

and I could keep on
them. I'd never get tired
I've read the good book six
seven times maybe and am
behind on the real things in
Wish I had nothing to do but
Shakespeare, Tennyson, Plutarch et
forever and over and over
to a lot of these
testify to half facts and
the make reports on

Erica Sheen

Geopolitical Shakespeare

Western Entanglements from
Internationalism to Cold War



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Geopolitical Shakespeare

*Western Entanglements from
Internationalism to Cold War*

ERICA SHEEN

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1

Shakespearian Entanglements

From Einstein to Barbara Ward

On 3 October 1933, Albert Einstein gave a speech in the Royal Albert Hall in London on behalf of the Refugee Assistance Committee, an organization dedicated to the provision of aid to scholars and scientists fleeing Nazi Germany. Earlier that year he had been travelling in the US, but as Hitler assumed emergency powers, Jews and communists were purged from the German civil service, and Dachau received its first inmates, he decided not to return. Fellow speakers included physicists Lord Rutherford and Sir James Jeans, economist Sir William Beveridge, and politician Sir Austen Chamberlain, an early advocate of British rearmament against Nazi Germany, whom we will meet again in [Chapter 8](#). Einstein was received enthusiastically. According to the report in the leading science journal *Nature*, he ‘congratulated the British people for remaining faithful to the traditions of tolerance and justice which for centuries they had upheld with pride [and] pleaded for support from statesmen and the community’:

If we want to resist the powers which threaten to suppress intellectual and individual freedom, we must keep clearly before us what is at stake, and what we owe to that freedom which our ancestors have won for us after hard struggles.

Without such freedom there would have been no Shakespeare, no Goethe, no Newton, no Faraday, no Pasteur and no Lister. There would be no comfortable houses for the mass of the people, no railway, no wireless, no protection against epidemics, no cheap books, no culture, and no enjoyment of art for all ... It is only men who are free who create the inventions and intellectual works which to us moderns make life worthwhile.¹

Why Shakespeare? Certainly, he fits the category of ‘men who have created intellectual works which ... make life worthwhile’, but did Einstein really value

¹ Albert Einstein, ‘Science and Intellectual Freedom’, *Nature* 132 (1933): p. 539.

his work as highly as that of his fellow scientists Newton, Faraday, Pasteur, Lister? Lists of this kind recur in contemporary debates about what in the 1930s was increasingly referred to as the crisis of Europe,² and Shakespeare is almost always part of them. They recur in this book. It's tempting to identify them as examples of what exponents of the 'political Shakespeare' movement of the 1980s and 1990s called 'the Shakespeare myth': an 'ideological framework' dedicated to the production and maintenance of 'myths of unity, integration and harmony in the cultural superstructures of a divided and fractured society.'³ But while it's certainly the case that the rhetorical function of these roll calls of 'great men' was to invoke Western values or achievements at a time when the West was all but broken,⁴ an approach to Shakespeare's role within them as an 'instrument of hegemony' would be incapable of responding to the international dynamics of an event like 3 October 1933,⁵ in which a stateless German scientist speaking to an audience of scientists, diplomats, intellectuals, and artists names Shakespeare not as an icon or symbol but as a real person, a person like Einstein himself, whose achievements derived above all from the fact that he had lived and worked in a world that allowed him to do so.

For a few brief months in the summer preceding this speech, Einstein might have become a British citizen. On 15 March 1933, following a reception the previous evening at the Standard Club in Chicago in which he spoke on the crisis in international affairs and 'pleaded for help' for Jewish scholars, he travelled by sea from New York to Belgium 'to await a more auspicious time for visiting Germany.'⁶ En route, he received the news that his German summer residence in Caputh had been ransacked; in Antwerp he surrendered his passport to the German Consulate and renounced his citizenship. By the end

² The phrase was used as the title of a lecture by H. W. Steed delivered at King's College London on Wednesday, 18 November 1931 (Back matter, *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 80.4121, 13 November 1931) and quoted by Frank H. Hankins from Andre Siegfried in *American Sociological Review* 2.2 (April 1937), p. 303: 'No question is more real and none more troubling, the more so because we are ill-prepared to face it squarely, than the "crisis of Europe", especially since the eventual decadence of the old continent would have seemed quite improbable a short twenty-five years ago.'

³ Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, eds., *Political Shakespeare* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985); Graham Holderness, ed., *The Shakespeare Myth* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. xiii.

⁴ For the origins of 'great man theory', see Thomas Carlyle's collection of six lectures, *On Heroes, Hero Worship & the Heroic in History* (London: John Fraser, 1841), the third of which, 'The Hero as Poet', discusses Dante and Shakespeare. Its opponents included Herbert Spencer (*The Study of Sociology* [New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1874]) and Charles Darwin, who confided to Spencer that he 'never believed in the reigning influence of great men on the world's progress' (Darwin to Spencer, 10 June 1872, in *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin* ed. Francis Darwin [New York, 1904], Vol. 2, p. 344).

⁵ David Margolies, 'Teaching the handsaw to fly: Shakespeare as a hegemonic instrument' in *The Shakespeare Myth*, ed. Graham Holderness (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 43.

⁶ *The New York Times*, 15 March 1933.

of August, it had become evident that he was at risk from Nazi persecution throughout the European mainland, and he sailed to England. In September, his supporters petitioned the British government to offer him citizenship; as late as mid-September, he spoke publicly of ‘becom[ing] a naturalised Englishman as soon as it is possible for my papers to go through.’⁷ These plans came to nothing, though it is unclear if this was because sections of the British government and press saw his presence as politically provocative or because Einstein himself was uncertain about making his home in England (perhaps for the same reason). By the time he made his speech in London at the beginning of October, he had already accepted an offer to return to the USA to take up a permanent position at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. Speaking outside the Albert Hall after the speech, he acknowledged the ‘affection’ the British people ‘extended to one who is a wanderer on the face of the earth’ but reported that he was leaving for America at the end of that week.⁸

Does this biographical context have any bearing on Einstein’s decision to place Shakespeare at the beginning of that catalogue of Western luminaries? Andrew Robinson’s sense of the limitations of his Anglophilia—‘one would search in vain in [his] life and writings for ... any passion to read and quote from English literature, such as the works of William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens or Rudyard Kipling’—suggests it might be wrong to think it had anything to do with personal literary interests.⁹ Should it be understood more in terms of a strategic pairing with Goethe, two national poets standing together, as they do so often in Anglo-German literary history, proud representatives of a cultural tradition now so deeply at risk?¹⁰ Was it a conscious decision to start a claim for what was at stake in the West’s complacent response to the rise of Nazi Germany with the single name everyone in his audience would probably have agreed stood for Western values? Did he think that Shakespeare’s name would help him communicate beyond the Albert Hall, beyond London, to an international society in which Shakespeare was arguably more a shared point of identification than the other individuals on his list?

My questions reach towards the presence in this speech of what Colin Flint has described as a politics of scale, a series of nested spaces that ‘stretch[es]

⁷ Andrew Robinson, *Einstein on the Run: How Britain Saved the World’s Greatest Scientist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019), p. 6.

⁸ Robinson (2019), p. 6.

⁹ Robinson (2019), p. 313.

¹⁰ See Ernst Beutler, ‘Goethe’, in *Goethe: UNESCO’s Homage on the Occasion of the Two Hundredth Anniversary of his Birth* (Paris: UNESCO, 1949), p. 9, for an account of the importance of this relationship. Goethe identified Shakespeare, as Einstein identified himself, as an international traveller. On Shakespeare as a national poet, see Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

from the individual to the global':¹¹ the physical space of the platform, where 'Shakespeare' is an idea powerful enough to resonate across the vast auditorium; the Hall itself, in its central place in a cultural life in which Shakespeare was similarly central;¹² England as an international space within which Shakespeare stood for the Western values threatened by the Nazi regime;¹³ all of them, as I will argue in this chapter, as where Shakespeare signified to Einstein himself the entanglement of his intellectual life as a German, a scientist and a Jew in the internationalist principles which brought him to speak in London's Albert Hall on a Tuesday evening in October 1933.¹⁴ Einstein introduces us to a geopolitical Shakespeare, Shakespeare put to the service of an imagination that confronts, in John Rennie Short's words, 'the operation of power in, through, and around political space' in a historical context which put every term in that formulation severely to the test.¹⁵

