Ben Jonson's Baroque in *A Tale of a Tub*: Chance as Fate and Melancholy

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***Abstract* — Thinking of a cross-cultural exploration through approaching Jonson via Benjamin's German ideas about the baroque opens new spaces to argue the complexities of baroque. In this sense, Jonson's last play, *A Tale of a Tub*, as a case study, helps us better understand Benjamin's reading of baroque. The main feature in this reading could be the presence of chance incorporating temporality and transience in Jonson's play. This paper argues that while this presence has shaped the fate of the villagers in Jonson's play Benjamin's idea of melancholy brings a change into their life**

***Keywords* —Baroque; chance; fate; Walter Benjamin.**

I. Introduction

Jonson's final complete play is *A Tale of a Tub*, performed first in 1633 and published in the second Folio of his works in 1640. The play is set in the remote Elizabethan past or even perhaps in the time of Queen Mary. But, as Richard Harp writes, "the Middlesex villages which compose its setting are so completely realized by means of its characters' language and diversity that there is little anachronistic about it" [1]. Martin Butler shows that Jonson has been faithful to historical fact: "This helps the play to comment constructively on matters of king, court and commoners in 1630s" [2]. The play is situated in the baroque time. It also should be noted that tracing the baroque features in Jonson's historical context is not part of my argument. I take up the argument that Jonson's play can be rethought in order to find those specific baroque features already remained unnoticed.

In this paper, I read Jonson's play while I am thinking of Walter Benjamin's reading of the baroque. Walter Benjamin's study of the baroque stage-form called Trauerspiel (literally, 'mourning play') engages with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century German playwrights as well as the plays of Shakespeare and Calderón and the engravings of Dürer. Benjamin tries to show how the historically charged forms of the Trauerspiel broke free of tragedy's mythological timelessness. If the Classical is that which is timeless and transcendent, then its eternal life must be contrasted to the historicism and the decay of the Baroque. If the Classical is that which is whole, complete, and self-sufficient, the Baroque is a mere collection of those left-behind details, the fragments of a melancholy cult of decay. Benjamin distinguishes between natural history and historical time. In the latter, human has imposed his own interpretation on the former. In the historical time, the human takes possession of anything outside his mind in thought. Knowledge in this sense is the correctness of his way of looking at the world. But truth is the unity of being recognized in reality itself which occurs in the natural history. Living in the historical time, the human has contemplated the world rather than allowing the world to present itself in reality as it is. The knowledge acquired through contemplation determines the human's fate. In fact, the human's fate is what he himself makes through contemplation. To put it differently, the human escapes the natural history. The fate he creates for himself is artificial since it has no grounding in the natural history. The human suffers melancholy because of not experiencing truth through living in the natural history, as Benjamin writes that "melancholy betrays the world for the sake of knowledge." [3]. This melancholy causes the human to fall into a creaturely state. In this state, for Benjamin, the human redeems the domain of objects and "is born of a loyalty to the world of things" [3], p. 157. Although Benjamin has considered the German baroque in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, his view helps us to rethink Jonson's play through the historicism of the baroque including the notions of fate, chance, and melancholy. These notions will be discussed more while I analyse the play.

II. Fate, Chance and Melancholy

The plot unfolds around the villagers of Finsbury's devotion to the tradition of St. Valentine's Day. It concerns the incompetent attempts of a variety of suitors to win the hand of Awdrey Turfe, the daughter of a Middlesex constable. In the beginning, John Clay the tile maker has won the hand of Awdrey. Later, to break Awdrey's engagement to John Clay, Squire Tub, a rival, falsely accused the man of theft. As Constable Turfe pursues the innocent man, another suitor, Justice Preamble, plays a comparable ruse against Squire Tub. Awdrey is chased after by four separate suitors when they are told she apparently has no particular preference among them. Amongst the disorder, Pol-Marten, Lady Tub's usher, marries Awdrey before the others realize. Their marriage is celebrated with a wedding masque, also titled *A Tale of a Tub*, which retells the story of the play.

The title of the play, *A Tale of a Tub*, signifies the archaic phrase defined in the OED as an apocryphal story. The apocrypha refer to the 14 books included as an appendix to the Old Testament in the Septuagint and the Vulgate but not included in the Hebrew canon. They are printed in Protestant versions of the Bible, Geneva Bible, and the Bishops' Bible.

