

## Hamlet and Raskolnikov — Renaissance and the 19th Century

By

GYULA KIRÁLY

(Budapest)

### 1

Shakespeare is a landmark in the construction of tragedy: he intersperses tragedy with novelistic and dramatic threads — he opens the play with a novelistic drama and we are faced with this novelistic drama actually up to the actors' play. Here the drama does not, really cannot, yet slide into tragedy. Hamlet starts with a test: he needs to ascertain his apprehension whether time is really out of joint. Tragedy is still to follow; Hamlet would not be the tragic hero of modern times if he passed up this experiment, if he did not start with the intellectual's certitude and took combat with mere conviction or prejudice, if he simply accepted the revenge.

However, the test will whirl the experimenter himself into a new situation: having staged the play Hamlet gives his intention away to Claudius and his playing mad shows through. And from then on the crucial question is at stake whether the hero endowed with the ability to recognize and gauge his predicament is capable of carrying out the recognized historical task. But from the same moment onwards his enemy is constrained to put on pretence and accept a situation which contains the scheme of a subsequent murder — thus the possibility for a tragic solution comes about. Time can be set right, at the cost of the tragic clash of Hamlet and Claudius, though.

In Raskolnikov's story too a novelistic drama takes place except that, as opposed to Hamlet's drama, in reverse as to its chronological order: the actual drama will set in after the tragic plight, the execution of the murder. For the crucial point, the highest stake for Dostoevsky is not whether Raskolnikov gives himself up at the end of the novel or not; he is rather interested in what spheres of the social existence and consciousness the hero explores in the novel turned dramatic after the tragic situation, what truths he elicits, how he presses the world for an answer which he was unable to obtain in the tragic deed. The Russian life depicted in the basic situation of Dostoevsky's novel necessarily accounts for the fact that Dostoevsky's hero is devoid of any moral support whatever for an experiment similar to that of Hamlet. It is this Russian milieu, inscrutable as it is, which compells him to act before having fully found out that his truth is really the truth of life as well, that time out of joint

can be set right by the individual and that a person responsible for history or for its formation is to do as his speculations had led him to assume. Raskolnikov cannot delay the solution, cannot question again and again the world which he intuitively grasps but has not yet deciphered. Should we approach the basic situation of Dostoevsky's hero from the opposite direction, the same conclusion might be drawn. Could it really be taken to be a test, a "probe" into reality that a man, pernicious as he or she may have become socially, is slain by another, however useful, person? Seeking for an answer in either direction, we are bound, to say no. An act, an action with due consequence can never be regarded simply as a "test". Raskolnikov himself surmises with all his nerve that "test" and "act" have sinisterly intertwined in his conception, but how and why — he is unable to understand throughout.

Already in Shakespeare's tragedy we may confront such a motif of "test", which is then brought into focus in the concept of Dostoevsky's novel. We have that "delay" in mind which at the same time indicates in Shakespeare's work the transition from drama into tragedy proper, the momentum when Hamlet, having had his father's visionary appearance, does not set about carrying out his revenge — which he had made an oath on — but embarks on confirming the vision, probing into the "psychological" truth of the vision. He is doing so because he wants *to put to the test* the authenticity of the vision in order to know whether Claudius is his father's murderer as his suspicion (and his father's ghost: in modern sense his psychological insight) prompted him. Thus Hamlet plays a role, the role of madness, for, Renaissance man conceived, the act cannot precede ascertainment, it cannot precede judgment and this is what accounts for Hamlet's delay, "vacillation" and "doubtfulness" not only *psychologically* but also from an *intellectual* point of view. In Shakespeare's drama this passage is worked out extremely minutely and purposefully. Raskolnikov too finds himself in a *new* situation, as Hamlet did, so "knowledge" for him prior to the act may be hypothetical only. If, however, Hamlet's revenge took place when he is yet intellectually uncertain as to Claudius' culpability, then Hamlet's notion of time to be set right would lose all its historical gravity and justification. So the pivot of dramatic construction is the ascertainment, the individual form of *cognition*, which in itself is part of the action and thus influences the preconditions of it, changes the basic situation.

This aspect of the Shakespearean dramatic construction has for diverse reasons not received due consideration. Those who do treat the problem, that is, dwell on the issue of Hamlet's procrastination — like Vigotsky in his *Psychology of Art* — come to the conclusion that, allowing for Shakespeare's original concept, it is not this changed situation but Hamlet's character which is to blame for the delay of the act: he meditates on it, he is preoccupied with implementing the act and attempts to retrieve time in the most aesthetic manner

possible so long as to run the risk of losing his *prime purpose*. He passes up the opportunity — writes Vigotsky — so at the end of the play this opportunity “returns only by way of accident”, that is, Hamlet’s deed is in many respects removed from the original plan and purpose: instead of performing the revenge he kills inadvertently. From this angle Shakespeare’s hero becomes a tragic figure owing to his deficient character or, we might say, his one-sidedness, alienation. (This view, as will be seen later on, is quite near to Turgenev’s, at least as far as Hamlet’s “passivity”, “reflectiveness” and “incapability of action” is concerned.)

Surely, Hamlet’s experiment is dearly bought, but in a different sense; the successful experiment reveals the make-believer, the question-poser who is keen to know, it unmasks Hamlet’s carefully concealed thought of revenge. The actors invited to dispel Hamlet’s gloom, with the play they perform under Hamlet’s direction, elicit the secret of Claudius, but at the same time Claudius also gains proof of Hamlet’s pretence and purpose. Here he learns what he could not find out when eavesdropping on the meeting of Hamlet and Ophelia and what the schoolmates called on to entertain Hamlet were unable to spy out either. A new situation emerges where playing the fool becomes impossible — Hamlet cannot carry out his revenge. On the contrary: it is Claudius that has an opportunity to “scheme” against Hamlet. And this is justified psychologically as well; when we are questioning reality and the answer will actually be profound and true, then with the question we lose and give up our advantage inherent in the questioner’s position, the possibility of an “incognito” existing prior to the questioning — we deliver up ourselves, too. Hamlet’s chance for action will return only when Claudius’ scheme has aborted, when it contributes for Hamlet to recover his opportunity of action in its original purpose: not as an act of revenge but as doing justice, judgment.

In this Shakespearean poetical train of thought Vigotsky noticed merely the moment that after the dramatic turn (that is, after the actors’ performance) it is not Hamlet to master the situations, he is no longer the “commander”, nay, to act again he will have an occasion *by accident* only. Therefore, in Vigotsky’s argument, from this moment Hamlet ceases to harness “history” as “he missed the opportunity”, and he is made to serve history; it is not Hamlet sets time right but time itself makes him play a wholly unexpected role far removed from his original design. Whereas the useless destruction, Vigotsky claims, “might have been avoidable” if the hero had not been so “wavering” and “delaying” his revenge and had acted (that is, at the early stage of his questioning reality, before having gained from it an answer of complete certainty).

Vigotsky fails to notice that this is a self-formation of the character with colossal historical responsibility in order to execute an historical act in a humane and consistently new-spirited way, and this is why the Shakespearean drama

shifts to tragedy in the middle point — at the moment when an answer is supplied to the questioning. Thus, understandably from his entire concept, Vigotsky in his essay on Shakespeare infers that in Hamlet's character there is really not much Renaissance feature, since in the end he is spurred to take vengeance simply by accident or, to be more exact, life considerably diverts him from his original goal and eventually it is not the original revenge which he puts into effect. In this concept we can detect a premise by which Turgenev was also haunted: i. e. that Hamlet's procrastination reveals the vagueness of character, the weakness of will. Vigotsky, just like Turgenev would in his time, views the Hamlet concept rather from a specific aspect peculiar to his own — Turgenev's — and the Russian plight: that's why he exposes not so much the concept of Shakespeare's tragedy as the typical Russian situation by the reinterpretation of Hamlet. Turgenev believes to have discovered the obstacle to the Russian noble youths' historical action in their reflectiveness of character, and to support this idea he brings forward some aspects of the Hamletian drama, the dramatic peculiarities of questioning reality in Hamlet's action. Vigotsky, in his turn, projects back the psychological pattern of the relations of the historical action — concerning the active person and objective relations, historical deed and individual (subjective) time — predominant in our age, to apply to a model of a wholly different kind, to that of the Shakespearean man of action and history displaying the dilemmas of authoritarian formation of history. So neither Turgenev nor Vigotsky pays any attention to the objective situation of Hamlet, the decisive divergence between their own epochs and Shakespeare's historical time. Dostoevsky, Turgenev's contemporary, when devising a different — though in many respects similar — position to the Hamlet of his age and, hence, to the denouement of the situation, registers and renders this difference sharply perceptible by the covert analogy-contrast of Hamlet and Raskolnikov. For him Shakespeare and his hero are again and again to be visible through the paradoxical situation of the hero's pursuit and the particularization of the tragedy of his fate, so that he can convey more clearly the considerable difference which exists between the two ages as well as the possibilities and dramas of the two heroes. All this becomes evident by throwing the Shakespearean and Dostoevsky's concepts into comparison. Dostoevsky — as opposed to the moralizing Turgenev analogy — puts a finger on the truly essential problem of the divergent historical situation: Raskolnikov, before being able to decide whether he needs to put himself to trial for the proof: is he a great man and can he undertake the spiritual and moral burdens incidental to the shaping of history? — he is drifting into a predicament of which he is able to get out only by assuming the action, taking the decisive step to a definite direction.

