the claim about the contemplative paralysis of great men caught in a Lutheran world] that in the proximity of Albrecht Dürer's figure, Melencolia, the utensils of active life are lying around unused on the floor, as objects of contemplation. This engraving anticipates the Baroque in many respects" (319; 140). And yet, it does so, antithetically to Warburg's version, primarily in its indication that the melancholy Baroque man is imprisoned in the "satanic" melancholic paralysis mentioned above. Benjamin writes, for example, that the "vain activity of the [courtly] intriguer[s]" who populated the Baroque plays must actually be understood as "the worthless antithesis of passionate contemplation" (320; 141); the sovereign and his lackeys are similarly trapped in the "depths of the creaturely realm" (324; 146), as are the "despots" and "tyrants" (322; 144) who crowd the stages of the German Baroque plays. For Benjamin, their access to the "absolute transcendentality" via grace that Warburg found in Melanthon's and Dürer's Lutheran worlds is denied. There are very few heroic "liberators" here, in other words.

Given that they reverse Warburg's claims in nearly every respect, it is perhaps surprising that these pages of Benjamin's work (G: 1.1: 323–29; E: 145–51) are primarily a tissue of extensive citations from both Warburg and Giehlow (on whom Warburg too had depended), as well as from Erwin Panofsky's and Fritz Saxl's 1923 book on Dürer's Melencolia, in which they had taken it as their mission to complete Warburg's work. Benjamin lifts the substance of his argument directly out of these texts, interweaving long quotes from them (again, sometimes footnoted, often not) on astrology and the development of humoral psychology out of its "science" (326; 148), for example, as well as some of the lengthy passages from the medieval and Renaissance texts his scholarly contemporaries had
included as quotes in their texts, with his own citations on melancholic astral-humoral issues from additional seventeenth-century texts. (The Warburgians did not respond entirely positively when Benjamin sent them this semiplagiarized text, as Sigrid Weigel notes.) Yet he does so, in the end, only to refute them. By dwelling on the radical separation of Man from God’s world, that is, and Man’s incapacitating “immersion in the life of creaturely things” (330; 152), Benjamin tracks how the afterlives of Lutheran melancholia in the Baroque era in fact diverge from the optimism of Warburg’s theory of “sublime melancholy” (329; 151).

The key moments in the Tragic Drama book that signal Benjamin’s reversal of Warburg’s upbeat reading of Lutheranism’s afterlives are, ironically, marked by a return to the Albertinus text that he had encountered in Liliencron’s Hamlet novella (to which he had probably been led by a footnote in Warburg’s essay). Stitching together quotes from Liliencron’s 1884 Albertinus edition with references to plays by the Baroque dramatists, Gryphius, Lohenstein, and Hallmann (G: 1.1: 322–23, 326, 331; E: 144–45, 148, 154), Benjamin describes how the Baroque melancholic, instead of “escaping madness” by means of the “Melancholia illa heroica” that Warburg describes (329; 151), for example, “goes mad and fades into despair” (323; 145). Missing from the “inventory” of “symbols of melancholy embodied in [Dürer’s] engraving” (331; 154) drawn up by Giehlow and the “other scholars” is, Benjamin writes, Albertinus’s “stone,” the “weighty mass,” that Benjamin indicates is the heavier “theological concept of the melancholic” (332; 155) of the Baroque. It is revealing that it is the Jesuit Albertinus’s understanding of sloth, acedia, that Benjamin uses here to describe the personnel of the “Lutheran” tragic drama as “dismal[ly]” and “hopeless[ly]” loyal only to the “creaturely” realm and the “world of things” (333; 156). The strongly Barthian refusal of commerce between the kingdom of Man and the kingdom of God he describes seems to be the equivalent of a kind of theological backsliding into the “old-fashioned” Jesuit and thus anti- or pre-Reformation mode. Yet there is also no hope for redemption, at least for the Germans. Their world “knows no higher law” (333; 157), Benjamin explains. Even the most pious of his Baroque Lutherans is not touched by “the sound of revelation” (330; 152) in the secular world.

Benjamin’s understanding of how to live with the melancholy reality of a Lutheran two kingdoms theory reborn in both early modern and modern Germany is thus quite distinct from Warburg’s. The postwar date of Benjamin’s text suggests that it may have been only after the national defeat of 1918 that he could produce his depressingly accurate account of the loss of a Lutheran Germany’s soul. Benjamin’s famously opaque insights into Baroque melancholy in the Tragic

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41 Warburg’s assistant, Saxl, did read the chapter of the Tragic Drama book that Benjamin sent to Hamburg, and sent it on to Panofsky, who apparently sent Benjamin a “cool” response to it. Saxl remarks that, although “interesting,” the essay was “not easy to read.” See Weigel 122–24.
Drama book may have derived from his own personal melancholic nature, as some scholars have claimed. But these insights also suggest Benjamin's stance on the devastating effects of the confessional logic that subtended the nation's actions in the war. If the failure to be able to believe in Warburg's perhaps desperately optimistic, salutary understanding of the link between God's purpose for Man and life on the ground is clear in Benjamin's case, his final argument in this chapter nevertheless does target a figure whose creaturely life was successfully illuminated by the "reflection of a distant light, shining back from the depths of self absorption" (we obviously think of the Dürer image here). As we know, however, "Germany" was not the country that was able to have imagined it. Rather, this "figure" was "Hamlet" (334; 157).