I've quoted two introductory studies of geopolitics, part of a cluster of such studies that appeared in quick succession from the 1990s to the present day.¹⁶ Their appearance records a generational shift in the rhetoric of contemporary international relations, a return to a mid-twentieth-century conception of world politics founded on dynamics of territorial contestation that were supposedly superseded by globalization and the triumph of capitalism at the end of the Cold War. Since then, the public profile of the term 'geopolitics' has been going from strength to strength. Its recent popularization has been associated with the recognition, precipitated by the invasion of Ukraine, that Russian territorial ambitions, no longer an expression of the ideological opposition associated with the USSR and communism, are nothing less than a war against the West. This recognition has precipitated in its turn an intensification of the

¹¹ Colin Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics* (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2006), p. 31.

¹² The Royal Albert Hall, now popularly recognized primarily as a venue for concerts, was built in 1871 in memory of Queen Victoria's German husband with precisely the kind of interdisciplinary conjunction evidenced in Einstein's speech in mind: to 'promot[e] an understanding and appreciation of the Arts and Sciences'; <https://www.royalalberthall.com/about-the-hall/our-history/explore-our-history/royal-albert-hall-stars/queen-victoria/> (accessed 30 October 2023).

¹³ See Aurel Kolnai, *The War against the West* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938), p. 5, for an account of National Socialism as 'a conscious, deliberate revolt of Germanism against the freedom of the human personality alike in its religious, social and political forms'.

¹⁴ On Einstein and internationalism, see Richard Crockatt, *Einstein and Twentieth-Century Politics: A Salutory Moral Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), *passim*. Crockatt describes him as a 'radical liberal internationalist' (2016, p. 4); a global public intellectual whose 'metier was not politics but principles' (Oxford Academic Preview, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQk7KtBXWyQ> [accessed 22 October 2023]).

¹⁵ John Rennie Short, *Geopolitics: Making Sense of a Changing World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), p. 3.

¹⁶ Flint (2006); Klaus Dodds, *Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Klaus Dodds, *Geopolitics, 4 Vols* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publishing, 2009); Jason Dittmer and Daniel Bos, *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, and Identity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019); Short (2022).

structures of alliance that came to constitute the West in the aftermath of World War II: the Anglo-American ‘special relationship’ announced by Churchill in 1946; NATO, founded in 1949; the foundation of West Germany in 1949 and its membership of NATO in 1955; the Treaty of Rome in 1957 and the formation of the European Community. In the summer of 2022, the expansion of NATO to include the hitherto neutral states of Finland and Sweden, and the German declaration of a ‘Zeitenwende’, a change of era marked by a dramatic increase in German military expenditure,¹⁷ signalled the extent to which the present time is increasingly identified as a new Cold War, or even Cold War II. In an uncanny way, Brexit, the British withdrawal from the European Union, returned the West to the tripartite territorial configuration that characterized those early Cold War years—Britain, America, Europe—precipitating a recognition that what the West is now, and why Vladimir Putin wants to attack it, is *what it was becoming* in the period with which I am concerned in this study. In an uncanny way, too, the popularization of the term ‘geopolitics’ in the present crisis rewinds its suppression in that same period, even as America’s new role as leader of the post-war West confirmed its status as the global *modus operandi* for international relations.

Take three days at the end of June 2022, as recorded by *The New York Times*. On 28 June—‘In Russia Crisis, India Tries to Balance Geopolitics and Economics’—we learned that India, ‘courted by both sides of the conflict, ... is trying to **maximize its geopolitical leverage without limiting economic opportunities**’:

‘It’s like chess,’ said Amitabh Mattoo, a former adviser to India’s National Security Council and a professor of international studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. ‘Everyone is finding it tough to anticipate the move of the other Now let us see whether Jaishankar and Modi can play the middle game of this fascinating game of geopolitical chess in the manner of a grandmaster,’ he added, ‘or will they falter?’

In the same issue we learned that the G7 leaders had identified the blockade of Ukrainian corn as a ‘geopolitically motivated attack on global food security’, and that Emma Ashford, senior fellow at the Atlantic Council and a specialist in international relations, believed that ‘Europe has an America problem’—a reluctance to respond to the American lead:

¹⁷ Rachel Tausenfreund, ‘Zeitenwende—The Dawn of the Deterrence Era in Germany’, GMF, 28 February 2022, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/zeitenwende-dawn-deterrence-era-germany> (accessed 29 October 2023).