Thus we have seen that for Dostoevsky's hero test and act are inseparable. In vain does the hero try to play down the act as a mere test, in vain does he relegate the murder along with his later good deeds to the rank of redeemable

evils, it is in fact here that we can detect the Toulon expected to give the answer. And the hero does eventually receive an answer to one level of those implied in the question. Namely, that is he really one of the great men who — in his concept — are the movers of history, or one of the crowd. True, here again remains one factor of uncertainty which is at least as decisive as the question some time before the execution of the act that the test was a *test* indeed or it was the act itself.

In the modern age the issues of history-shaping and of human responsibility continue to be indiscernable in the individual's *solitary* assumption of responsibility. At the same time the social situation compells to act and question simultaneously. This is Raskolnikov's "to be or not to be" dilemma, inner factor of uncertainty compared to Hamlet's outer one. (This factor of uncertainty will be expressed in Raskolnikov's question: would Napoleon have killed the old woman if he, say, had not had his Toulon.)

The individual acts in a moving element also in Shakespeare's time, to be exact in the historical time of Shakespeare's drama, or even he is a piece of this history. Still, the individual's acceptance of his historical role is at this stage an authentic historical possibility and is founded on the recognition of the positive truth that the great exceptional personality moulds history and that this is rooted in the character of the structure of the relations. But precisely this is the reason why the individual cannot but bear the responsibility for the development of the history to be shaped. And this is a quandary for the man of action and thought before which even Shakespeare's hero stops short.

Here, then, the dramatic situation swings over to *tragedy* because against the given historical background Hamlet does have a chance to shape history. If it was really Claudius "pushed time out of joint", then Hamlet can "set it right". The question of certainty, therefore, is for Hamlet at once the question of *history-shaping*, the question whether existence may be "made". Full certainty is crucially important since Hamlet is not at all sure if history is to be shaped by this means or reflecting upon setting time right is no more than wishful thinking and illusion? Here the goal is to turn the apparently abstract truth into an answer of concrete verification.

The dilemma and Hamlet's wavering results from the fact that for Hamlet, owing to his Renaissance frame of mind, the complete proof of reality must lie in its practice. The point to be decided is, can history still be shaped at the cost of tragedy and does individual feat actually mould history? With this Shakespeare meant to underline the *tragedy-creating power and dialectic of that actual contradiction* (for the drama turns into tragedy after Claudius' exposure) which exists between the acting person's pursuit for one, and history as the outcome ("other outcome") of all the acts divergent from the direction of those acts for the other.

Thus the acceptance of one's fate as an unescapable and necessary precondition for pushing time out of joint or setting it right, is of vital importance in Shakespeare's intentions as well. In *Hamlet*, however, unlike the basic situation of *Crime and Punishment*, it is only Hamlet's question-query that is directed unambiguously to press reality for an answer. Moreover, Shakespeare needs a question of the kind which does not yet terminate with the fact of question-putting and probing the fate of the questioning-probing person, his possibility for vital action. It is precisely Hamlet's being a questioner-actor-experimenter that sustains the plot on a dramatic level until the answer comes, in order to release the tragic tendency thus retained in the drama and to set it off towards the tragic denouement.

## 2

Now it is clear that in Shakespeare's concept of tragedy Hamlet's "vacillation" springs not so much from his character as from the size of the task and from the recognition of the historical responsibility involved. The situation is therefore duly dramatic as long as Hamlet is playing a role to find out the truth, until the historical forces carry Hamlet's dissembling to the point of culmination where it is no longer Hamlet who plays but the most competent masters of acting, the actors, the genuine "play-actors", whilst Hamlet is "nothing but" director and spectator. Shakespeare's poetic notion and the underlying thinking is made plain: however much Hamlet succeeds in performing his play-acting, his acting the fool, it can at best protect him only from being compelled to reveal his scheme, yet still in incognito he is actually unable to question in a way which he could accept as a real question of the Renaissance man, a successful "probe" — and its result as decisive argument amid pros and cons. He knows full well that possibilities would not return and an erroneous act would put a stop to Hamlet's advantage, and this quandary Hamlet is unable to undo until he is given a helping hand by art. True, art can recapture Claudius' crime only conventionally, in a fictive way, but with devices which make this artistically "judged" act create the intensity of a real experience. For Claudius might remain unaffected by what is represented on the stage; and although he can assert his sympathies and antipathies without fearing the loss of his social existence as an observer — but, as one aesthetically involved and having a perspective over two worlds simultaneously — the presented one and his own brought along to the show — he is incapable of dissociating himself from the original experience (i.e. from reliving it), so Claudius cannot help exposing himself. The probe, the questioning through the actors' scene is Hamlet's test or experiment, in fact the playing of what had supposedly happened, it remains all the same a test and not an act although — due to art — it amounts to being a questioning of reality as to its result and in this respect it does appear an act and not a test. Thus Hamlet can ascertain the truth hitherto "suspected"

only, and Horatio is in a position to control it, he was invited by Hamlet to bear witness lest Hamlet, under the influence of his "fixed idea", should misinterpret Claudius' reactions to the events represented. At the same time, however, Claudius also gains a full, awaited answer, his suspicion is reinforced. Earlier, the Hamlet-Ophelia meeting was arranged by him so that he could see through Hamlet pretending madness, to make sure of his conjecture: did Hamlet realize what had happened? Is he determined to plan a counter-attack and is he playing the fool for this reason? What Claudius supposes is in Hamlet at this point a repeatedly evoked but long-veiled certainty yet to be disclosed, inscrutable for viewers; Hamlet's play-acting is indeed the finest instrument which not only Rosencrantz and Guildenstern but also Claudius cannot get to sound either. The mousetrap, then, was set up by Claudius too early. Nevertheless, it applies to Claudius too what is valid for Hamlet: the individual's questioning history demands a price from the *questioner* as well. Claudius gets into a position very similar to the prince's following the performance: who is in for a penny must be in for a pound. If he has killed the king he is bound to set about his next killing: this time he has to kill Hamlet who — Claudius is now fully aware — sees him through and strives to displace him from power.

Claudius has no doubts whatever about the necessity of the succeeding act, the unavoidability of killing Hamlet. Only the fact that the implementation is to be kept secret will oblige him to assume another role instead of the lost one. For where an act is to be kept secret, where concealed and undetectable intent is at work, the attitude of play-acting is indispensable.

And indeed, Claudius, at the beginning of the actors' performance — upon recognition, has no choice but to assume another mask. The previous role lasts as long as he is able to dissemble his emotions, until he hides his involvement. When his more advantageous position inherent in play-acting is lost, Hamlet is driven to act openly, with all its consequences, negative for him but positive in the light of his task. From now on it is Hamlet who comes straight to the fore, — and Claudius assumes yet another role. When Hamlet decides not to kill Claudius at his prayers, he is no longer directed by vacillation or speculation but conscious deliberation. When he recommends to his mother a sort of way-out alternative and offers his alliance for setting time right, he is not pretending any more, he quits feigning madness and starts acting: he happens to kill Polonius instead of Claudius, though. Here again Claudius is forced to act on the sly, as he would when killing Hamlet's father, although Hamlet attacks him openly.