The tragedy of Benjamin's Hamlet is, however, that, as Benjamin writes, it is only briefly "before its extinction" that Hamlet's life, as the "object...of his mourning," can be redeemed by moving "into a blessed existence." The notion is perverse insofar as "self awareness" (G: 1.1: 335; E: 158) thus in no way guarantees a "heroic" redeemed life, as it does for Warburg, but rather only a front-row seat at the spectacle of destruction and death. Here again, the prince seems to figure forth wartime Germany in spite of Benjamin's denials. The description in the third and final chapter of the Tragic Drama book of a theory of Baroque allegory that, in mysterious fashion, can in fact redeem the "comfortless confusion" and "desert of all human existence" in which the tragedy of Germany was caught (405; 232) sounds curiously similar. The passages in which this theory is developed are some of the most arcane and difficult to understand in this arcane and difficult book. They involve a series of metaphors that indicate that when such a redemption occurs, it is mostly by chance, as when "those who lose their footing turn somersaults in their fall" and, in an abrupt "about turn," "rediscover themselves," no longer in "the earthly world of things," but rather "under the eyes of heaven" (405–6; 232). The exchange of the heavenly for the earthly kingdom comes here without warning and, indeed, entirely without work. It is an agentless redemption, in other words, that recalls the Lutheran doctrine of grace developed by some of the early twentieth-century dialectical theologians mentioned above. That one can only clumsily stumble into such redemption, if at all, suggests the rareness of its occurrence. Indeed, it seems more likely that, even if there is a brief glimpse of heaven, the somersault will end in a fall, or, as in the case of Hamlet, in "extinction" and death. It may have been from the other tragic dramas, namely the German Baroque plays themselves, that Benjamin learned that this moment of insight might in fact not coincide with a fall simply by chance but rather literally require the loss of the world. The absolute fall out of immanence into transcendence, and thus out of Man's world into God's, often occurs in those plays only via the stage property of an allegorized corpse, as Benjamin understood. Only so could the "transitoriness of things" be "rescue[d] into eternity" (397; 223).
Andreas Gryphius's Baroque tragic drama Catharina von Georgien Oder Bewehrte Beständigkeit (Catharine of Georgia; or, Constancy Defended) (1657) takes as its subject the story of a Christian queen who, according to at least one source, was a canny military strategist and formidable political force in the complex world of early modern western central Asia, where Orthodox Georgia was sandwiched between Persia and the powerful Ottoman Empire. Catharine led her people effectively but was ultimately taken captive and held by the shah of Persia for seven years. During that time, she was subject to his demands to both marry him and convert to Islam, both of which kinds of importuning she steadfastly refused. As punishment for what is taken to be this otherwise highly laudable conduct, and also as a result of local political maneuverings on the part of the shah’s diplomatic advisors, she was first brutally tortured and then ultimately burned alive, a martyr to her chastity, religious faith, and strength of will. These are the historical events that form the tense subject of Gryphius's play, which, while underscoring Catharine's this-worldly constraints, also bills itself as a display of a constancy (constantia, Beständigkeit) that, even as it beggars restriction to the material realm, is what endows Catharine's politically brutal sojourn on this earth with higher meaning. The play has been called a “Protestant version of the [genre] of the martyr-tragedy,” at the center of which lies a “genuinely Lutheran opposition of secular and spiritual power” (Borgstedt 61 and 49). The tension the play stages between political-historical contingencies and a transcendent sphere defined by Christian ethicomoral codes is thus not unrelated to the two kingdoms theory I have discussed. Its “two-part title” (G: 1.1: 371; E: 193)—with the case of the queen's creaturely individuality used as a pointer to indicate her nearly other-worldly constancy and thus to intimate the necessity of her earthly doom as the sole conduit to that realm beyond—is an example of the kind of emblematic logic that Benjamin saw governing the Baroque's response to this theory and out of which he developed his own ambivalent conception of allegory in the Tragic Drama book.

Gryphius's play was written around 1647 and first published a decade later; the historical events of 1624 it depicts were thus not so very far in the past for either its author or its audiences, which were several. The issue of audience, indeed, of how to be a good reader of either plays or emblems, or, indeed, of a Lutheran world emptied of (or at least absolutely separate from) the world beyond, is key to understanding what Benjamin describes as the “violent” “dialectical movement” (G: 1.1: 342; E: 166) of allegory. On the one side lies the “frozen, primordial landscape” of “secular” history, he writes, and, on the other, the “unfolding” of the “significance” of the “creaturely” in “death” (343; 166). How to judge her fit with one or the other of these worlds is precisely Queen Catharine's challenge in Gryphius's play, the grim details of which are proof of the accuracy of Benjamin's claim that “the German tragic drama was never able to use allegory inconspicuously” (368; 191). Indeed, his
most pressing question about the Baroque plays that are his subject comes toward the end of the Tragic Drama book: “What is the significance of those scenes of horrible martyrdom in which the baroque drama wallows?” (390: 216). Gryphius's play is not unusual in the vivid brutality of such scenes, which anchor not only the characters who experience it, but also its audience and readers, in the violent ruins of the secular political world. The challenges of finding redemption beyond this world are great. It may thus not be by chance that, in his introductory examination of allegory, Benjamin highlights the reference to Herder's understanding of emblems in Friedrich Creuzer's early nineteenth-century history of symbols, Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen (Symbolics and Mythology of the Ancient Peoples, Particularly the Greeks) (1819); emblems are expressions of a specifically "German power" that emerged with particular prominence in the paradigmatically "emblematic age" of the Reformation (G: 1.1: 345; E: 168), he notes. Gryphius's play must have seemed extremely "Lutheran" to Benjamin in its display of the difficult relation between the travails of this world and God's will, as that relation determined its highly emblematic texture and themes. It certainly invited him to consider allegory in Protestant terms.

From the outset Gryphius's Catharine of Georgia calls attention to the challenges inherent in the allegorical culture of the Baroque. At the opening of act 1, the queen narrates to her companion, Salome, a dream she has had the previous night. In the dream, in which she was the protagonist, Catharine observed how, clothed in the magnificent garb of her royal station, she had begun to feel on her temples the pressure of her diamond-studded crown as it shrank. "In a flash" (l. 330), the crown transformed itself into a wreath of thorns; piercing and then penetrating deep into her skull, it caused streams of blood to run down her face (l. 335). The more she and others struggle in the dream to free her from this "most horrible agony" (l. 342), the more firmly the thorny crown takes hold, resulting, finally, in the gory disfigurement of the queen. Catharine goes on to describe how in the dream, even as she suffered the torturous embrace of her crown, "a stranger" assaulted her by grabbing her breasts "not without pain" (l. 344), causing her, finally, to faint. Even though the account ends with the queen's explanation that, still in the dream, she comes to be enveloped in a sense of well-being and is able to observe her tormentor, who turns out to be the shah, trembling with fear at her feet (ll. 345–50), the extended, nightmarish account can leave both viewer and reader only with a queasy memory of the sadistic crown and the queen's mutilated breasts.