One might think that a major geopolitical shock like the war in Ukraine would have allowed for a Europe-wide ‘Zeitenwende’: a moment to reckon with these difficult questions and hammer out concessions that would allow progress to be made. And in the early weeks of the war in Ukraine, many of these divisions were indeed blotted out by shock and horror, with states largely united in their response to the war. In the months since, however, these divisions have re-emerged, making themselves felt in new ways The European Union, slowed by the need to reach a consensus, has struggled to keep up.

The next day, 29 June, Christine Lagarde, president of the European Central Bank, seemed to confirm Ashford’s words: anticipating the end of the pre-2020 era of low inflation, she acknowledged that ‘there are forces that have been unleashed as a result of the pandemic, as a result of this massive geopolitical shock that we are facing now, that are going to change the picture and the landscape within which we operate’. And the day after that, *The New York Times* reported that Brittney Griner, the Black American basketball player detained in Russia, was about to stand trial:

Griner’s detainment arrives at a delicate geopolitical moment during Russia’s ongoing invasion of Ukraine and amid Russia’s strained diplomatic relationships with the United States and some European countries. From the start of Griner’s detainment, her supporters feared that she could be used by Russia during the global conflict.

The extent to which these fears were confirmed, and their geopolitical implications for Cold War II, was indicated in commentaries six months later on exactly what Russia had gained in the subsequent trade for her release: a notorious political assassin.¹⁸

The terms ‘geopolitics’ and ‘geopolitical’, here in phrases like ‘major geopolitical shock’, ‘massive geopolitical shock’, ‘delicate geopolitical moment’, ‘geopolitical leverage’, ‘geopolitical chess’, do a lot of work in these reports, and they do it, above all, by allowing links between seemingly disconnected points on the geopolitical scale to remain both vague and compelling. Their presence in these articles advances the implicit argument that people as far apart—in

¹⁸ See, for instance, Jelani Cobb, ‘Brittney Griner and the role of race in diplomacy’, *The New Yorker*, 17 December 2022: ‘The Griner affair may yet reiterate a crucial lesson of December 1983—that inequality, or even the appearance of inequality, is not only a liability at home but an impediment in foreign affairs. The irony is that Putin, in the most cynical way possible, has demonstrated that Black lives really do matter, by highlighting just how much you can achieve by placing one in jeopardy.’

every sense—as a professor of international studies in India and an American basketball player in Moscow are somehow not only part of the same event but key to understanding it *as* an event. Commentary of this kind would seem to justify Jason Dittmer and Daniel Bos’s description of geopolitics as a ‘slippery idea’ that has a ‘veneer of tremendous explanatory power’.¹⁹ Both the slipperiness and the explanatory power derive from the origins of the term in the history of the event with which I began this chapter. Coined by Rudolf Kjellén at the turn of the twentieth century to advance the argument for a pan-Nordic alliance against Russia, it consolidated in Germany in the 1920s.²⁰ Political geographer Karl Haushofer founded the journal *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* in 1924,²¹ giving academic status to a perspective that would become fundamental to Nazi thinking about territorial expansion. In 1933, as Einstein came to England to escape Nazi persecution and to call for support for other German refugees, Haushofer was appointed President of the German Academy, presiding over a geopolitical institute that ‘fed into the ideologies of the German Nazi party.’²² Einstein’s naming of Shakespeare as an example of ‘men who are free’ countered these ideologies with a vision of a West that must fight for what it was to be Western.

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the term ‘geopolitics’ was discredited by its association with Nazi Germany: Dittmer and Bos describe it as ‘corrupted’, a ‘dirty word’;²³ Short describes it as ‘an ugly idea’ ‘contaminated’ by its association with an ideology of ‘racial superiority and the operation of brute force’.²⁴ But as an approach to international relations, geopolitics underpinned the West’s conception of the West as it emerged from American isolationism into cold war, in particular as a revived West Germany took its place in a West now aligned against the Soviet East, as the place in post-war European intellectual life of the controversial Carl Schmitt, the subject of [Chapter 8](#), demonstrates.²⁵ It’s not surprising to learn from Dittmer and Bos that the word was restored to the discourse of international relations by Henry

¹⁹ Jason Dittmer and Daniel Bos, *Popular Culture, Geopolitics and Identity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), pp. 2–3. ‘Slippery’ is also used by Klaus Dodds in his *Very Short Introduction to Geopolitics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 4: ‘to paraphrase the social theorist Michael Mann, geopolitics, like most terms that have attracted academic attention, is slippery’.