Published on October 31, 2021.
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In the Greek language, it means 'unknown' and 'hidden.' The title with this implied meaning turns upon itself prefiguring an uncertainty illustrated throughout the play concerning the tradition of Valentine. The birthplace of the plot's recounting is a religious event, the tradition of St._Valentine's Day. The event celebrated in the play works for a local gentry desire to appropriate a mate for the villagers. The play begins with Cham Hugh, the vicar of Pancrass, hailing Valentine: "O' my Faith, Old Bishop *Valentine*." The matter of faith justifies and legitimizes this celebration. However, they have incorporated a secular tendency into it, that is, the lottery to draw a mate. The game is working at the heart of this faith which is connected to the idea of chance:

> *Hug.* Sir, to conclude in Counsel,
> A Husband, or a Make for Mrs. *Awdrey;*
> Whom they have nam'd, and prick'd down,
> *Clay* of *Kilborn,*A tough young fellow, and a Tile-maker.
> *Tub.* And what must he do?
> *Hugh.* Cover her, they say:
> And keep her warm, Sir: Mrs. *Awdrey Turfe,*
> Last night did draw him for her *Valentine;*
> Which the chance, it hath so taken her Father and Mother, (Because themselves drew so, on *Valentine*'s Eve Was thirty year) as they will have her married To day by any means [4].

Repeatedly, thirty years of decision making by chance has engaged them with life. The presence or absence of the marriage institution in the village is so important that it determines one's social status. In Act III, when John Clay is accused of theft, Mr. Awdrey loses his high ranking status, then he receives it back quickly when John is said to be innocent by Squire Tub: "I take my Office back, and my Authority/Upon your Worship's words. Neighbours/I am High Constable again: where's my zon *Clay?*" [4], pp. 5-6. The importance of this event is as much as the worth of whole life. The connection between chance and life raises the point that life is determined by chance. Squire Tub, the romantic rival, questions the Fortune which has taken Awdrey from him. What has been decided on Valentine's Day is believed to be his fortune, that is, he is not going to marry the lady. The fortune or the fate disappoints him: "*Tub.* I see my wooing will not thrive. Arrested!/As I had set my rest up, for a Wife?/And being so fair for it, as I was — Well, Fortune,/Thou art a blind Bawd, and a Beggar too,/To cross me thus; and let my only Rival/To get her from me?" [4], p. 36. The blind disabled fate has penetrated into his life. There is a predetermined nature for people involved in this game. They become the subject of fate. Indeed, chance has become their fate. Chance does not remain any opportunity to think of the main binary opposition of the real/ideal made within the human history. It leaves us to the hand of indecisiveness about human nature and the world. Below, I argue how the villagers make their fate through chance which empties their life. Then, this emptiness is clarified better by thinking of Benjamin's notion of melancholy.

Benjamin's study of fate in the baroque time in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* will clarify Jonson's play about the relationship between the human and fate. What occurs within this relationship is the identification of subjectivity with the subject of fate. Benjamin defines this subject position in terms of what he calls "creaturely":

> For once human has sunk into the merely creaturely [*des bolß kreatülichengesunken*], even if the life of apparently dead objects [*des scheinbar toten Dinge*] secures power over it. The effectiveness of where guilt has been incurred is a sign of the approach of death. The passionate stirrings of the creaturely life in man – in a word passion itself – bring the fatal property into action … In the drama of fate, the nature of man which is expressed in blind passion, and the nature of things, which is expressed in blind chance [*Zufall*] are both equally subject to the law of fate [*Gesetz des schicksalsaus*] [3], p. 132.