If daylight sometimes helps to dull one's memories in such cases, Gryphius resolutely refuses to allow dramatic time to erase the details of Catharine's lurid vision. In act 5, the dream comes to life, albeit offstage, as the actual tormenting of the queen is described in even more gruesome detail by a serving woman, Serena,

42 Line references are to Gryphius, Catharina von Georgien. All translations of this play are my own.
Serena reports the progress of the torture step by step and with an attention to anatomical specifics made possible, one might argue, by the playwright’s participation in the public dissecting of human corpses in the famous anatomical theater in Leiden, where he spent the years 1638 through 1644. The textual particulars involve a painstaking description of Catherine’s internal organs, which are revealed as the flesh is methodically stripped away from her torso and her breasts ripped to shreds. Gryphius mercilessly has the queen survive this brutality only to have her thrust, still living, into the flames (ll. 104–25). In a particularly macabre twist, her charred head is ultimately rescued from the ashes and appears, relic-like, on stage (ll. 209–20) to be handed over to her son, Tamaras, by the Russian ambassador, who had been the one who had pleaded with the shah for the queen’s release—obviously to no good effect. Gryphius’s dedication to the gruesome theatrics of martyrdom, which in any case followed with care the “script” established in his French source, Claude Malingres, Sieur de S. Lazare’s Histoires Tragiques de nostre Temps (Tragic Histories of Our Times) (1635), is rivaled only by that of his fellow Silesian playwright Daniel Casper von Lohenstein, who, some years later, called for the actual staging (rather than mere reporting) of the grizzly torture of the eponymous heroine of his tragic drama Epicharis at the hands of the Roman emperor Nero as punishment for her involvement in the Pisonian conspiracy. In 1655, a series of engravings was printed in connection with what some scholars claim was a planned performance of Gryphius’s Catharine of Georgia play, somewhat perversely dedicated to the reigning duchess, Luise, at the small Silesian court of Oehlau, a female head of state and probably, like Catharine, a member of a religious minority too (see Zielske). In these engravings by Johann Using, the image of the woman’s tortured body, while repugnant, captures the viewer’s attention and is hard to dismiss.43 One must wonder how Duchess Luise, as Gryphius’s patron and sponsor, reacted to the play.

Given that any number of the tragic-drama plots of the plays of the German Baroque culminated in macabre scenes like the ones described here, it is no wonder that Benjamin refers to them as “crude theater” (G: 1.1: 335; E: 158). The “creaturely” dimension of human existence in which he is especially interested is nowhere more obvious than when the interiors of the broken bodies of their characters are displayed prominently for audiences to see. Benjamin develops his theory of allegory out of readings of the significance of the maimed corpses, stage props, and ruins that littered the seventeenth-century stage of which he writes. When he claims, then, that “norms of emblematics” (391; 216) may be understood on the basis of such scenes of cruelty and martyrdom, we may be forgiven for thinking that he may have had in mind the dream narration scene with which Gryphius’s play begins.

43. The Using engravings are reproduced in Zielske, as well as in volume 3 of Hugh Powell’s edition of Gryphius’s Trauerspiele.
(Benjamin refers to it several times in the book), since the gory dream did in fact have precedents in actual emblems. The competing interpretations the characters in the play give of Catharine’s nightmare vision, and the significance for them of the scene of torture that it appears to predict, stage a moment of emblematic representation that calls attention to the tension between the Realpolitik necessary to negotiate the contingent and brutal political realities of both early modern and modern life, on the one hand, and the possibility of leading a life of “moral autonomy” that transcends these constraints by following the mandates of an other-worldly sphere, on the other (Koepnick 279). The play’s performance of early modern practices of emblem making and reading may well have helped Benjamin see allegory as a way of understanding the fatal crossroads at which a modern Lutheran Germany stood, but also as a commentary on the fact that the road to spiritual rebirth might be a slippery and precarious one with many false turns.

Queen Catharine’s dream recounts the transformation of her crown into an instrument of torture. The image to which the dream refers can be found in any number of seventeenth-century emblem books, which Benjamin refers to as the “authentic documents of the modern allegorical way of looking at things, the literary and visual emblem-texts of the Baroque” (G: 1.1: 339; E: 162). These widely circulated collections of conventional wisdom provided opportunities for the witty combination of elements from nature, history, and myth and were designed to reveal—or to provoke readers into construing—the coherence of the phenomenal and noumenal worlds. A particularly fine example of the thorny-crown emblem was included in Guillaume de La Perrière’s La Morosophie of 1553, for example, which describes itself as a collection of one hundred “emblemes moraux” (moral emblems). The pictura, the actual illustration, which emblem theorists refer to as the “body” of the emblem, is of an opulent crown thick on its inside with thorns; it is accompanied by French verses, the “soul” or scriptura, that gloss the image by telling the reader its greater meaning, namely that the “fine gold” of the crown means only “great pain” for its wearer. In another rendering of the same image by the Spanish political theorist Diego de Saavedra Fajardo, first published in 1640 but reprinted numerous times throughout the seventeenth century and all over Europe, the explanatory motto under the image is compact; it reads, Bonum fallax (loosely translated “The Good That Betrays” or “Fake Goods”). Combined, the “body” and the “soul” of the emblem are meant to guarantee insight into a previously obscure, but now clear moral, political, religious, or natural-historical message about, in this case, the realities of sovereignty’s dangerous burdens. The very fact of this emblem’s inclusion in these two exceedingly popular and widely available print inventories of early modern commonplaces about the lives of the

44. The La Perrière image and verse are reproduced in Henkel and Schöne 1259, as are the Saavedra verses.
powerful, together with the consistency of the message expressed about its significance in two volumes first published some one hundred years apart, suggests a certain hermeneutic stability, a guarantee of interpretive orthodoxy apparently surrounding the statement that the powerful suffer precisely when they are powerful. Another emblem, whose motto reads, Tollat qui te non noverit (Only he who is unfamiliar with the heavy weight of ruler will take it up), would appear to confirm the rule. This emblem, as familiar to consumers of early modern emblem books as the thorny-crown emblem to which Catharine’s dream refers, is rendered exquisitely in Julius Wilhelm Zincgref’s Emblematum Ethico-Politicorum Centuria (One Hundred Ethical-Political Emblems) of 1619. The Zincgref emblem distinguishes itself by being one of the very few actual emblems that Benjamin discusses in the Tragic Drama book (G: 1.1: 252; E: 73).