The outcome of the situation is also inverted. Claudius is compelled to make use of the secrecy of make-believe, and this is advantageous for him only on the surface, as, in fact, it is a state of isolation and, on account of the similar social potential of an enemy of similar determination, very disadvantageous. For instance, Claudius cannot even tell Gertrude the content of the letter with

which he sends the attendants of Hamlet to England, and the preparation of the poisoned sword as well as the chalice filled with poison in the last scene is arranged with circumspect care and behind Gertrudis' back. Constrained under secrecy he cannot prevent her from drinking the poisoned beverage intended for Hamlet. This leads up to a situation of tragedy instead of one of revenge: the tragic situation for Hamlet is that *accident* cannot jolt history out, nor can it set it right, but only the individual, the great man with power at his disposal. Moreover, even he cannot do it without determination and heroism, struggle and consciousness. In the meantime the struggle makes clear not only that who and in what direction moves, displaces or sets right this history but also that the price paid for shaping history must invariably be the life of the individual responsible for history. In this regard the tragedy remains a tragedy throughout, which is to say that it is not so much a tragic ending to the drama but rather that the drama *serves* for the tragic denouement.

Vigotsky's view then, as has been seen, is questionable enough on this point too. *Accident* in Shakespeare's concept refers only to: *where* will arise a new situation favourable for Hamlet to set time right and *what will it be like?* But it is not implied at all that Hamlet takes his vengeance incidentally, or that he does not carry out the revenge but kills by accident.

In Hamlet, nobody can manage to question reality without losing at once the original possibility of action. Claudius too fails to drive back the impending tragedy to the level of drama, since he cannot get any perspective and certainty from his pretence concerning the unexpected turns of reality. Accepting one's fate and historical responsibility together can only maintain the probe into reality on the level of drama. Apart from Claudius and Hamlet, each one of the characters furnishes an example of miscarried activity, abortive choice and manipulated individual. These fates do not purport on the part of their subjects to be questioning the world, at best they assist another subject — i.e. Hamlet — in questioning. Laertes and Ophelia might be exceptions only if he or she became a shaper of the world and not its instrument or victim. Ophelia's madness, Laertes' last confession are a proof of their abortive choices. The alternative of unfinishedness, then, must be preserved so that the essential act, by means of information obtained about reality, could be directed towards setting time right, towards a fundamental change of reality. Fate qualifies as tragedy: it points not to the arrangement of the world but to the possible forms of human action, of history-making, and to the quality of the act of the acting persons, the tendency of their reality-forming.

It is this tragic element of Hamlet's fate which is missing from the questioning act of Raskolnikov.

Raskolnikov is forced to act by his situation as early as he has no more than a hypothesis about the action and the world, when he is still quite doubtful of his truth. Like Hamlet, he also seems to be driven to the act by accident.

However, Hamlet was compelled to act not only when he has ascertained his truth, that is, when he has obtained an answer to his question posed to reality, but also when he has got into a situation in which, unless he could summon all the strengths of his nature and intellect, he would let slip the historical responsibility which had fallen on him — and him alone. For of Fortinbras' intentions Hamlet is wholly unaware up to the end of the drama. On the other hand, this compelling predicament helps Hamlet muster his inner strength and accomplish the undertaken historical action.

The constraint of Raskolnikov's quandary is the exact opposite of this. As a matter of fact, act and test are intertwined, which means that certainty and consequence will simultaneously present themselves. Raskolnikov's situation is fashioned by Dostoevsky — in compliance with the development of the individual and historical relations of the 19th century — so that the hero should be forced to act before being able to mentally control its justification. Further action — that is, to regard the test as a test proper with a view to a subsequent act — is on this very account impossible. This "probe-test", unlike that of Hamlet, instead of liberating the person as act-doer, causes him to pretence. Whoever plays a role might question reality, but the answer will be incidental, his triumph relative.

The disadvantage of being compelled to play-acting is immediately evident in that test and act are now even more inextricably inseparable than before the murder was committed. First, because Liza's assassination is too exorbitant a price to pay even in the make-believer's eye for keeping a test secret, and it is so even more when the importance of secrecy dwindles. This elicits from Raskolnikov a desire, many times unsurmountable, to be communicative which almost amounts to giving himself up. And, later on, the play-acting is to include the negation of the "probe-test" and it *cannot* thus defend the "innocence" of the ethic departure of the "test-act".

The key to the failure of Julian Sorel's pretence is also to be found here: essentially good, he wants nevertheless to play the foul, just to attain his aim. Yet his aim does not serve to set time right, and therefore it is the *Evil* itself, the play *turns from role into reality* and this at one stage brings the dissembler into a detrimental position, or even exposes him, and no indemnification is to be had for this. A historically disadvantageous position of this kind is momentous in the scheme of Raskolnikov's play-acting, too. And the paradox of the situation is that he needs to play the role vis-à-vis Porfiry, who himself is under the protection of the "disjointed time" and defends it himself. But to no avail is the aim more than that of Sorel in *Rouge et noir* or that of Lucien Rubempré in *Illusions perdues* — and in vain is the carrying out more consistent.

Raskolnikov's article written half year and published two months earlier expounds a theory which he had already discarded, that's why it is excluded

from the novel, it is prior to the novel's time. Its function in the novel, put there after the act in a definite situation, is that the hero, by virtue of his being the author, should question after the act the arguments proposed in the article. Although the possibilities are accurately shut off by Porfiry, Raskolnikov does find a loophole all the time just on account of his surpassing the earlier concept. Porfiry can question Raskolnikov's "theses" — and in so doing he compels Raskolnikov to confront his theory with his new experimented world-view. Thus the ambiguous position of self-defence has a negative side to it. At first sight it seems — and this is Porfiry's intellectual perspective as well — as though it had not been this reality, with extreme alternatives and dilemmas, to cause the hero to connect act and test. Apparently, the notion arises as if his world-view, ideology propounded in the article had been at work behind his "test", that is, behind his real intentions and not a confrontation with the world and a gradual awareness of the world; as though it had not been the same reality which offered Raskolnikov to "make a choice" with its condition of "blood flows everywhere", with its alternative "in case you do it you are unfortunate, you don't do it, you are perhaps even more unfortunate", the catastrophe of the Marmeladov-family, the marriage threatening Dunya, the laws governing Porfiry's, Luzin's and Svidrigailov's wolds, in short the public conditions and the mood of the day.

The *argument-duel* between Porfiry and Raskolnikov is instrumental to qualify from a definite point of view the act-attempt of Raskolnikov, so that, in some kind of a distorted mirror, Raskolnikov's act should be rendered before the reader as an answer to the relationship of individual and society.

As a matter of fact, Raskolnikov's act continues to be unexposed before Porfiry and the majority of the characters; what does come to light is *unprovable*, so the play-acting remains what it has ever been, a denial of the act. Yet this does not protect Raskolnikov from being judged by the outer world any more than it protected Hamlet or Claudius, even though he goes on under cover of play-acting up to the last moment in order to dodge the *qualification* of his purpose.

Hamlet's purpose remains in obscurity as long as he cannot but take vengeance on the invading power. After he exposed his purpose his open action presses Claudius to take on pretence with all its compulsive consequences: the irreversibility of tragedies. Because of pretence Hamlet was compelled to a frank monolog and a feigned dialog, just like Claudius here or Raskolnikov when he has committed the murder.

But in the case of Hamlet the fates of the characters surrounding him are not even a distorted mirror of Hamlet's state of mind or action, rather the other way round: Hamlet is the flawless mirror into which each of the characters is bound to glance some day and to judge his or her own way of life and actions. This happens to Polonius too, who was so confident when supplying

Laertes with his paternal advice for his long journey. When he undertakes to pry into the thoughts of Hamlet labeled mad, he senses wisdom from behind his partner's words, which is all at once a largely unfavourable qualification of his own principle of life. Ophelia came to realize that, taking advantage of her naive child-like goodness, her father and the king had actually meant her to "snatch" Hamlet's thoughts (in the church-scene), and it becomes unbearable for her that she has thus proved unworthy of Hamlet. Ophelia as a child shrank from condemning her father's overtly immoral deeds, but now — when Hamlet's random sword passes sentence on her father — as one who has been unworthy of her companion feels guilty herself, and this self-accusation is irresolvable: she has lost her father as well as herself. Laertes looks into this mirror right before his death: (when the queen drinks from the chalice which turns out to be poisoned) suddenly he can see Hamlet's purity and the difference between Hamlet's revenge for his father and his own, and with his confession-admonition he is the only one to regain in the last minute the historical role.

Hamlet can at best look into the mirror of himself, and this commands him to be in a perennial state of monologizing. At one stage before the last act he might still withdraw from this state of monologizing, i.e. at the moment when he meets Fortinbras' soldiers. But these are *soldiers* and he a prince; the information acquired permits of a *monolog* once again.