Fate, for Benjamin, is not the integration through the sequential logic of causality which is ascribed to nature. Rather, fate cannot be disassociated from guilt: "Fate is the entelechy of events within the field of guilt" [3], p. 129. The guilt must not be misunderstood by referring it to an original state of innocence that preceded the Fall. The guilt is not directly connected to a subject. Rather, it relates to the acceptance of the fate's inevitability and thus to the naturalization of fate. The guilt, in other words, is the process of subjection to fate. The guilt would not be original once it is defined in relation to the historical time and the subject is thought to be temporal. The original sin would no longer be original. Accordingly, the guilt would not be guilt; it has come to be in the passage of time. The human oblivion has constructed the concept of the guilt. He himself has imposed it on his life. This temporization constitutes the human subjectivity. While fate in tragedy determines the individual destiny, the baroque drama, for Benjamin, situates fate within community. The term "creaturely" is connected with the "dead objects" which is more generally the domain of "things." The sinking of human life relates to the equation of that life with animality. But the animality does not signify animal directly. Benjamin engages himself about this point with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Within Jonson's play, the communal function of Saint Valentine Day collectivizes the whole community's fate. Its historical presence through repetition has established it as an unavoidable tradition. The villagers subject themselves to this tradition while they are unaware of its fatal work:

> *Cle.* WHY, 'tis thirty year, e'en as this day now,
> *Zin Valentine*'s day, of all days kursin'd, look you;
> And the zame day o' the Month, as this *Zin Valentine,*
> Or I am vowly deceiv'd.
> *Med.* That our High Constable,
> Mr. *Tobias Turfe,* and his Dame were married.
> I think you are right. But what was that *Zin Valentine?*
> Did you ever know 'um, Good-man *Clench?*
> *Cle. Zin Valentine,*
> He was a deadly *Zin,* and dwelt at *High-gate,*
> As I have heard; but 'twas avore my time:
> He was a Cooper too, as you are, *Medlay,*

An' In-an-In: A woundy brag young vellow:
As th' port went o' hun then, and i' those days.
Scri. Did he not write his Name, *Sim Valentine?*
Vor I have met no *Sin* in *Finsbury* Books;
And yet I have writ 'em six or seven times over.
Pan. O' you mun look for the Nine deadly *Sims,*
I' the Church-books, *D'oge;* not the high Constables;
Nor i' the Counties: Zure, that same *Zin Valentine,*
He was a stately *Zin:* an' he were a *Zin,*
And kept brave house [4], p. 11.

The question of genealogy about this tradition shakes its basis. Though the presence of historical time indirectly and unconsciously puts doubt in their mind about their trust on the origin of the tradition, they still continue to repeat and live with it. In his modern understanding, Benjamin thinks that origin is a thoroughly historical category which has nothing common with genesis: "Origin does not at all mean the formation or becoming of what has arisen but rather what is arising […] that which is original never lets itself to be known in the bare, public stock of factual. It wishes to be known, on the one hand, as restoration and rehabilitation and, on the other hand, in its very rehabilitation as uncompleted and unsettled" [3], p. 45. In this sense, the tradition in Jonson's play, for the villagers, is thought to have a genesis as a finished object. But the uncertainty of the genesis questions the complete belief in a timeless origin as essence in any phenomenon. Anything goes under change in the historical time. This comic controversial discussion over the origin of the tradition hints to the point that they are not awakening to the unnatural existence of this day which could be considered as an object. They have limited themselves to the inscription of this tradition as fate. In other words, their life is permeated by this fate which has overcome them. It is impossible for them to interrupt it. When Clay is accused of robbery, Turfe, Lady Awdrey's father, passively accepts this as his daughter's fate who is going to marry Clay selected from the lottery in Valentine day: "As Fortune mend me, now, or any Office/Of a thousand pound, if I know what to zay,/Would I were dead" [4], pp. 28-29. The "Fortune" taken as fate here determines their life. In different occasions, at least ten times the fortune falls on the villagers' life. In "*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy," for Benjamin, "Trauerspiel exhausts artistically the historical idea of repetition" [5]. The German Trauerspiel which is different from tragedy determines the same through the historical idea of repetition. The historical idea of repetition is akin to the tradition which is repeated by the villagers for thirty years. It has recognized itself as self-evident. It describes the repetition of the movement from the past to the present as "self-evident" and as chronological. To elucidate the historical idea of repetition, Benjamin also states that the German Trauerspiele remains in the dominion of the "demonic world order of fate" [5], p. 157. No figure interrupts the temporality of fate in the Trauerspiel. Benjamin writes that "fate, whatever guise it may wear in a pagan or mythological context, is meaningful only as a category of 'natural history' in the spirit of the restoration-theology of the Counter-Reformation" [5], p. 157. For Benjamin, fate, as a category of historical time, is implicit in the Trauerspiel and envelops it in the fate of "natural history" or the "eternal" image of history [5], p. 397. Moreover, "the Trauerspiele of the seventeenth century treats the same subjects as to … necessitate repetition" [5], p. 137. The Trauerspiel finds kinship in the demonic order of fate, which Benjamin considers it as "the true order of eternal reoccurrence" [5], p. 135. The form of the Trauerspiel, therefore, determines the repetition of the same. The same signifies tradition's repeated capacity to establish and re-establish fate as self-evident. Thus, in the Trauerspiel the repetition of the same is achieved through an ambiguous ending where no perceived break between either mythical or historical epochs occurs. Similar to a trial, in "Language in *Trauerspiel* and Tragedy" the Trauerspiel defers before finishing. Two essential "metaphysical principles" can demarcate the idea of the Trauerspiel, these are the cycle and repetition [6].