The scarcity of historical examples of emblems in Benjamin’s argument does not suggest, however, that he was unfamiliar with what he calls “the more original works” (G: 1.1: 339; E: 162) of Baroque emblematics. Nor, indeed, are his claims about their significance for the allegorical logic of the period inaccurate, as the reception of the thorny-crown emblem in Gryphius’s play attests. Benjamin famously, yet perhaps somewhat counterintuitively (given the apparent stability of meaning in the emblem collections), describes “the antinomies of the allegorical” as dictating that “any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else” (350; 174–75). He claims, in other words, that one of Baroque allegory’s primary tasks was to reveal that the significance of its images—and thus, of the fragmentary “ruins” of the sublunary, or “creaturely,” realm of (in this case) real-world courtly manipulation and intrigue they both represented and “bodied forth”—were not stable, or, at least, that there was no guaranteed relation between suffering in the this-worldly realm, and redemption in the next. The claim may seem perverse in the context of a play that seems to celebrate Catharine’s nearly Christ-like acceptance of her martyrdom as the avenue to the world of the divine. Gryphius’s play nevertheless not only shows the horrible price the body must pay for its removal into God’s kingdom. It also thematizes the difficulty of knowing for sure whether that redemption will or can occur by showing that the thorny-crown emblem’s meaning is at best ambiguous in the play; it is thus of problematic value, especially for those, who, like Duchess Luise, belonged to the very political world whose opacity the emblems were designed to clarify. The hope that there is something more must be almost literally a leap of faith.

The interpretive conundrum surrounding the thorny-crown emblem that arises in Gryphius’s play—and its exemplification of Benjamin’s claims about the antinomies of Baroque emblematics—points to the ambiguity of living in a ruined world and to the attendant possibility of a profoundly “unheroic” relation to the realm of contingency. Indeed, after Catharine ends her description of the dream in act 1, her serving maid, Salome, takes up the role of early modern reader of emblems by providing a gloss of the dream image. The dream is “too true” (l. 355), Salome
Melancholy Germans

says; the queen had indeed suffered mightily in earlier times precisely because of the heavy burdens of majesty represented by the crown. Salome’s reading seems to accord with the general understanding of the often painful obligations of power indicated by the glosses in the emblem books. The sense of relief Catharine feels at the end of the dream is nevertheless a premonition, according to Salome, of the aid, indeed the “freedom” (l. 357), that is imminent, especially since she then proceeds to reveal to the queen that she has a message from the queen’s son, Tamaras, that will be delivered to the queen by the secret emissaries from Georgia, who are then immediately brought on stage. In a nearly uninterrupted— and thus in performance terms necessarily show-stopping— speech of some three hundred lines, the queen’s countrymen inform her of the complex political events roiling her realm. Salome glosses the fact of the message from the prince— and the presence of Demetrius and Procopius as his envoys— as the future promise signified by “the beautiful crown shown to her by the night” (ll. 364–65). Salome’s reading of the queen’s dream is odd, first of all, because emblem theory in principle suggests that the gloss, or “soul,” of the specifics of an emblem’s image is meant to lead the reader of the emblem up the ladder of meaning, so to speak, to the more general insight hidden in the “body” of the illustration, and not back down to another individual or merely historical occasion, such as the arrival of the prince’s message or the ambassadors’ presence, which might or might not embody that wisdom. Moreover, the crown in the dream is anything but “beautiful.” Nevertheless, although admittedly a bit unorthodox in these ways, Salome’s initial reading does seem to fit with what was clearly accepted at the time as the way in which the thorny-crown emblem should be read, namely to indicate the reality of the material (i.e., political and military) burdens of those in power.

Yet, what is odd about Gryphius’s attribution to Salome of knowledge of well-known emblems is not that this clearly recognizable emblem is invoked in the play. Rather, that Gryphius offers not just one— namely Salome’s— apparently conventional gloss, but later, also a second reading of the crown dream that turns out to be at odds with the first is what gives one pause. This second gloss occurs toward the end of act 4, after Catharine has learned that she will be tortured (ll. 353–70). By this time, the queen has been challenged— in return for her freedom— to both abjure her faith and yield her chastity to the shah by his minion, Imanculi. She has refused and accepted a martyr’s fate instead, with the explanation that Christ too had to suffer before entering his kingdom (l. 238). Over the earthly crown the shah offers her Catharine will thus choose the “eternal crown” (l. 262), she says. The reference is to, among other things, the opening allegorical scene of the play in act 1, in which an allegorical figure of Eternity has indicated the transitory nature of earthly power represented by the detritus of power strewn about her on the stage (ll. 1–88), a scene that is also illustrated by Using. In the Using engraving, the earthly crown that Salome had taken the dream crown to signify actually lies neglected in the foreground of the image. This is the same crown that adorns the title page of the
Using illustrations, the one that the shah offers the queen. The “eternal crown” she prefers can be seen up above, proffered to her by an angelic figure. This literally superior crown is also the well-known symbol of martyrdom, the “corona Martyris,” as described in tomes such as Filippo Picinelli’s Mundus symbolicus of 1687, for example, and is accompanied by the palm frond of suffering (see Zielske 12 n. 17). “Martyrdom . . . prepares the body of the living person for emblematic purposes,” Benjamin writes (G: 1.1: 391; E: 217). In the play itself, the dream emblem does prepare Catharine for the martyrdom of her body. The clear choice of the one crown over the other in the Using image, which accurately illustrates Catharine’s ultimate preference, nevertheless downplays the fact that there is a sustained struggle in the play over the actual significance of the crown emblem—and thus over the substance of her choice.