Raskolnikov's situation is quite dissimilar. The monolog will last until the murder puts an end on several levels of life to this monolog-potential and transforms it again and again into dialog. The dialogs in Raskolnikov's situation are at the same time those of similar fates, the probes into reality of similar tests; they are answers of similar deeds and answers of another level, of different ethic motive and of different social outcome, but eventually common ones which concern the protagonist as well. Of *fates* and not of *tragedies*. That is why these alien fates and actions are themselves merely distorted mirrors of Raskolnikov's act, and for the very same reason further dialog will on one point always prove distorted, so a dramatic turn is impossible to reach. The role performed is therefore unacceptable, but in its time comes undone, spreads out, for the time challenged but left unconquered demands closure by a fate shirking thus the tragic possibility and dramatic clash alike.

## 3

Hamlet's *fate compared to his act* becomes of secondary importance because the potential for acting is almost a shaping of history too: fate is simultaneously a tragedy, but the tragedy highlights not the hero's fate but the "setting right of the historical time", that is, the gradual process of becoming

a "great man" under its historical, psychological, ethical — and formally not narrative but dramatic epic — conditions.

The hero's "adventure" and "feat" divides only in the dramatic phase up to the performance of the actors: this accounts for the fact that here Hamlet's attitude is not yet tragic, only "play-acting". In the tragic phase, however, adventure and feat merge in a way that each *adventure is determined* by the preparation for the *feat*. It is not the hero that "adventures", he is not the one to "choose" as in the dramatic part: he must show up and prove his ethic profundity and to confront *with this* his environment, so that the tragedy should not remain *his fate only* but his tragic *deed* also, a deed setting time right.

Dostoevsky's "Hamlet" — Raskolnikov — gets into a different, new situation: he is compelled to link test and act, adventure and ethic trial. The modern age refuses to provide opportunity for separation, not even on the level of play-acting. Moreover, it is when Raskolnikov "plays a role" that he comes closer to Macbeth—Claudius, no matter how Hamletian a point of departure may be his "play-acting". He is even denied that historical moment in which Tolstoy's heroes could become, though not "great men", but at least extraordinary men.

This is a transitional period between feudal and bourgeois worlds, a "peaceful" world in which the endeavours of the youths of the nobility repeatedly come to nothing. Since the age of Chatsky the sense of becoming superfluous has been predominant — (for the heroes to become seekers requires historical preconditions).

And what about the non-noble, the pre-bourgeois, the "raznochinet" personalities? In Balzac and Stendhal the hero started on his way to become great historically, and it comes to be revealed — in the novels of both writers — that the individual's social adventure does not lead to becoming a "great man", a "Napoleon". On the contrary: Sorel's pretence of playing evil while he is "good", terminates in his becoming evil, that is, he falls. The play-actor is always in a disadvantageous position if the play-acting is to be linked to the act. This is Lucien de Rubempré's predicament too. And even more so than in Sorel's case. The French situation, the victory of the bourgeoisie, the prosaic relations make the individual a "great man" strictly from a negative aspect. Either the hero keeps his moral superiority and then he is doomed — human totality cannot evolve under the conditions of the bourgeois order, obstructive as it is to the development of the individual —, or he pushes forward, only to become an amoral person. So the possibility for a career is equal to giving up the poesy of the individual.

Development of individuality and career cannot converge because the individual involves *moral* efforts as well: history will not "jolt in place" with the activity of an amoral person but prepares for another dislocation. This is

the career-effort peculiar to Sorel, Rastignac and Lucien as opposed to that of Hamlet. Here it is the novelistic and not the tragic fate which builds the foundation of human existence. It is not the "great man" that shapes history, as there is no chance to become a great man.

Dostoevsky's hero lives and plays his historical part under conditions not yet prosaic — Balzacian — and no more authoritarian — Shakespearean. In his situation the stage of the individual's *gradual world-awareness* and that of his deed, *historical action* are inseparable. The world which is not yet bourgeois and no longer feudal (let alone authoritarian) spurs precisely the plebeian intellectual to a world-awareness and act at once Hamletian, Rastignacian, Sorelian and Lucienian: the ethic issue and the problem of becoming a great man are — on account of their transitoriness — simultaneously posed by the Russian conditions to the individual, which is to say that a person is not only compelled to become something but also the illusion of choice is kept up for him. For this reason it happens that Dostoevsky's characters always *assume sole responsibility* for the choice, even though their position were enough to relieve them of responsibility. And on this account do they always choose Hamlet's responsibility plus Sorel's play-acting, resistance: they fight not only for the world but for themselves as well. They are unable to be just "seeking" or "superfluous" or merely "active" heroes. Their situation moves them to take social responsibility, but the very same situation drives them to social ambitiousness, as their becoming a hero requires them to become also a "great man". And since being devoid of a historical situation they do not become great men, they cannot but suffer a defeat in the face of reality: this is their disadvantage compared to Hamlet's predicament. Time-inversion — the drama dissolving tragedy — is here the form of poetic train of thought setting out to unravel reality, just as the unity, chronology and succession of time in *Hamlet*. In the former the drama starts after the tragic clash, in the latter the collision and confrontation of dramatic validities turns into tragedy. Yet in both cases the drama will eventually come out as the genuine probe into reality; this probe or questioning, however, should be preceded in *Crime and Punishment* by a workaday tragic act which the hero believes to be the appropriate questioning; and in *Hamlet* the drama as genuine probe precedes the tragic act changing reality. Therefore, in the shift of Hamletian tragedy and drama both the question and the changing of the world appear as real, whereas in *Crime and Punishment* the tragedy cannot be the means to set time right and the questioning — however dramatic — cannot end with an answer. That is why the epilogue postpones closing the question from an inner necessity, as the question cannot but remain open. No answer is to be had.

Raskolnikov's adventure in the realm of mind after the act tends to steal back something into the fact of the act which has, in the course of realization, been almost ousted: the questioning of reality. This is a fight, an intellec-

tual adventure exceeding to a similar degree, coupled with extreme oscillations of answers given to the question, as it was in Hamlet's dilemma of "To be or not to be" (i.e. in the drama up to the turn into tragedy). Even the alternative "to die is better" or "to back out of the situation" arises in the same manner for Raskolnikov as for Hamlet. And this backing out, this "to die" is just as impossible here as there. In contrast with Svidrigailov in *Crime and Punishment* or with Stavrogin in *The Devils* — for whom such a solution might in any moment be expedient since it belongs to the logic of their destiny within the milieu of the novels — the spiritual aspirations and the fates of Myshkin, Ivan Karamazov and Raskolnikov renounce to embrace such a solution: and renounce they must even though now and then they do encounter situations in which a way out like this seems to offer up as a solution.

In the novel, neither Raskolnikov nor the other characters are able to separate the questioning of reality from essential action. Their common dilemma is this inseparability: proper action is possible only when the test and knowledge of *human fate* have been achieved. On the other hand, human fate seals the active man's possibility, cuts him off once for all from a vital relation with the world.

Raskolnikov anxiously sets his own attempt and decision into opposition with those of Svidrigailov, Dunya and Sonya in spite of the fact that he "the elect" is not alone in sensing that "time is out of joint", but the others, "the crowd", too, senses it. Moreover, with no theory to refer to, they too violate the norm the upsetting of which seemed for Raskolnikov in his article written half a year earlier, to have been the sole privilege of the elect. This experience indicates the first step beyond the abstract theoretical thesis expounded in the article "great men have rights — the masses are a tool". Porfiry in his argument with Raskolnikov falls short because he cannot decipher this new Raskolnikovian experience from the article. Such an experimental world-approach originating in social practice is unfathomable for Porfiry. Porfiry — as well as Luzhin — considers the displaced nature of time not as a displacement but as an eternal human predicament, and from this both characters draw for themselves the necessary and advantageous existential conclusions. Both Luzhin and Porfiry, in respect of their social essence stand in opposition to those who are unable to adapt their human individualities to this social order proclaimed "world order".

Hamlet was alone in recognizing the displaced nature of time; 19th century man, however, senses it in social dimensions. And this is not merely a proof against the "single self's" calling, but it is in favour of something which is alluded to in *The Devils* in its negative consequences. The positive allusion, which would come in the figure of Alyosha in the second part of *The Brothers Karamazov*, remains but a plan. But as regards the posing of the question, Dos-

toevsky is again the most profound compared with his contemporaries. In his novels starting from *Crime and Punishment* he causes almost every stratum of society to live through simultaneously the inhumanity and anti-individual nature of the prevailing order. Dostoevsky cannot reach the point of seeking cure of the "revolting" nature of the social order, still he is aware that the search is inevitable.