The repetition of the same which constructs fate has made the villagers to lose their sense of reality. Chance which from the beginning to the end of the play orientates all events can expose the emptiness of fate. Chance works as the already predetermined nature, the object overpowering the villagers' community. They impose chance as fate on themselves while they are unaware of that. The villagers' susceptibility to chance could be related to what Benjamin calls "grace" within the world of faith. They are assuming the religious grace within Valentine Day suggesting the possibility of overcoming the world. But paradoxically this faith has stopped them to have progress in their life because the grace here is identified with chance making their potentialities impossible to be actualized; they are cut of any action: "Making soul dependent on grace through faith, and making secular-political sphere a testing ground for a life which was only indirectly religious, being intended for the demonstration of civic virtues, it did, it is true, instill into the people a strict sense of obedience to duty, but in its great men it produced melancholy… It did not prevent life from becoming stale" [5], p. 139. The concept of the grace through its temporal presence deprives the human life of the value of good work. The human blindly and passively subjects himself to this grace. Here the grace changes its function: if it is not followed by the human, it becomes guilt. In Jonson's play, the grace is identified with Valentine Day, as the villagers obey it strictly. It has penetrated into their life. Mrs. Turf says: "*Tur.* Zee, who is here: *John Clay!/Zon Valentine,* and Bridegroom! ha' you zeen/Your Valentine-Bride yet, sin' you came? *John Clay?*" [4], p. 14. John Clay plays the role of St. Valentine and Mrs. Turf sees the appearance as real. People feel a sense of guilt if not adhering to this real. But they follow the tradition already devalued from within itself. They are not aware of depriving themselves of the tradition by placing chance in this real. To put it another way, chance determines both their faith and fate. They not only secularize this faith by incorporating chance within this tradition but also devalue it as a good work. Their world is the empty world in which actions and good works are no longer the guarantee of the grace. This has emptied Valentine both religiously and earthly. That is why Benjamin states that life becomes stale. Without the redemptive potential of human agency, all actions are deprived of value and a melancholic "empty world" arises from the world of thing [5], p. 139. The Baroque play is a mourning of the loss of redemption through the

grace, and the loss of the tragic hero's capacity to deal an iron blow to fate. Chance cannot be the satisfactory basis of experience. According to Weber, this is also the reason of "the theatrical turn of mourning toward the mask in order to produce at least the semblance of a reanimation that according to Luther otherwise had become accessible to faith alone" [7]. Benjamin in "Julien Green" writes about chance in a different meaning as the passion which should be distinguished from the meaning of chance brought into Valentine: "Chance is the figure of Necessity abandoned by God. This is why, in Green, the depraved interiority of passion is in reality so completely in the grip of externality. So much that passion is basically nothing but the agent of chance that transmits despair to his characters' various destinies. Hope is the ritardando of fate" [5], p. 332. Despair is resulted by the abandonment of the Necessity felt by the presence of chance within life. Chance, here, signifies an opportunity to remove the necessity of fate. Life should be full of passion with a profane destruction in order that it can push back fate. This chance poses an alternative logic to causality, one that emphasizes the generative force in the production of new opportunities which embodies the promise of break from the established forms. The Valentine tradition is destroyed by chance but not with this constructive function in destruction. This is the positive chance which I discuss it later in the structure of melancholy.