In the competing readings of Catharine’s dream, Gryphius’s play offers a judiciously skeptical commentary on the plausibility of making the right choice, indeed, on the difficulty of choosing the heavenly over the profane crown and path—and thus of constantia over political manipulation and duplicity. Or, if that is too strong, it reveals that that choice will occur only when there is no other way out. This difficulty emerges with greatest clarity in act 4, where the competing regimes of earthly politics and divine glory, and thus the dueling kingdoms of Man and God, are under constant pressure. The queen clearly seeks to remove all ambiguity about the meaning of the crown by engaging at the very end of the act in a moment of emblematic reading herself; just before she is led away from her women to the torture chamber, she recalls her dream and explains: “Now the dream that last night, when I was overcome with sleep and fear, pointed to this outcome, is fulfilled” (ll. 353–55). The crown of thorns signifies the martyrdom God has bestowed on her, she explains: “God makes me a gift of this crown when I die as he did” (l. 370). The sadistic man of the dream is, in turn, her imminent death. The shah’s henchmen proceed to more or less enact her reading in the carefully orchestrated torture sequence described in act 5 that deliberately echoes the details of Catharine’s nightmare vision. In allowing the queen’s gloss, which endows the crown, as a symbol of earthly power, with divine significance, to follow and thus literally supersede Salome’s earlier, more pragmatic and “applied” reading, Gryphius’s play would seem to stage an example of how to read emblems correctly by indicating how to move through the external appearance of the image “up” to the greater “redeemed” truth to which it points. Salome, who saw the crown only as an image of earthly power, is in the process cast as a bad reader of emblems, and it is Catharine who, by glossing the crown “properly,” that is, figuratively and within the frame of the world beyond, succeeds in merging with what has conventionally been taken to be the allegory of the play that bears her name. That is, the drama’s double title sees the suffering of the queen first and foremost as a way to examine the abstract concept, probably neo-Stoic in nature, of spiritual steadfastness and Christian fortitude, rather than as the occasion for a history lesson about the hazards of a harsh
political life in western central Asia—or in Silesia—in the first decades of the seventeenth century.

Yet the availability of two possible readings of the emblem in Gryphius's play, and the somewhat troubling fact that Salome's apparently discarded gloss actually appears to have been more in line than Catharine's with early modern doxa about sovereignty, as represented by the emblem books, might have created the real need expressed in Benjamin's reflections on allegory to understand how emblems work. What could Gryphius's staging of the two readings in conflict mean? Is the play primarily about early modern political or early modern spiritual life? What is the connection between them? Is it, moreover, about clear choices on the part of princes and all political actors faced with difficult decisions, or about the impossibility of making such decisions correctly? Stefanie Arend has argued that a careful reading of the characters of Salome and Imanculi, the shah's messenger to Catharine, reveals them as proponents of a perhaps more Machiavellian, but nevertheless more commonly accepted early modern political calculus than the queen. It is Salome, after all, who arranges for the secret visit of the Georgian messengers and who reminds Catharine in act 1 of her obligation to secure the succession of her son, Tamaras, to the throne (ll. 169–226). In similar fashion, Imanculi, even as he brings her his master's offer of marriage and conversion in act 4, engages in a lively political debate with Catharine, pointing out to the queen, for example, that, according to a logic of ratio status that transcends national and confessional differences, it is her duty, precisely as sovereign, to act rationally by looking beyond the irrelevant details of chastity and religious faith to the future welfare of her kingdom (ll. 80–264). Catharine's evolving commitment to martyrdom and to an unearthly kingdom and glory begins to look somewhat unorthodox, even a bit overwrought, when considered in the context of these kinds of more pragmatic political positions. Such positions are nevertheless intermittently, but also steadily promoted both throughout and also at the conclusion of the play, when Seinel Can, the shah's other minister, succeeds in act 5 in manipulating the Russian ambassador into not blowing Catharine's death out of proportion (ll. 257–344); doing so would only create a major diplomatic incident and endanger the public face of both Russian foreign policy and the Persian throne. In these ways, the play suggests the early modern lesson that those in power ought to act pragmatically and amorally and without a clear sense of—or concern for—the beyond.