While in *Hamlet* the drama could turn into tragedy because the enterprising individual was permitted to observe and, through his tragedy, to push the disjointed world in place; the solitary hero, however, is deprived of this possibility under the alienating circumstances of the 19th century. Polyphony of fates and concurrence of fates: this typological mentality peculiar to the novel is marked out for grasping and reflecting this new universal condition. From this angle, the form of the Dostoevskian novel itself is a reflection, a model for such a universal condition. For this reason Raskolnikov's drama cannot turn into tragedy, it must needs remain a novel throughout, or, to be more precise, although there is an ambiguously inseparable coexistence of novel and tragedy in Raskolnikov's fate, it is the fate alone that will be fulfilled. Katharsis is denied, we have come to know the world, but not the method to shape it with. Nevertheless, this is why a novel is a novel. A person is forced back into himself in case he undertakes to act alone, if he deems his venture as an historical act, as Hamlet did, or if he fails to notice that his "test" is a fateful act, which is Raskolnikov's case. This explains why Raskolnikov has become estranged and isolated by the act, whereas Hamlet is merely compelled into a position of act-protraction. The act itself just jolts Hamlet back into his humanness at the expense of the tragedy of history-shaping.

Hamlet's solitude does not cease when he finds an ally in Horatio to set time right; it ceases rather when play-acting has become irrelevant, when his dramatic fight has become tragic, for the acceptance of tragic necessity implies unmasking and shedding light on the "secret of secrets". Here one has come to realize that time did actually come out of joint, and that setting it right should exclusively fall on the shoulders of Hamlet, and that it can really be set right by an individual's responsible action. Raskolnikov's monolog, however, while constantly having a claim for dialogizing, is ever commanded back to a monological state.

As a matter of fact, with Dostoevsky's heroes the play-acting, the secret-keeping continues to the end, since the dramatic situation was not solved but deepened and rendered irrevocable by the test-act. (Dolgoruky encounters a similar situation in *A Raw Youth*.) Raskolnikov's experience demonstrates that if there are others who have also stepped out of the given social time, if there are others who have transgressed the human norm, if others have also revolted, then a revolt built on a *single* self may no longer be one shaping history. An assumption of responsibility culminating in a single self will prove

to be an ill choice of the *individual*. The "act-attempt" cannot have unified, but separated Raskolnikov from the others and a new kind of bond will occur when he himself has renounced this concept of test-act. The loss of tragedy here is not a "renunciation", a "non-assumption" of it on the part of the hero. Porfiry's insinuation to this effect is rightly rejected by Raskolnikov — for Porfiry has not got beyond the point in puzzling out the act where he presumes that Raskolnikov had acted on the spur of the theory and he insists that Raskolnikov should discard this theory: any other consideration comes only as irrelevant in Porfiry's image of Raskolnikov. To be sure, Raskolnikov's theory in the form conceived a half year before the test is no longer a basic motive in his action, — that's why he gives up so easily the appropriateness of the concept of killing the old usurer when he admits it as an "error". Just as he already regards it an error that he compared himself to Napoleon and Mohammed. However, he would not give up that which is not theory but the *experience* of the string of actions performed before and after the act: that he did take on the moral responsibility of the fate of his environment. Even on the last pages of the novel he will not regard this assumption of social responsibility as an error. (Raskolnikov's last dream brings out again this sense of responsibility.)

Hamlet could not but take vengeance on Claudius — no other way was open to set time right. Like Hamlet, Raskolnikov also has recourse to what his society can offer him as an opportunity: where there's blood overflowing, he too resorts to vendetta.

(The genuine revolutionary thought which surpasses the romantic anarchy displayed by Raskolnikov will have to resort only to what the given society produces as a method: violence against violence, but not that of the isolated person.)

## 4.

Before being able to give up the handicapped position of play-acting, Hamlet tries to break out in two ways: one is a withdrawal into the state of monolog, and a specific continuation of this are his pseudo-dialogs with Ophelia, Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; the other way is to seek out an alliance with Horatio, Gertrudis and the actors — he does find his real companions in Horatio and the actors.

Raskolnikov soon realizes that play-acting is not only disadvantageous but also unendurable, partly because it is a continuous provocation to unmask himself and, what is more significant, because his play-acting is a paralyzing condition whence he cannot go ahead. He too is gathering information: shall he give himself up in the police-station or confess everything to Sonya? And as he judges it too large a price to pay, he ascribes it to his

weakness that he is unable to keep his act secret. He needs Sonya precisely because she "understands" why he acted the way he did and that what condition he got into on account of his deed and — ultimately — it is only upon this "confession" that judging his deed's meaning or meaninglessness can take place.

A hope for clarification is what leads Raskolnikov to Sonya, his anguish seems somewhat relieved only by her, and it will *partly* be Sonya's reaction to the confession which will determine in him whether the act was an act of felony or an *attempt*, a test of himself. The dialog proper commences only with Sonya, while with the other characters Raskolnikov maintains a monolog or a pseudo-dialog: he speaks with them without touching the essence, or this essence is confined to metaphors and monologs.

Contrary to his original purpose, Hamlet kills not only for avenging his father's death, as Vigotsky supposed — but around the revenge new problems are clustering and the vengeance itself gradually loses its centrality in Hamlet's action; it should rather be seen that in setting right the extreme dislocation of time the father's revenge — as a personal element — *selected*, so to say, Hamlet for the act. The reason why this is so important may be elucidated by Laertes' father's revenge turned "cynicism". As Laertes is motivated simply by convention and the personal element he is subject to manipulation. He lacks a base of comparison, a standard of value. Thus the revenge may — and does! — lead him to destruction of the *good*, to the "murder".

In fact, the crucial issue is what separates so clearly the acts of, say, Laertes and Hamlet. Laertes stabs Hamlet to death — out of vengeance, he believes —, yet the conventional view of revenge does not exonerate him from the responsibility of moral-ethical blunder. This is not true of Hamlet: he is intent on jolting time in place and proceeds irresistibly on the only way leading to it when he calls out for his mother's help and stabs the eavesdropper who might threaten their prospective alliance. Ophelia is bound to Hamlet by virtue of her love and to her father by her filial fidelity — and because she can be utilized against Hamlet and is utilized to this aim by Polonius and Claudius — Hamlet is unable to hold her back from the inevitable breakdown. Laertes is the king's favourite — Hamlet has to fight and kill him before hurling himself at the king. The "murder", the "revenge" ceases to be a murder, a revenge — these are merely phases in the execution of the task of setting time right. Vigotsky rightly contends that the original revenge "somehow gets lost". Nevertheless by means of this "somehow" the performance of setting time right is transfigured to tragic assumption.

Raskolnikov has to lend an ear to the blame of his environment, even of himself, in order to qualify his act: was it a murder, a theoretical "murder" what he had done or an attempt, an abortive deed, an act to be disclaimed, misunderstanding or a crime committed in an irresponsible state of mind?

And the act shows now one face now the other in the second part labeled *psychological*. Raskolnikov's entire struggle after the murder not to give himself up becomes justified on moral grounds by the fact that on the level of purposes, or even on the level of external — social-ideological — factors underlying the purposes the deed will not become clear by the sheer fact of its having been committed. Raskolnikov's descent to hell lasts until he has given himself up, but should he give himself up — the opportunity for further questioning stops. Therefore, Raskolnikov tells Sonya that he has killed the old woman not only because Sonya "understands" him, because she would not reprove him — she herself is also beyond the limits both social-moral and human. Raskolnikov confesses to her rather because in the situation of play-acting — into which he has got by the denial of the act — the deeper layers of the motives for the act are inaccessible. The duel with Porfiry may yield only the attitude "I'm not the murderer" or "even if I were, you couldn't take me up on that" or "I'm not a murderer, I'm an avenger".

Any debate more to the point would make a self-denunciation, as it surely does: the moment Raskolnikov forgets about the attitude of dissembling, about the necessity of forcing out essential answers which are decisive even for himself, about finding out the truth, he is suddenly faced with a malevolent, victorious Porfiry. The only theme where he might defend the truth of his theory is the article, but it has in the meantime lost its relevance. Then the thesis was held that one was free to kill. Whereas both before and after the murder the crucial question is: "is he free to do it? was he free to do it?" Sonya is the partner who before the giving up provides the situation for Raskolnikov where he can *withdraw* from the play-acting and he can supply an answer from utterly divergent points of view or can ask for one from his partner.

Svidrigailov, too, is ready in his dialog with Raskolnikov to create this situation devoid of dissembling. The snag is that the price is too high: an identification of the ultimate meaning of both their deeds: a kind of offer to put a stop to any further questioning, and this is why Raskolnikov cannot accept it (just as the acceptance of Porfiry's offer might involve such a price of giving an answer, excluding further inquiries). This again would be one kind of answer but, since the act cannot be traced back to a single motive, so the closure, the answer to the question "what was then the act?" cannot be one-dimensional either.