The stale life can be referred to the Benjamin's idea of "the passionate stirrings of the creaturely life in man." The empty life into which the villagers have sunken has mortified them. The life has become a mere life, the life of creature. To reiterate Benjamin, "the life of apparently dead objects secures power over it." Some situations in Jonson's play present the life of creatures. In Act II. Scene IV, Squire Tub, the romantic lover of Lady Awdrey, confesses the nothingness of his love:

> *Tub.* Troth, I could wish my Wench a better Wit;
> But what she wanteth there, her Face supplies.
> There is a pointed lustre in her Eye Hath shot quite through me, and hath hit my heart: And thence it is I first receiv'd the wound, That ranckles now, which only she can cure. Fain would I work myself from this conceit; But, being flesh, I cannot. I must love her, The naked truth is: and I will go on, Were it for nothing, but to cross my Rivals. Come, *Awdrey*: I am now resolv'd to ha' thee [4], p. 37.

Before this speech, Tub expresses his love suddenly which confuses Lady Awdrey to think that how it is possible that some strange person falls in love with her. Then, in the above line Tub comically have to love her not because of love in the first impression but of crossing his rival, that is, for nothing. Another comical situation in which chance signifies nothingness occurs when lady Awdrey sets free herself from the three characters taking their chance to marry her:

> *Awd.* Was ever silly Maid thus posted off?
> That should have had three Husbands in one day;
> Yet (by bad Fortune) am possest of none?
> I went to Church to have been wed to *Clay;*
> Then Squire *Tub* he seiz'd me on the way,
> And thought to ha' had me; but he mist his aim:
> And Justice *Bramble* (nearest of the three)
> Was well nigh married to me; when by the chance,
> In rush'd my Father, and broke off that dance [4], p. 52.

Clay, Tub and Bramble are the three husbands in just one-day rushing to possess her. This dance of chance ends up at last with the marriage of Lady with one of the servants, Pol Martin, *by the chance* at the end of the play. This is the effective presence of an object in their life which is not a mere object, though it is empty. It has the deadening influence degrading life to the life of creatures. While Jonson in the prologue claims that he is going to show the difference between high and low social statuses by ridiculing them: "*We bring you now, to shew what different things/The* Cotes *of* Clowns, *are from the Courts of Kings*," [4], p. 6 the epilogue implies that the whole play removes any differences between clowns and kings. It can be conferred that Jonson does not bring any evaluation doctrine to judge: "*This Tale of me, the Tub of Totten-Court/A Poet first invented for your Sport/VVherein the Fortune of most empty Tubs/Rowling in Love, are shewn*" [4], p. 97. This suggests the state of a tale of tub, that is, the life of creatures, borrowing the phrase from Benjamin about the baroque, is moving downward to earth, the hopelessness of the earthly condition [3], p. 79. Harry Levin in "An Introduction to Ben Jonson" explains that in Jonson's historical time "nature, it is felt, is in decay; times are out of joint" [8].

The mournful images of the empty world in which the villagers are living for nothing results into what Benjamin means by the structure of melancholy. Melancholy occurs within the world that has already been emptied. For Andrew Benjamin, in "Benjamin and the Baroque: Posing the Question of Historical Time," "existence was traversed by this emptiness on the one hand and by a pervasive sense of the inauthentic on the other" [9]. Such condition of life associated with the creaturely life in Benjamin is discussed by thinking of melancholy in its relationship with astrology, the relation between melancholy and Saturn. In its stellar's influences, Saturn is associated with melancholy with two opposite traits. One is that which becomes sloth and dullness, while the other opens up the power of intelligence and contemplation, as Benjamin writes: "Like melancholy, Saturn too, this spirit of contradictions endows the soul, on the one hand, with slot and dullness, on the other hand, with the power of intelligence and contemplation" [3], p. 152. The history of melancholy unfolds within this dialectic in which it gives birth to both an earthly, cold, and dry life, a material life, and the most extremely high spiritual life. Deploying the works of Panofsky and Saxl, Benjamin reiterates this tension between Saturn and the figure of Cronos, the "god of extremes." In this reinterpretation, Benjamin qualifies the creaturely life with melancholy: "For all the wisdom of melancholic is subject to the nether world; it is secured by immersion in the life of creaturely things, and it hears nothing of the voice of revelation" [3], p. 52. The life's inherent potentiality should be activated to overcome the creaturely life. This voice of melancholy is heard and encourages the baroque man to denaturalize and demythologize his life once he recognizes himself as creaturely. This process inevitably

becomes his fate. The melancholy contains this possible re-actualization by its dialectical trait.