Arend's suggestion that what is driving Gryphius's text is an examination of the tense relationship between a doctrine of moral absolutes, on the one hand, and the exigencies of early modern political life, on the other, explains a certain formal unevenness in the play. The text oscillates between often energetic dramatic dialogues and at least two lengthy, soliloquy-like narrations of political background, lifted, to all appearances, directly from Claude Malingres's prose narrative, which again has been said to be Gryphius's main source. This formal tension is not the result of the author's inexperience, however; rather, it mirrors the rhetorical and ideological
struggle in which the play engages between foregrounding the historical details of Catharine's fight for political survival before her capture, as evidenced in the informative, but long-winded speeches, on the one hand, and downplaying the horrifying realities of her case as subordinate to and merely an example, albeit a spectacular one, of Christian devotion to virtue and God, on the other. In the end, the question of how to read this play is really the same question as the one concerning the crown: When is a thorny crown a crown, indicative of lessons about the vexed nature of sovereignty and burdens of earthly rule, and when, pointing beyond itself, is it a more or less religious symbol of the earthly suffering that afflicts all of mankind prior to its redemption at the hands of God? Put another way, when is a historical queen historical, subject to the demands of real time to which she must respond in kind, and when is she merely the illustrative part of an emblem, a prop, in an extended allegory of transcendence that leaves the world behind? How, finally, can we, how could Gryphius guarantee a “progression” from one to the other reading, when, as Arend points out, Catharine herself has a difficult time in the play leaving her successful, if sometimes duplicitous political history behind? How much, finally, would the suggestion of Catharine's patient endurance of torture and her allegorical significance as a Mankind redeemed have helped a literal early modern head of state, such as Duchess Luise, get through her or his politically hazardous day? Conversely, how much would it help the state if that sovereign were to conclude that, given the realities of early modern political life, earthly dominion should best be put aside in order to make room for the kind of perhaps devout, yet also profoundly melancholic withdrawal opted for in two spectacular early modern cases, namely Emperor Charles V and Queen Christina of Sweden, retirements that, if chosen in the smaller principalities of Silesia, where Gryphius was born, lived, and wrote, would have exposed these small polities to incredible dangers at the hands of greater confessional regimes? Perhaps it is best in such cases not to choose faith or the divine realm. Questions of this nature about what could be considered “good” and responsible, politically and morally defensible behavior on the part of sovereigns in politically and religiously fraught times were certainly ones the duchess might have asked herself, had she attended Gryphius's play—if it was indeed staged for her at her residence in Ohlau in 1655, as the Using illustrations suggest. Given these questions, it is important to remember that Gryphius himself did not require that the queen's torture be staged; indeed, he makes a point of having the splaying open of her body and the gory amputation of her breasts “merely” narrated in act 5 by the serving woman, Serena, who is herself said to have fainted at the sight of Catharine's agony, unable, like the audience of the play, to actually contemplate it at length (ll. 10–13 and 96–100). The text indicates that the shah was present in the torture chamber (l. 45), however; his ghoulish presence is accurately depicted by Using in one of his illustrations. The shah's inability to turn away from the sight of the queen's tormented body is significant, and yet also calls attention to the play's bizarre conclusion, in which he also experiences some kind
of vision (ll. 345–48). In a replaying of the sequence of the original thorny-crown emblem dream, an apparition of the battered queen is spectacularly transformed into an angel in front of his eyes (ll. 375–400). It is not clear how this scene might actually have been staged. Using's engraving mistakenly shows the shah staring only at the posttransformation Catharine, and thus captures neither his horrified contemplation of her mutilated body, as it is called for in ten lines of explosive terror and lament (ll. 375–84), nor its (for him) equally terrifying transmutation into angelic form, which has the collateral effect of translating his earthly survival into a living psychic hell. The queen's transformation is reproduced, in other words, in him, yet in reverse, as her realistically implausible elevation into a state of eternal bliss in front of his eyes triggers his visible fall into madness and a lifetime of creaturely suffering not so very different from either the martyrdom she has endured or what Benjamin calls the "ensnarement of history" (G: 1.1: 320; E: 141–42) that marks her character. In other words, Using's image does not show the possible link between the state of both characters' existential realities and the state of their souls. Nor, perhaps more importantly, does it allow us to wonder, as Nicola Kaminiski has done (104), what we are to make of the fact that the only character in this play able to complete a proper emblematic reading by seeing beyond the maimed body to its greater significance in a transcendent realm—namely the shah—does so only in a state of intense confusion, even insanity. Using's image thus supplies for the viewer what the reader or audience of Gryphius's play is prevented by the play itself from seeing, namely the redemption of the queen, which in the play text appears only as part of unreliable hallucination on the part of the shah.

Gryphius's play thematizes several times over the question of how the bodies of emblems and allegories, of queens and earthly suffering, are to be read properly, and, just as importantly, whether they can or cannot be used to point beyond or signify anything other than the realm of history on which they rely. Using's illustration of the torture scene, with the queen's body as the center of visual attention, runs counter to Gryphius's decision to have that body, in its most creaturely moment, indicated only in words, as if, emblematically speaking, Using thought it possible to supply only the pictura, the image, assuming that the audience would produce the "correct" scriptura, or motto, itself. Gryphius appears not to have been so sure. It is impossible to know why Using's illustrations supplied scenes not present in the play. (There has been no scholarly proof that the play was actually staged in Ohlau in any way that followed these prints.) Nevertheless, Using's supplements call attention to an important moment in Gryphius's play, namely the veering away of the text from having its audience actually contemplate the queen at her most creaturely, and thus from having to consider the depressing reality of her fall into despair as a formerly successful, but now dispossessed political animal and head of state. This is the lesson that Benjamin's remarks about emblematics in the Tragic Drama book indicate he may have learned from Gryphius's decision not to stage the
torture scene. While it is clear, in other words, that Gryphius envelops the issue of the queen’s body and its attendant historicity in the fulsome emblematic apparatus for which the play is so well known, this does not mean that he does not also subtly acknowledge in the serial glossing of the thorny-crown emblem precisely the difficulty, if not also the ultimate arbitrariness, of reading—and living—history allegorically in a Lutheran world, the very difficulty that Benjamin’s discussion of Baroque emblematics reveals.