The second part of the novel is a polyphonic answer, closure, and almost every one of these returns in the conversations with Sonya. Raskolnikov is sincere only towards her, unconditionally and without play-acting. True, he does pay his price for this: Sonya is the one who eventually will bring him to give himself up before ever getting a positive answer to his own quandary. This also accounts for the fact that the Raskolnikov-question does not, cannot,

in fact, come to a halt with Raskolnikov's fate, as it is of broader implication, so it rightly continues in the epilog indicating the interminableness of Raskolnikov's voice (similarly to Onegin's and Tatyana's encounter which could not close the philosophical problems raised by their fates, it could merely be instrumental in setting off a string of novels where we confront the rendez-vous and partings of so many Onegin's and Tatyana's). We do learn, however, that in this fate-closure the interpretation of Raskolnikov's act in the concepts of Porfiry, Luzhin, Dunya, Svidrigailov and even of Sonya has proved inadequate.

Of course, in the Dostoevskian concept of novel the issue is unresolved on the level of the characters and on the level of their mental horizons, for the question itself is central and decisive in the 19th century: how is it possible to separate the genetic and social ethics that are fetish-like entangled by means of an act shaping society; how can one undertake to shape history so that his action may give rise to essential changes and result in the abolishment of antagonisms prevalent in social coexistence; and is this really achievable by virtue of the ever so heroic and devoted action of the individual?

Thus Raskolnikov falters on the very point where Hamlet cannot have been uncertain, i.e. in the question whether he is the one born to set time right. Concerning whether he has found a substitute for the Napoleonic Toulon the brooding-self-consuming hero's answers will later on be digressing in different ways. It is undoubtedly proven, however, that one may not and must not question reality at the expense Raskolnikov thought was allowed. Not only because greatness, human greatness is the result of a process of actions and lacks *a priori* existence, but also because *becoming great is not an issue of psychology but a social-historical relationship*. Dostoevsky will then put it in terms of logic: a long series of intellectual and ethical efforts are needed on the part of the individual so that his questioning of reality should spring not from selfish curiosity but from reality-forming responsibility and endeavour.

Raskolnikov remains uncertain as to his own status as he was before committing the probing act. The phrase "you'll still hear of me" is voiced precisely on the way to the katorg, that is, after giving up the duel carried on with Porfiry. At the same time, Raskolnikov has come to realize that "moral compromise" and "greatness" are not necessarily interdependent ontologically, only historically.

In Raskolnikov's disappointment with Napoleon we may detect an element which will be experienced by Bolkonsky and Bezuhov, the central characters in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. True, in Tolstoy's concept the social issues do not arise in such a wide and thoroughgoing manner as is characteristic of each novel of Dostoevsky. However philosophical and psychological may be Raskolnikov's question, here the social background will not permit the questioner to raise it "disinterestedly". Moreover, not only the justification for the

questioning of reality but also the questioning itself is not philosophical or psychological either.

On the other hand, this Toulon as an act fails to be suitable for questioning reality (this signifies the "acting" Raskolnikov's running around), for as an action it would only be an act forcing out the answer if *this* were the level of action of the age, if the acting person alone could be able to dislocate and set time right or, say, if not Pushkin but Napoleon III had been right as for the forces determining the course of history — if Dostoevsky were doing justice not to Pushkin but to Napoleon III. Still Dostoevsky poses here the question the way Tolstoy will some years later in *War and Peace*: what are the conditions of the shaping of history, of "the making of history", what is the role of the individual and how is he selected or how does he lose when encountering this historical role?

In this respect Bolkonsky too makes faulty digressions in order to reach the peak of becoming a "great man" — and fails just as Raskolnikov did. With Tolstoy the historical situation and the "epic" era of noble life seems more propitious to a positive representation of the question, with Dostoevsky, however, the question itself receives deeper perspective. From this aspect it is to a smaller degree that Dostoevsky, compared to Tolstoy, gives expression to the Russian spiritual make-up — and closer to Shakespeare he rather expresses the *atmosphere*, the *cast of mind* of the age in the correlation of history and man, the course of history and individual action.

Nevertheless, we do perceive in both writers a question-posing quite dissimilar from that of the Western European. Actually as early as Pushkin's novels the issue is raised in a manner different from Balzac's pushing figures. And the heroes of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky in particular do not see themselves as ones seeking merely an opportunity for career under the given conditions. Moreover, the writer too refrains from depicting the Russian milieu as though the opportunity for career were a *qualification* of the social order and of the individual simultaneously, as in the novels of Stendhal and Balzac. In this pursuit for career Tolstoy's and Dostoevsky's heroes do carry some sort of *surplus*, which is the questioning of the age: that which intrigues the character and the writer alike, although in this respect there exists an enormous difference between the characters and their writer, be it Tolstoy or Dostoevsky. The major question of the epoch is, how is society arranged, in a way so as to be beneficial for the individual to develop his/her history-shaping power, or is his/her will to act doomed for some reason or other? The characters put this question at the end of their fate in the novel — their creator or writer at the beginning of the novel.

Yet in Tolstoy as well as Dostoevsky — characteristically — the ultimate question remains unanswered for the characters. Tolstoy strives to supply some answer with his novel to the question, while Dostoevsky moulds the

pattern of his novel so that the human fates may close the impassable ways — still, there should always be open a perspective hitherto uncontrolled by a human fate, the control of which, however, will not in the least be kept by the author in his extra-narrative competence, but will be utterly yielded to his heroes, to the illusions of his figures. Tolstoy's novel ends with the conversation of Pierre Bezuhov and Nikolay Rostov; in the course of their talk Pierre makes mention of the dekabrist movement, viz. a kind of collective expedient concerning Russia's plight. With this Tolstoy makes the question of history-shaping a collective concern. But the subsequent novels testify to the fact that Tolstoy is in the end unconscious of this solution: Levin or Nehludov are in quest of a historical solution where the person standing for the progressive nobility, the aristocratic reformer might push back the displaced historical time. Although this intention is wrecked by Tolstoy the writer, but Tolstoy the doctrinaire on the whole sympathizes and identifies himself with the comforting illusions as to the Bible (*The Resurrection*) or the patriarchal way of life (*Anna Karenina*) as pointing to a way out.

Dostoevsky, however, brings his Raskolnikov and Myshkin to failure novelistically as well, and even his Alyosha according to the final plan of the second part of *The Brothers Karamazov*, and presents the illusion as one of an opposing human way not tracked down in the novel: in Sonya's way (in *Crime and Punishment*), in Aglaya's way (in *The Idiot*), in that of the murdered Shatov (in *The Devils*), and in Mitya's way (in *The Brothers Karamazov*). Dostoevsky as a publicist does repeatedly assert that to him no remedy is in sight as to the problems of mankind and of the Russian man. That is why he is so consistent in having his **central** heroes fail, in driving their ideologies into crisis and forbears from narratively motivating the truths of those heroes who do not fail, and he never creates a novelistic pattern for the incomplete fates of his heroes in the novel.

Dostoevsky refuses to give a solution throughout, as the era did not give one either. And the novel, then, must be an analysis of genuine questions and genuine solutions arising in the given age, that is, of genuine contradictions. What lies beyond it is no longer the realm of the novel. Chernishevsky directs into "dream" the course of his heroes in "*What is to be done?*", and thus he does not unravel their fates, he fails to draw the tragic conclusion concerning his heroes' fates, which means that as far as genre is concerned, he closes the novel as a morality and therefore his characters, compared to those of Dostoevsky, are unable to question the world so that they may get a proper answer.

## 5.

The issues clustering around Hamlet are the historical responsibility incumbent upon one person and the resulting tragic consequence, and the possibility of history-shaping by one man. Raskolnikov's problem: can the individual assume historical responsibility under the new historical conditions or, in other words, can history be shaped by a single person?

The dominant problem of Hamlet's age: to be a hero in a universal condition when the epoch is far from heroic, that is, when time is out of joint. Between individual and community the contact characteristic of heroic eras is absent and the conditions for the subsequent historical step to be jointly taken are long lost. On the contrary: the individual can achieve success even if his action is hostile to the community (Claudius), if he is interested in the course of time only so much as he can channel to his own ends (Polonius).