In Act IV. Scene V, when Pol Martin and Lady Awdrey are alone, he proposes marriage to Lady. Their conversation is of importance, since for the first time two characters without disguise begin to show their real personality. They overcome what has been imposed on them by the mask of fate. They rebel against the lottery determining Lady's fate. Pol Martin asks Lady if she can love. Lady seems to hear the word "love" in its real usage in the proper time and place, though she does not know what it is really. Martin replies that love is a ruse which women use. Then, they dispose for marriage outside the disguised world emptied from within:

> In plain terms, tell me, Will you have me, *Awdrey? Awd.* In as plain terms, I tell you who would ha' me. *John Clay* would ha' me, but he hath too hard Hands; I like not him: Besides, he is a Thief. And Justice *Bramble*, he would fain ha' catch'd me: But the young Squire, he, rather than his life, Would ha' me yet; and make me a Lady, he says, And be my Knight; to do me true Knights service, Before his Lady Mother. Can you make me A Lady, would I ha' you? *Pol.* I can gi' you A Silken Gown, and a Rich Petticoat: And a *French* Hood. All Fools love to be brave: I find her Humour, and I will pursue it [4], p. 75.

For Lady, the quality of braveness in a knight means love. For him, the social status for which her parents and the rest of the villagers have dedicated their lives has no value. Martin's conception of himself–that he is a fool who loves to be brave–is ironic, meaning that within the world of creaturely life there is the possibility to be mad which would allow for the actualization of potentialities inherent in life. It is obvious when Martin uses disguise against itself. Tub asks Martin to disguise Lady, who is not to be known by the others, but Martin uses disguise to find an opportunity to propose to Lady while the others are unaware. Then, they are proclaimed to be husband and wife by Hugh, the vicar, while he does not know them: "*Hug.* She was so brave, I knew her not, I swear;/And yet I married her by her own name./But she was so disguis'd, so Lady-like,/I think she did not know her self the while!/I married 'em as a meer pair of strangers:/And they gave out themselves for such" [4], p. 86. Lady is brave, as she has gone outside the measure of the society. Madness would be different from the measure that is the fate which has been naturalized. "Melancholia," as Benjamin writes "is the most creaturely of creative impulses" [3], p. 152. Benjamin connects melancholia to madness. Within the creaturely life, Martin and Lady Awdrey allow the interplay of destruction and construction. The dialectic of despair and nonsense occurs where Martin as a low rank servant marries a lady of high rank. In other words, in the hopelessness, the marriage with a fool is nonsense but it allows for the release from the disguising world of masks emptied from the possibility of creativity: "*Wherein the Fortune of most empty Tubs/Rowling in Love,/And her* Pol-martin*'s Fortune; with the rare /Fate of poor* John, *thus tumbled in the Cask*" [4], p. 6. Moreover, the marriage of Martin to Lady Awdrey occurs within the situation created by them which is outside a class-conscious society. They have made an opportunity for a classless society. Benjamin in "Paralipomena to 'On the concept of History'" in this regard states that: "Once the classless society had been defined as an infinite task, the empty and homogenous time was transformed into an anteroom, so to speak, in which one could wait for the emergence of the revolutionary situation" [5], p. 402. They provide this revolutionary situation in a society which has been emptied by allowing chance to determine its life. Chance determines humanity's fate and that they must live a creaturely life, which Benajmin explains when he states:

> For once human life has sunk into the merely creaturely [*des bolß kreatülichen gesunken*], even if the life of apparently dead objects [*des scheinbar toten Dinge*] secures power over it. The effectiveness of the object where guilt has been incurred is a sign of the approach of death. The passionate stirrings of the creaturely life in man–in a word passion itself–bring the fatal property into action … In the drama of fate the nature of man which is expressed in blind passion, and the nature of things, which is expressed in blind chance [*Zufall*] are both equally subject to the law of fate [*Gesetz des schicksalsaus*] [3], p. 132