Benjamin attempts in the third chapter of the Tragic Drama book to distinguish between the much-prized symbolic thinking of German Classicism, the “idea” and its “appearance” as one, on the one hand; and what he calls the “movement between extremes,” here the extremes of the “material” and the “transcendent,” in the form of “expression” that was Baroque allegory as it was most “authentically” available in Baroque emblem books (G: 1.1: 339; E: 162), on the other. As arcane as Benjamin’s distinction between symbol and allegory here may appear, what is at stake in this chapter emerges quite clearly when read through the lens of Gryphius’s play, in which the “idea” of the concept of constantia is thrust up against the “appearance” of the historical example of the Georgian queen’s suffering. Benjamin’s theory of allegory also becomes clear when read in light of several of the scholarly sources from which he derived his understanding of emblematics, most prominently, Karl Giehlow’s monumental study, “Die Hieroglyphenkunde des Humanismus in der Allegorie der Renaissance” (The Humanistic Study of Hieroglyphics in Renaissance Allegory), published in 1915. Warburg’s “prognostication” essay, discussed above, was also important. Benjamin cites liberally from Giehlow’s monograph-length essay, in which the scholar examines primary sources documenting the theories of Marsilio Ficino and others about hieroglyphic writing in the Renaissance, and tracks these theories as they migrated into the practice of the coterie of scholars and artists around Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, which included Albrecht Dürer. Giehlow is particularly interested in understanding the mostly Lutheran afterlives of the earlier Italian theories. We in turn see the afterlife of his work in other work on Dürer by the Warburgians that Benjamin knew, including Warburg’s essay, as well as Panofsky’s and Saxl’s 1923 book on Dürer. Benjamin also cites two late seventeenth-century Latin-language reviews of Claude François Menestrier’s 1682 La philosophie des images (The Philosophy of Images) in this section. His knowledge of both sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theoretical treatments of emblems derives from these sources, all with their respective confessional inflections (Lutheran and Jesuit). His deployment of them in his theory of allegory helps illuminate the choice that the Lutheran, Gryphius, made not to show the vivid image of the queen’s broken body in his play, first of all because Gryphius was deeply knowledgeable about the tradition of Jesuit martyr plays, which prided themselves on the actual display of suffering, and second because of the precarious and unpredictable reactions real human beings might have when actually confronting such suffering in the world, as indicated by Giehlow and others.
As noted above, Benjamin's emblematic reading of the Lutheran Baroque begins with the claim with which he opens this chapter, that the “antinomies of the allegorical” dictate the “dialectical” character [of allegory], whereby “every person, every thing, every relation can mean absolutely anything else” (G: 1.1: 350; E: 174–75). That an object can mean something else is of course the essence of the pictura-scriptura relation in the emblem. In the process, “the profane world” can be “both elevated and devalued” (351; 175), Benjamin writes, since the pictura is necessary to, yet must ultimately be dissociated from its gloss if the greater insight is to be attained. Benjamin is primarily concerned here to explain what he calls the “Christian origin of the allegorical outlook” (394; 220). Yet he relies heavily on extensive quotations from Giehlow as well as his successors, Warburg, Panofsky, and Saxl, to explain the power, residually pagan and even demonic, that can accrue to “the material,” “the physical,” and “the elemental . . . creaturely” (400–2; 226–29) in the process of allegorization, a power that represents a potentially threatening force capable of blocking— even as it provokes and is necessary to— the Christian allegorist’s project to move beyond the realm of facticity. The allegorist must do all he can to resist and triumph over precisely this creaturely force, in other words, precisely by submitting matter and the profane to signification. He does so, however, according to Benjamin, only via a process of brooding contemplation in dangerous imitation of the “rebellious, intense gaze of Satan” (403; 229).

This claim makes sense, first of all, since emblems were often used as part of the furniture of contemplative, and particularly religious, activity in the early modern period. More important, however, are the implications of Benjamin’s claim that without “patient . . . meditation” the allegorist may be satanically tempted by the allurements of this life and thus not be able to get beyond the “things” that “in the simplicity of their essence . . . as enigmatic allegorical references . . . continue to be dust” (G: 1.1: 403; E: 229). If we consider Benjamin’s words here in the light of the two kingdoms theory, they suggest how difficult it is to get beyond the parameters of Man’s world. In the context of a Lutheran theory of emblems, what we see is the threatening suggestion that successful allegorical reading, which involves seeing beyond this world to God’s, is in fact terribly difficult to perform, since “spiritual” meaning is often so deeply intertwined with “the material as its counterpart,” a material facticity that can be “concretely experienced [only] through evil” (403; 230). The reader of emblems must first confront the emblematic pictura directly, allowing the possibility of being seduced by it; only after “patiently contemplating” it in this way can she couple the pictura with the signifying scriptura, or motto, that might redeem it. Referencing Gryphius’s frame, the queen must first confront and perhaps even lament her (lost) crown as a sign of worldly sovereignty and accept that her creaturely life is a life that ultimately promises only death. Only after deep consideration can the crown and her life— and death— be left behind as objects of a redemptive reading. That this act of contemplation may be short-circuited or go awry triggers anxiety in Benjamin, which is clear from his association of it with the
"satanic." The reasons for this anxiety are most fully expressed in the last several pages of the Tragic Drama book.

In order to avoid being seduced by the thingness of the profane, Benjamin writes, the allegorist must first engage deeply—and dangerously, as it turns out—with the world precisely in its "unashamed crudity" (G: 1.1: 405; E: 231) as "dust" (403; 229). This is the world as a "heap of ruins" he so famously describes as the "bleak confusion of Golgotha" (405; 232). It is only then, Benjamin asserts in the obscure location noted above (its obscurity nods toward the shift in Benjamin's rhetoric and the emergence of his own anxiety here), that, like "those who stumble turn somersaults as they fall" (405; 232), readers of allegories (and emblems) may "in the most extreme . . . so . . . turn about that all . . . darkness, vainglory, and godlessness seems to be nothing but self-deception" (405; 232). Golgotha will only then be seen no longer as Golgotha, but rather as an "allegory of resurrection" (406; 232). It is by virtue—and yet, only by virtue—of this single and unexpected "about-turn," Benjamin writes, that "the immersion of allegory has to clear away the final phantasmagoria of the objective . . . [and] rediscovers itself . . . under heaven" (406; 232). He concludes: "This is the essence of melancholy immersion: that its ultimate objects, in which it believes it can most fully secure for itself that which is vile, turn into allegories, and these allegories fill out and deny the void in which they are represented, just as, ultimately, the intention does not faithfully rest in the contemplation of bones, but faithlessly leaps forward to the idea of resurrection" (406; 232–33). The unpredictability of this ironically "faithless" leap signals the ultimate helplessness of the melancholic Lutheran allegorist who, if he (or she) is radical enough, will see no way to gain any sure footing at all on any bridge between Man's and God's worlds.