Hamlet sees his own task in driving back this course of time into its original rut and this can be achieved in his age surely by the individual alone. For the "natural" historical relationship of individual and community was torn by the disjointed time, so in order to push time in place this individual must act without the community and, apparently, even in defiance of it. Since until this patriarchal or rather the newer Renaissance condition is carried to victory by the individual, no harmonic connection can be formed between individual and society. And at the same time the individual is compelled into an out-of-time condition as long as he takes steps to restore unity, because the connection of individual and community both of the heroic ages and the patriarchal eras has broken and the patriarchal or Renaissance man is left to himself. The action can be nothing but tragic.

In Greek tragedy the individual acts with an awareness of the prevalence and validity of the heroic condition. He perceives the dislocation of time not as a possible historical flow of time but as a vacuum which is to be brought to an end in the interest of the eternal ancestral order. Even the last stage of Odysseus' adventure (return and conflict with the court) reflects such a condition, presupposes such thinking. It is further underlined by Homer's construction: the disintegration, the dislocation of time is present from the outset, but it never becomes predominant, only as an impending threat, yet another metamorphosis of the world hovering incessantly over Odysseus' head, and for his wife and child there is a latent tragedy should Odysseus not return or perish.

The Shakespearean hero senses this dislocated state of affairs as a historical potential which marks a real, equal chance for power for the irresponsible and the responsible individual alike. With the Greeks, this disjointedness does not yet betoken the reality of the new, the historical time. Concerning Shakespeare, however, history's sidetracking its own course emerges as a potential of

the shape of history, real, existing time. Thus dislocation is a *mythological condition* for the Greeks, whereas for Shakespeare it is a *possibility of the formation of history*, an issue of philosophy and ethics, which implies the relationship of the human existence and the teleological nature of the life of mankind.

Along with this Shakespearean discovery of the new conflict-condition there arises within the poetic form of tragedy the possibility of the dramatic analysis of the conflict or, in other words, the originally tragic purport undergoes a shift in the work as realization. This will render possible the symbiosis of drama and tragedy, the linking of history and topicality — outer and inner motions — the artistic fusion of action impelled by the ideal and the intellect. It is not only the passion and duty but also the intellectual activity, the analysis, deliberation, scepticism, the concentration of will, the insight, the understanding, the awareness of history, the fear, the courage — many a level of the conscious self — all these come into the forefront of dramatic and self-analysis, and along with it the whole Shakespearean tragedy-drama opens a new phase as compared to the concept of man and reality, man and the universe characteristic of Greek dramas as well as the topos-forms peculiar to that concept.

Such a linking of tragic and dramatic conflicts points to new perspectives, with Shakespeare's discovery of the new conflict-condition the opportunity for a detailed dramatic analysis of the conflict is created within the poetic forms of tragedy. The opportunity, that is, of the emergence of the modern problem of individual and community, personality and history in its due complexity and historical concreteness. From now on, the acting person acts not only from ecstasy, nor from a priori conviction or religious belief, but also spiritually and ideologically he or she maintains a dynamic relation with his or her new situation; the analyzing, the understanding and the awareness of history find their roles as history-shaping powers in Shakespeare's concept.

Shakespeare derives even the tragic notion from the possible solutions of this dramatic conflict, from the alternative relationship of individual and history, so for him the tragic notion is not only an acceptance of fate but also an assumption of role on the part of the individual in the formation of history justified by the individual's relation to the historical time and historical community.

In Hamlet, to be sure, the Shakespearean tragedy develops dramatically and turns from there into tragedy when the dramatic conflict itself is elucidated or, reaching the peak it clarifies the content of the two alternative solutions — the varying world-views and ethics of Claudius and Hamlet. Two kinds of individual — and community —, two kinds of personality — and historical relation, concept — are clashing here for life and death. For the "concept", the world-view in Shakespeare by dint of the individual's history-shaping role is itself a history-forming power.

The Shakespearean drama discusses whether such a history-shaping individual conflict ends in tragedy or is aborted; therefore, the tragedy in the concept of the work is none other than a situation-solving element in the drama. The possibility of tragedy's loss may arise because history, the dislocation of time implies that the individual saddled with a responsibility for history might even abuse his responsibility, his opportunities and alternatives inherent in his dominant status in case he puts his selfish aims in the centre instead of those of the community. This is a natural consequence of the self-awareness, the newly-gained central position of the individual on a historical turning-point.

This side of the problem is quite lucidly formulated in the figure of Claudius. Love, the more light, more joy, the indulgence in pleasures, and along with these an adherence to life in respect of his character is rendered with evocative, tangible imagery in the action of the work. And this alternative crops up even in Hamlet's mind. Claudius and Polonius, in order to distract the prince from his dismal thoughts, from the intention of the revenge, send Ophelia not at random — according to their design, characteristically, Ophelia needs to remind Hamlet that they once used to be in love. Claudius assigns the same task to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to find out some way or other what purpose lies behind the feigning of madness, or rather to tempt him to gaiety and carelessness. And with good reason, as Claudius' power will be durable if the court resembles his life-style.

Eventually, Hamlet is also to tackle with this concept of history, this idea of the individual which is strange to him but pressingly topical and factual. Hence the colossal role of Hamlet's monologs in the drama: after the recurrent raising of the cumbersome responsibility we are presently faced with the hero's self-accusation lest he should accept even for a moment the concept of his enemies. On account of this inner struggle does he receive with such great pleasure the actors' play: he feels that it expresses his own views on life, his concept of history and his ethic. And that is why he is enthusiastic when meeting Fortinbras' soldiers: he presumes to detect in their self-sacrifice yet another mode of life opposing to that of Claudius. To every new proof Hamlet reacts with excitement and overwhelming joy. And at the same time when a counter-proof presents itself or he is gripped by uncertainty, we may witness the analytic endeavours sometimes balking but of immense strength of the spiritual and intellectual efforts of Hamlet the philosopher.

But when Hamlet does gain proof of Claudius' guilt, of the verity of his surmise, of the veracity of the ghost, then he reaps at once in the dispute of historical alternatives the victory of his responsible concept of history. From then on Hamlet's will is getting more and more resolute, hard and invincible, as opposed to his earlier justifiable vacillations.

The phase lag between Hamlet's certitude of Claudius' guilt (the actors' play) and his becoming resolute (the stabbing of Polonius instead of Claudius)

is explicable not only on psychological grounds. The love of life and the tragic assumption of role as a total integration of the two requirements posed by the age makes the vacillation fully understandable even later on. Ultimately Hamlet does accept the heroic and tragic role of the single man, of the lone and forsaken active person, but in the rest of the drama turned tragedy he repeatedly emphasizes, almost as a mouthpiece of the author, the adherence to life of Renaissance man. Yet the difference is enormous between the volitional, intellectual vacillation springing from the uncertainty before the turning-point and the state of nostalgia and speculation afterwards. Up to the turning-point the lack of the two kinds of certainty — the conviction of Claudius' guiltiness and of the wrongfulness of Claudius' concept of life — causes the delay of the act, while after the turning-point he sees and experiences the un-avoidability of assuming the role, he realizes that he might even take leave of life by his execution of the historical act.

After the final certainty, the actors' play, there comes an additional proof gained through sheer accident: Claudius' meditation in the church. For Hamlet the scene is unambiguous: although beyond hearing distance of Claudius' whispering words he nonetheless can grasp the king's state of mind through his gestures. Claudius seeks forgiveness and his weakening instantly makes him realize that absolution is denied, as there is no atonement while he benefits from the fruit of his sin. Here Hamlet fails to act not because he falters for a moment as to his proven truth: to kill Claudius while he implores for absolution makes Hamlet shrink back merely because the revenge would be only a "revenge", thus unworthy of Hamlet and of the final goal, as well as of the importance of setting time right. Hamlet knows already that Claudius will send him to England — to have him killed, he vaguely suspects — but at the same time, he has received a message from his mother to make his appearance in her room. Is he called because Gertrude is determined to quit her incestuous, sinful connection or, if not so, she might perhaps be persuaded to do this and by this means she can be tempted to his, Hamlet's, side? Thus Claudius becomes isolated and time can be set right without running the risk of tragedy, the act may be revenged in a Renaissance manner. For Shakespeare this momentum is tremendously important, since from this moment starts the process of surmounting the matricide-complex of Greek tragedies which is constantly vibrating in the conversation with Gertrude, now as the queen's fright, now as the thought underlying the expressivity of Hamlet's argumentation, as the almost irresistible step of the revenge of the non-Renaissance Hamlet. And if we need to seek for a cause why Hamlet is obliged to continue with his speculation and delay his act even when seeing Claudius kneel in the church, the motive can be found in this. The concept of blood-feud, as a matter of fact, which was not an ethical problem prior to the act, in Greek tragedy (revenge by son of mother's husband-murder), protrudes here as an ethical issue. Concerning Hamlet's

state of mind the second caesura of the work — reflecting in the structure of content of both the dialogs and the monologs — can be observed at this very point. After all, Gertrude will not give a positive answer to Hamlet's offer. But Hamlet is no longer preoccupied with the question if he is right in his suspicions, or which of the concepts are more authentic, more humane, but with the newer problem which goes with the task of setting time right, which is again a source of delay for the classic Greek tragic hero: why is he called to settle such a matter, why is it not possible to "do away" with sin without committing another sin, is one entitled to punish even his own blood provided no other way is open to jolt the time of history back?