III. Conclusion

Jonson's play, considered within the baroque tradition (Benjamin's Trauerspiel) could be, unlike classicism, a distinctive, genuine dramatic form possessing its own distinguishing features. Jonson has shown that the comic manipulation of the creaturely life goes against its naturalized centrality. It seems that the comic presentation here denies any tragic guilt or atonement in the tragic theories which bring moral phenomena into their views. However, a point should be made. Here, in this regard, the question for Benjamin is not the significance of moral content. He asks: "Do the actions and attitudes depicted in the work of art have moral significance as images of reality? And: can the content of a work of art be adequately understood in terms of moral insights?" [3], p. 104. The answer is negative neglecting the concepts in the philosophy of history or the philosophy of religion. The work of art, Benjamin continues, is not the object of attention to be investigated for the sake of a moral lesson. It does not permit what is represented but it is the actual representation. In this sense, *A Tale of a Tub* is the actual representation of itself. This is what Benjamin calls "truth content." Another feature, according to Benjamin, is the grounding in historical events and temporality. The mythic time of tragedy stands beyond the flow of historical time, as it is graced by the majestic presence of the heroic figure, elevated by the grandeur of his actions and his sacrifices in the face of uncompromising fate. By contrast, the Baroque theater, for Benjamin entitled *Trauerspiel*, is defined by the mechanical procession and repetition of events rooted in the bleak emptiness of unfulfilled profane historical time, that is, in fate. Jonson's play is a caricature of classical tragedy in this sense. To put it in Benjamin's language, beyond the transient temporality, the changeless, timeless, and placeless ideal forms do not exist for the villagers, as they

have emptied Valentine Day by grounding it within the structure of chance. In the absence of homage based on an ideal or real, the time's presence falls the ruin on them. They live in the "petrified primordial nature." When the destruction by time never let a way out, they only repeat the past as a finished project. They live in the stiffened past finding no eschatology or a messianic content, that is, a break from any faith in the imminence of future salvation and redeeming the past that lives imminently in the now-time. They cannot reappropriate the messianicity of the present age. In other words, chance is not revolutionary for them in order to fight against the oppressed past. Within this homogenized time, the marriage at the end encounters the past events and blasts the village out of the homogenous course of history. This feature has been dealt with by Benjamin in his comment on *Hamlet*. He writes that "the language of the pre-Shakespearian Trauerspiel has been aptly described as a bloody legal dialogue … whoever else was indicted in it is only left partially dealt with" [3], p. 137. Benjamin maintains that only pre-Shakespearian Trauerspiel leaves those indicted "partially dealt with." Shakespeare's Hamlet, according to this statement, ends with a decision; the decision that concludes and redeems all those who find themselves accused. Through closely following the rhythm of Benjamin's text, it is possible to argue that Benjamin's implicit argument builds toward a dialectical conclusion. This conclusion argues that Hamlet, although stylistically and typically a Trauerspiel, overcomes the logic of eternal repetition through the hero's "language" both perfecting and abolishing the genre. The question therefore arises as to the means in which Hamlet's language overcomes the melancholic nature of the creaturely in order to redeem the preceding events. The same question applies to the ending of Jonson's play where Pol Martin decides to marry Lady. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Jonson's *A Tale of a Tub* both present Benjamin's Trauerspiel within which its dialectical nature comes to a standstill. In Benjamin's words in "On the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress:"

> Where thinking comes to a standstill in a constellation saturated with tension-there the dialectical image appears. It is the caesura in the movement of thought. Its position is naturally not an arbitrary one. It is to be found, in a word, where the tension between dialectical opposites is greatest. Hence, the object constructed in the materialist presentation of history is itself the dialectic image. The latter is identical with the historical object; it justifies its violent expulsion from the continuum of historical process [10].

Within the mechanism of fate worked by the repetition of the same, the dialectal image is the emergence of a new. The tension between dialectical opposites comes to the creative standstill. Jonson's play as a Trauerspiel is itself the dialectical image.

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