Benjamin's allegorical theory, with the slippery connections between a profane world capable of being both "elevated" and "devalued" and that world's final meaning, echoes the way emblems function in Baroque tragic dramas like Gryphius's Catharine of Georgia. The "good allegorist," like the queen, will immerse herself deeply, like Warburg's Saturnine man, in objects, in the image, historical matter, and the world, yet have enough Jovian wherewithal to suddenly "turn about" to look at, but also beyond, the heavy matter of the creaturely, the object, the thing, beyond her kingdom and her maimed body, in other words, for its "soul," its "redemption" and significance, thus "denying the void," as Benjamin writes, of the "earthly world of things" (406; 232–33). The danger, however, and the threat—nearly inaudibly, yet persistently evident especially at the end of the Tragic Drama book—are that not everyone, and especially not all princes, will "turn around," but will remain gripped, rather, by this earthly world, by both its access to power and its corpses and creatureliness, and by the historical tragedy they repeatedly create and enact. This is precisely the realm that most consumed the playwrights of the Lutheran Baroque, as Benjamin clearly recognized, with their focus on not only the always prominent figure of the intriguer, but also the treacherous realm of
the court, where the logic of the (in)famous state of exception rules, the space, that is, where the action of the Silesian plays inevitably transpires. Seen from the point of view of emblems, such a dwelling in the realm of the creature and the day-to-day would suggest a kind of short circuit of or at least resistance to the synergistic dialectic of allegory, a moment when it becomes difficult, if not impossible, for the reader or viewer to supply an effectively redeeming and world-transcending gloss to the all-absorbing realm of the pictura.

Salome's first reading of the thorny-crown emblem is itself somewhat paradoxically suggestive of this kind of short-circuited reading, since she glosses the crown of the dream as signifying no more than itself, namely earthly power, the pragmatics of which dominate the play. Salome reads for signification, but only in such a way as to lead back to the concrete "body" of the queen as it resides in the world of duplicitous advisers and pragmatic diplomats, rather than to a "beyond" of its more lofty significance and the redemption of Catharine's soul. This is an insight that only the crazed shah— and not the spectators of the play— is ultimately guaranteed. And if it is only the madman who actually sees the road to redemption, the rest of the world is trapped. Gryphius may have realized that he could not underscore any more vehemently the dominance of the realm of history, whose appeal was already obvious in the extended narrations of the queen's own pride in her political past, on the one hand, and in the odd dialogue between the Russian ambassador and the shah's lackey in act 5, on the other, which seems to culminate in the dismissal of the importance of the queen's ultimate sacrifice for the political players who survive her (ll. 341–44). If he displayed, in other words, the power of history to both break the queen's body and discount her suffering to viewers of the play like Duchess Luise, they might have found it too difficult to tear their eyes away from the spectacle of Catharine's creaturely defeat and thus too hard to continue believing in the possibility of the "turn" that would enable them to see the higher realm to which such suffering could lead. The sheer difficulty of allegorizing in the face of the pressures of the political world may have been the reason that Gryphius decided against showing the queen's torture on stage. Benjamin seems to have grasped this reasoning in his reading of the emblematics of broken bodies in the Baroque Trauerspiel.

Benjamin indicates quite clearly the extent to which controversies over religious dogma during the early modern period were a determining element of his understanding of allegorical theory. Gryphius was a devout Lutheran, all the more so as his birth family and place were decimated and destroyed early in the century by the forces of the Catholic Counter-Reformation. His appointment later in life as city advocate for Glogau, one of the main cities in what had been the predominantly Protestant area of Silesia, meant that he was primarily responsible for leading the tense negotiations with the central authority of the Catholic Habsburgs on behalf of the city. He was exceedingly active, in other words, in precisely the dangerous and bleak secular world of which Benjamin writes, defending local interests as the
pressures of the greater power of the empire put a Counter-Reformation pincer grip on Silesia—an actor on a real-life political stage, in other words, not unlike the one depicted in his play Catharine of Georgia, in which the minority religion of the Christian queen is thrust into crass and unequal contact with the surrounding Muslim powers and crushed by them. Scholars have noted that Gryphius was heavily influenced, as were many of the “Lutheran” playwrights about whom Benjamin writes, by the Jesuit theater tradition and, in the case of Gryphius in particular, who spent his young adulthood in the multicultural city of Danzig, by the legacy of the order’s spectacular martyr dramas (see Parente). At a very young age, for example, Gryphius translated one of the Tragoediae sacrae (Sacred Tragedies) of the French Jesuit Nicolaus Caussinus, Felicitas, whose near-martyr plot anticipates that of his own later, independent Catharine play. Catharine of Georgia captures just this rich, yet also highly combustible cultural and confessional mix in, among other things, the way it just barely swerves away from requiring a display of Catharine’s ruined body in the text. It thus problematizes the question of how representations—and in this case, literal stagings—of martyrdom might be received in a melancholic Lutheran world. Was one to believe in the higher meaning of such a death as a matter of faith, or realize that only madmen dare to make such a leap?

Gryphius’s play draws attention to the vexed status of what Benjamin calls the “norms of emblematics” (G: 1.1: 391; E: 217) and whether or not it was possible to live with and by them in a Lutheran world. In the French source text, for example, Catharine undergoes an eleventh-hour conversion from an icon-loving Orthodox Christian to a good Catholic, since only an Augustinian monk is there to give her death rites. The charred head, which is referenced in Gryphius’s play, as noted above, goes on to become, in the French source, a relic and the cause for the founding of an Augustinian church in predominantly Orthodox Georgia. In Gryphius’s version, which otherwise follows its source in excruciating detail, the head survives, but it is understandably not elevated into a relic in this “Lutheran” play. The power of the body part to either perform or provoke an act of conversion may have been strategically suppressed, or, if that is too strong, then avoided precisely because of the Lutheran Gryphius’s doubt that “things” should be taken so easily to stand in for, to signify, or to coexist, in some kind of symbolic embrace, with higher versions of themselves. In spite of the emblematic cocoon that surrounds the Catharine play, then, and on which most scholars have focused, there remains the nagging suspicion that the extremes to which the playwright must go to show, or not to show, that her cruel suffering has a point, indicate—after the fashion of the nonresolution of the two readings of the emblem of the thorny crown—that the jury was still out on the possibility of reading the allegory of suffering on the queen’s part in any ultimately (self-) redeeming way. Benjamin seems to have understood and accepted this possibility. His reading of the “brutal stage” of “Lutheran” Baroque drama in any case itself functions well as an allegory of modern Germany’s blocked path to redemption.