Hamlet learns simultaneously Gertrude's message and Claudius' decision: in the very moment of his awakening precipitated by the play-scene. Hamlet is not only fully absorbed with the victory won in his last great struggle for certitude, but also the two pieces of news coming from opposite directions allure him to hope and imbue him with doubts. The real essence of Claudius' scheme is imperceptible for him only in its concreteness, it will turn out later, aboard. What concerns his hope, however, he duly feels that Gertrude's call is a beam of light in "the empire of darkness". It may be that the tormented conscience of his mother troubled her and even set off a process of purification in her self-accusing soul! And actually it does appear so, on the way to his mother he catches sight of Claudius in prayers: if the tragedy presented just now could elicit such a self-examination in Claudius, why not should it have an even larger impact on his mother? And then the solution too might be other than the solitary revenge, the mere retribution, the stabbing of the defenceless, praying enemy. It is not that his sense of beauty is averse to it, nor is the "eneration" the obstacle — we encounter the same Hamlet who, later on, will justify before his conscience that dagger which was originally designed for him by Claudius. But there is no possibility for Hamlet to step out of the vicious circle of the history-shaping of sole responsibility.

The actors' play, as we have seen, is the turning-point of the drama: Hamlet has realized that the culprit's person is proved beyond doubt and that his wavering is unfounded as to the norms and ethic requirements of his attitude in the historical role cut out for him. At the same time Claudius has also ascertained that Hamlet had found out the murder, so he can keep the power only if he sends Hamlet after his father, to his death. Hamlet's dissembling comes to an end, but Claudius in his turn is compelled to play-acting which is promising, yet the course to be taken is so full of abysses that he, too, can easily fall into them (as he does in the end): he is to deceive not only Hamlet's escorts and Laertes but the queen as well. Although Laertes uncovers the manipulation, but only before his death; Gertrude too surmises that the gem thrown into the chalice is venom and, belatedly, wants to suffer in Hamlet's stead, so the protagonist of the uncovered play-acting cannot shun retribution. The

two scenes bringing a turn for the second time (Hamlet—Gertrude meeting, Claudius' prayer) make the characters themselves see the possibility of the development in new light. After his momentary wavering, Claudius admits that no remorse is possible, because the pleasure bought at the price of damnation can only keep him alive, keep his ambitions, and although Hamlet cannot witness this, Claudius' further schemes have begun with Polonius' voluntary eavesdropping. Hamlet's revenge, however, if it could have happened before, then it could have happened earlier too, but if he did revenge himself earlier, Hamlet would not have been Hamlet. The reason why he does not avail himself of the encouraging certainty against the praying king, is that Hamlet can still entertain hopes as to his mother's alliance. The entire psychological "choreography" of their meeting testifies to the fact that Hamlet is still confident he will be able to influence his mother. Their whole dialog, Hamlet's speech dwelling on Gertrude's guilt and invoking the unavoidability of redemption has approximately an import of the magnitude in the given situation like Marmeladov's monolog on the spur of which Raskolnikov swings from the condition of "is one free to kill?" over to the psychological, intellectual and social compulsive-condition of "to kill is inevitable".

And that Hamlet eventually deems the illusion of this alliance more promising than the possibility offered by the slaying of the praying king, demonstrates that he — now secure from the will-paralyzing doubt of "guilty or not guilty?" — comes close for the first time to the genuine concern of the revenge or history-shaping: what does the revenge involve in the given historical situation? The son scourging his mother now must face a new stream of questions of responsibility: is there hope for him to avoid the tragedy of the heroes of similar role of Greek tragedies? Hamlet is perhaps utterly unaware what is at work behind his "indulgence". Hamlet the thinker will then blame himself for this indulgence, but Hamlet the man of Renaissance sensibility and reflection sets up already before the act the questions of self-proof, just as he did after the appearance of his father's ghost. Claudius' prayer and the meeting of Hamlet and Gertrude is the very scene where the Shakespearean work — in different context though — takes a similar turn as in the play-scene. Up till now Hamlet was seeking for the truth, his truth, now, when he has found out the proof and in his consideration nothing can obstruct — only delay at most — the act, the real problem may come to light: *the revenge, the setting right of time will reproduce the same dilemma, though on a different level, as though he had taken vengeance without certainty, out of sheer faith.*

And with this we confront again the fusion and separation of Greek tragedy and modern drama. Should Hamlet kill the king at this point he would cut himself off from the unknown alternative which the meeting with his mother might hold in store, then he would be rash in executing the act just as Laertes when avenging his father's "murderer". However, his task as a Renaissance

man is to tear the navel-cord from the myth of Greek fate and predestination, he is to prove that men are not terrestrial vicars of the gods' strife but the responsible prisoners of their own historical action. If Hamlet were taking vengeance only, he would act as any Greek hero who is convinced that sinners are to be punished even if the act would generate newer sins, and in this manner the fact of matricide would bind again the severed navel-cord to Greek tragedy or to the medieval world-view. Yet for Shakespeare the crucial thing is to think over how man becomes Renaissance man in a tense dramatic situation, or more precisely what are the spiritual, psychological and social parameters of this transition. It is for this very reason that we regard *Hamlet* a modern play. The Greek hero, as well as the medieval one was not free, the responsibility of the act lay with the contending gods or the unfathomable Providence. In the first phase Hamlet fought his way to freedom, now he must not lose it in a flash, since the achievement of the right to free choice transformed him also, he was made a Renaissance personality through his fight for certainty. This new Hamlet will no longer relinquish the emerging opportunity to that Hamlet — which he is still slightly haunted by — which would have got hold of the opportunity after such a strife.

This accounts for the intense dramatic suspense of the meeting of Hamlet and Gertrude. This is a tragedy apart within the tragedy, in which the prince sheds his mask and tries out every keynote possible, from puerile entreaty to threats in order to reach success. Gertrude also senses something from this, as she knows full well that Hamlet could quite as well behave in this moment as an avenger. And actually his passion is not immune to this temptation, just as this alternative was raised before in connection with the praying king. Surely the stabbing of Polonius behind the arras signifies for Hamlet a failure, as playing the fool does not put a singular strain on him on account of his state of mind, and in the given moment Hamlet even takes shelter in this role. Polonius is the first victim of this reverse situation in which Hamlet is unable to fend off the revenge and in consequence of his deed he is left to himself. Hamlet's further doubts arise from the fact that after his abortive attempt in his mother's chamber he feels that Gertrude too must be drawn into the revenge. Partly for this reason does Hamlet take up the challenge so reluctantly in the last scene. Hamlet's dilemma: how is he able to set the historical time right without in the meantime losing his inner freedom so that his action should not be revenge but doing justice? And from the second caesura — especially after the Hamlet—Gertrude meeting — the work scrutinizes a problem which is new compared to the first part of the drama: how should a man freed from convention and prejudices act and fulfil his task while remaining free inwardly, a commander of laws and not their simple tool? To be sure, we are faced no longer with a Greek tragedy but with one consciously assumed, a modern tragedy in which the solution to the dramatic and then the tragic conflicts becomes once

for all exempt from the compulsive fate-mystic-deus ex machina of Greek tragedy. From the side of the *personality*, from the aspect of the individual's role-assumption the drama reveals a more real, more historical content of fate.

If Shakespeare were to analyze fate from a different angle — from the angle of order, social structure, that is — then the tragic drama or modern tragedy would eventually turn into a novel. But this would be possible only if Shakespeare had examined not the nascent Renaissance world but a world turning into prosaic order. The epoch into which Shakespeare's Hamlet makes inquiries provides only for the analysis of that moment which can be best expressed through the encounter and symbiosis of drama and tragedy. And this raises theoretically plus historically the question of the difference between drama and tragedy, their relationship in terms of genre, and simultaneously the relationship of the novel and tragedy and the genres of modern age and antiquity.