²⁰ Rudolf Kjellén, *Staten som livsform* (Stockholm: Hugo Grebers förlag, 1916). See Ola Tunander, ‘Swedish-German Politics for a New Century: Rudolf Kjellén’s “The State as Living Organism”’, *Review of International Studies* 27.3 (2001); Christian Abrahamsson, ‘On the Genealogy of Lebensraum’, *Geographica Helvetica* 68.1 (2013): pp. 37–44.

²¹ Short (2022), p. 5.

²² Dittmer and Bos (2019), p. 4.

²³ Dittmer and Bos (2019), p. 7.

²⁴ Short (2022), pp. 9, 14.

²⁵ See, for instance, Nicolas Lewkowicz, *The United States, the Soviet Union and the Geopolitical Implications of the Origins of the Cold War* (London: Anthem Press, 2018); Saul B. Cohen, ‘Global

Kissinger, who ‘lifted the veil’ on the term ‘by implying that the study of geopolitics could work for the United States.’²⁶ But if the word itself was tainted with a residue of Schmittian taboo, the more respectable term used to describe these international dynamics in the period of Western history under discussion in this study is the one I include in my subtitle: entanglement. These two ideas track each other so closely from the 1920s to the 1950s that we can only see geopolitics as entangled, and entanglement as geopolitical.

Einstein’s speech as a stateless German in London in October 1933 and its publication in 1950 as an essay in an anthology celebrating the life of a great American provide this study with its starting point for my account of Shakespearean entanglements in the geopolitics of the post-war West.²⁷ In spring 1930, he had sent a greeting to his friend, dramatist and peace activist George Bernard Shaw, whom he described as one of the few who understood the dangers of the international situation. Praising Shaw’s ‘zeal for putting things to right’, he identified him as ‘one of the tiny minority’ to whom it is given to ‘fascinate their generation by subtle humour and grace and to hold the mirror up to it by the impersonal agency of art.’²⁸ The metaphor is, of course, from *Hamlet*: the Prince’s injunction to the Players before their performance of *The Mousetrap* at the Danish court in Elsinore: ‘the purpose of playing ... is to hold as ’twere the mirror up to nature.’²⁹ Einstein applied it to Shaw again later that year, in October, when Shaw was a guest at a dinner in support of the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. On this occasion he supplied the missing term, ‘nature’, and elaborated the connection between nature and theatre in a comparison between the ‘little world’ of drama and the ‘reality of life’ that evokes a scalar contrast between the scope of global geopolitics and the focus of particle physics:

From your magic box [Zauberschachtel] you have produced innumerable little figures which, while resembling human beings, are compact not of flesh and blood, but of brains, wit, and charm. And yet in a way they are more human than we are ourselves, and one almost forgets that they are creations

Geopolitical Change in the Post-Cold War Era’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 81.4 (1991).

²⁶ Dittmer and Bos (2019), p. 9.

²⁷ Albert Einstein, *Out of My Later Years* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950).

²⁸ Albert Einstein, *Ideas and Opinions*, trans. Sonja Bargmann (New York: Crown Publishers, 1982), p. 68; Albert Einstein, *Mein Weltbild*, ed. Carl Seelig (Berlin: Ullstein, 2019), p. 39: ‘*Und ihr auf dem unpersönlichen Weg der Kunst den Spiegel vorzuhalten*’ (his italics). See Chapter 4 below at p. 87 for a tribute in 1948 to Shaw and Shakespeare as artists ‘who have spoken out for nonconformity’.

²⁹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 3.2.19–20 (Stephen Greenblatt et al., *The Norton Shakespeare* [New York: W. W. Norton, 2016]. All quotations from Shakespeare are taken from this edition).

not of Nature, but of Bernard Shaw. You make these charming little figures dance in a miniature world in front of which the Graces stand sentinel and permit no bitterness to enter. He who has looked into this little world [diese kleine Welt] sees our actual world [Lebenswirklichkeit, 'the reality of life'] in a new light; its puppets insinuate themselves into real people, making them suddenly look quite different. By thus holding the mirror up to us all you have had a liberating effect on us such as hardly any other of our contemporaries has done and have relieved life of something of its earth-bound heaviness.³⁰

It was, of course, to Shakespeare himself that the idea of imagination as a mirror held up to nature was characteristically applied, particularly in a German context. For Goethe, Shakespeare was 'nature itself'. Moira Weigel has demonstrated the importance of Hamlet's mirror to debates about appearance and reality in Kant and German idealist philosophy,³¹ but she has also shown that these debates had a dark side: a 'bad' mirror in which 'the play of outward appearance' constitutes the self, not as essential or authentic, but as a 'lost object'. Her analysis takes her into Freud's *Trauer und Melancholie* (*Mourning and Melancholia*) (1917), where she finds an account of the lost object as 'withdrawn from consciousness' and, therefore, 'lost insofar as they cannot be known':

Perhaps the inexhaustible value of *Hamlet* for the Goethezeit has less to do with Shakespeare's 'being Nature'—with the naturalism and psychological depth that his Neoclassical admirers celebrated—than with the way the play transforms the categories of 'being' and presence into *problems*.³²

The continuity between this conflicted Romantic tradition and the modernist ontology of quantum mechanics (QM)—its rejection of 'universal' scientific principles such as the objective reality of matter and the principles of causation—has been noted. Paul Foreman discusses QM as an expression of a Weimar culture in which modernism and the avant-garde conspired with fashionable philosophies like Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (*Decline of the West*, 1923) to advance irrationalism over rationality and

³⁰ Einstein (2018), p. 75; Einstein (2019), p. 104.

³¹ Moira Weigel, 'Hamletkrisen: Kleist, Shakespeare, and Media Theory circa 1800', *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 92.1 (2017): p. 29.

³² Weigel (2017): pp. 34–5. Her emphasis.

progress.³³ Einstein himself laid its foundations in the first years of the twentieth century, but he was unwilling to follow the more extreme conclusions of younger colleagues, particularly Werner Karl Heisenberg and Niels Bohr, who argued that quantum objects are non-localized and indeterminate. Einstein's interpretation of the famous 'double slit' experiment, whereby a beam of light projected through a screen with two slits presents itself as either wave or particle depending on which slit is used, attributed the effect to the physical properties of the photon, a particle that behaves like a wave, thus advancing a causal, and spatially locatable, explanation for the results of the experiment.³⁴ Bohr responded with the principle of wave-particle duality, according to which matter configures itself as either wave or particle only at the point of time and place at which it is observed.³⁵ When Max Born proposed in 1926 that the question of when or where a particle might manifest itself should be understood in terms of probability, not causation, Einstein famously responded that God does not play dice with the universe.³⁶

It was fellow physicist Erwin Schrödinger who first used the word 'entanglement' to describe this state of affairs. Fluent in English from childhood, he wrote in both German and English throughout a career that brought him, like Einstein, out of Germany to England in 1933.³⁷ In an English-language article of October 1935, 'Discussion of Probability Relations between Separated Systems' in the *Mathematical Proceedings of the Cambridge Philosophical Society*, he identified entanglement as 'not one but *the* characteristic trait of quantum mechanics, the one that enforces its entire departure from classical lines of thought'.³⁸ His choice of the word brought together the range of meanings

³³ Paul Foreman, 'Weimar Culture, Causality, and Quantum Theory: Adaptation by German Physicists and Mathematicians to a Hostile Environment', *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences* 3 (1971): pp. 1–115.

³⁴ For a lucid account of these debates, see Carlo Rovelli, *Reality Is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, trans. Simon Carnell and Erica Segre (London: Allen Lane, 2016), pp. 96–103.

³⁵ See, for instance, Trevor Pinch, 'Karen Barad, quantum mechanics, and the paradox of mutual exclusivity', *Social Studies of Science* 41.3 (2011): p. 436: '[t]here is no independent reality with well-defined properties waiting to be measured as in classical mechanics. ... Objects and agencies of observation form inseparable wholes, and space and time are themselves phenomenal.'

³⁶ 'I, at any rate, am convinced that *He* is not playing dice.' Letter to Max Born, December 4, 1926, in *The Born–Einstein Letters: Correspondence between Albert Einstein and Max and Hedwig Born from 1916 to 1955 with commentaries by Max Born*, trans. Irene Born (New York: Walker and Company, 1971), p. 91.

³⁷ Schrödinger's maternal family was English. According to his Aunt Minnie, he learned to speak English 'before he ever spoke German properly'. Walter Moore, *Schrödinger: Life and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 14.

³⁸ Erwin Schrödinger, 'Discussion of Probability Relations between Separated Systems', *Mathematical Proceedings of the Cambridge Philosophical Society*, 31.4 (1935): p. 555. His emphasis.

that had gathered into it across the turn of the twentieth century:³⁹ a circumstance which complicates or confuses a matter; a compromising relationship, unsuitable liaison; a barrier arranged to impede an enemy's movement, an obstruction formed of stakes and barbed wire—the visual signature of trench warfare, which Schrödinger himself experienced in 1914, and which, anticipating the phenomenology of quantum mechanics, he described evocatively in an account of optical parallax on the stakes and barbed wire.⁴⁰ But it was in a German-language article a month later, 'Die gegenwärtige Situation in der Quantenmechanik' ('The Present Situation in Quantum Mechanics'),⁴¹ in which he presented the famous 'thought experiment' [Denkbehef] now routinely referred to as 'Schrödinger's Cat', that the meanings he associated with 'entanglement' came most fully into focus as an expression of what Sir William McCrea described as 'the turmoil of [his] times'.⁴²

So well known is this intellectual fable, so comprehensively applied to the range of contemporary critical fields that draw on quantum theory, that its own entanglement in the history of entanglement has received little comment. Schrödinger's German article was a response to an equally famous article by Einstein, Boris Podolsky, and Nathan Rosen in *Physical Review* in May 1935, 'Can Quantum-Mechanical Description of Physical Reality be Considered Complete?', now usually referred to as 'EPR', which argued that there are 'elements of reality' whose properties can be known prior to measurement and which, therefore, challenge the Bohrian view that a quantum particle does not have a value until measurement has taken place. Schrödinger's essay elaborated the problems relating to the indeterminacy of variables in the equations by which QM is represented mathematically when applied to what he calls

³⁹ Oxford English Dictionary Online, 'entanglement', <https://www.oed.com/search/advanced/Entries?q=entanglement&sortOption=Frequency> (accessed 21 October 2023).

⁴⁰ '[O]ne night from our observation post, we saw a number of lights moving up the slopes at the head of the lake, where there were no paths, apparently coming towards our position. I sprang up ... and went through the connecting passage to the post to survey the situation. The observation was correct, but the lights were St Elmo's fire on the points of the barbed wire entanglements only one or two metres away, the displacement onto the background being caused by parallax as a result of the movement of the observer himself. Walter Moore, *Schrödinger*, Canto Classics (Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 82. For the phenomenology of QM see Robert P. Crease, Delicia Antoinette Kamins & Paul Rubery, 'Introduction: Phenomenology of Quantum Mechanics', *Continental Philosophy Review* 54.4 (2021): pp. 405–12, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11007-021-09561-w>.

⁴¹ Erwin Schrödinger, 'Die gegenwärtige Situation in der Quantenmechanik', *Naturwissenschaften* 23 (1935): pp. 807–12, trans. John D Trimmer, 'The Present Situation in Quantum Mechanics: A Translation of Schrödinger's "Cat Paradox" Paper', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 124.5 (1980): pp. 323–38. Page numbers for both articles are provided in the text.

⁴² Sir William McCrea, 'Eamon de Valera, Erwin Schrödinger and the Dublin Institute', in *Schrödinger: Centenary celebration of a polymath* ed. C. W. Kilmister (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 120. Schrödinger's German word for what he had already described in English as entanglement was 'Verschränkung', crossing, folding, clasping, interlacing.

‘natural objects [Naturobjekte]’. He uses what he describes as an ‘image or model [ein Bild oder ein Modell]’ to present such a situation. He is at pains to make clear the problems that arise from such a process: an image or model inhabits space and time in a way mathematical variables do not. Of course, ‘one must not think so literally [natürlich ist man nicht so einfältig]; but ‘in this way one learns how things go in the real world [wie es auf der Welt wirklich zugeht]’. It is ‘the means of gradually bringing our picture, i.e. our thinking, closer to the realities [Denn im Grunde ist das die Art, wie allmählich eine immer bessere Anpassung des Bildes, das heißt unserer Gedanken, an die Tatsachen gelingen kann]’ (pp. 323; 808).

For natural objects the realities are, to put it mildly, challenging. According to QM,

Each of its determining parts can under certain circumstances become an object of interest and achieve a certain reality. But never all of them together—now it is these, now those, and indeed always at most half of the complete set of variables allowed by a full picture of the momentary state. Meantime, how about the others? *Have* they then no reality, perhaps (pardon the expression) a blurred reality [eine verschwommene Realität]; or are all of them always real and is it merely ... that simultaneous *knowledge* [gleichzeitige *Kenntnis*] of them is ruled out? (pp. 326; 810)

A blurred reality: does this mean the natural object is itself blurred, or just the way it behaves when we think about it in this literal way? Schrödinger acknowledges the difficulties involved in ‘jumping’ from science to representation:

It would be of no help to permit the model to vary quite ‘un-classically,’ perhaps to ‘jump.’ Already for the single instant things go wrong. At no moment does there exist an ensemble of classical states of the model that squares with the totality of quantum mechanical statements of this moment. (p. 327)

There’s nothing for it but to move towards a visualization of the problem: an ‘imagined entity [Gedankending] that images the blurring [Verwaschenheit] of all variables at every moment just as clearly and faithfully as the classical model does its sharp numerical values’(pp. 327; 811). He offers an example of what he describes as ‘quite ridiculous cases [ganz burleske Fälle]’:

A cat is penned up in a steel chamber, along with the following diabolical device [Höllmaschine, hell machine] (which must be secured against

direct interference by the cat) [die man gegen den direkten Zugriff der Katze sichern muß]: in a Geiger counter there is a tiny bit of radioactive substance, so small, that perhaps in the course of one hour one of the atoms decays, but also, with equal probability, perhaps none; if it happens, the counter tube discharges and through a relay releases a hammer which shatters a small flask of hydrocyanic acid. If one has left this entire system to itself for an hour, one would say that the cat still lives if meanwhile no atom has decayed. The first atomic decay would have poisoned it. The ψ -function of the entire system would express this by having in it the living and the dead cat (pardon the expression) mixed or smeared out in equal parts. (pp. 328; 812)

Of course, what is ridiculous about this—‘burleske’ (burlesque) is a much better word, drawing us back to the ambiguous aesthetics of German expressionism—is exactly what one learns from it about ‘how things go’, how they were already going, in the ‘real’ world of National Socialism. Schrödinger’s ‘hell machine’ anticipated the apparatus devised to kill the inmates of concentration camps.⁴³ If, for Einstein, Shaw’s ‘magic box’ represented the reality of life for a West that finds images or models for freedom in the geopolitics of theatre, Schrödinger’s steel chamber and its imprisoned cat reveals the horror of its dark side in the moral abyss of the Holocaust. In doing so, it pre-empted the questions of criminal responsibility which would preoccupy the Nuremberg Military Tribunals of 1945–9, my subject in [Chapter 3](#). Schrödinger’s parenthetical note, ‘which must be secured against direct interference by the cat’, insists on such a reading. Superfluous to any account simply, so to speak, of ‘the science’ (he could simply have assumed a cat too passive to try to escape), it challenges any attempt *not* to read his fable geopolitically.⁴⁴ Implying the possibility of resistance and its violent repression, it raises controversial questions about Jewish ‘participation’ in the Holocaust that would preoccupy Hannah Arendt in her account of Eichmann in Jerusalem, to which I return in [Chapter 9](#).

Like Schrödinger’s cat, quantum theory was entangled in catastrophically incompatible political and cultural milieux: the nationalist environment

⁴³ David Kaiser, ‘How Einstein and Schrödinger Conspired to Kill a Cat. The rise of fascism shaped Schrödinger’s cat fable’, *Nautilus* 41 (October 2016), <https://nautil.us/how-einstein-and-schrdinger-conspired-to-kill-a-cat-236140/> (accessed 22 October 2023).

⁴⁴ In her detailed reading of the cat paradox, Karen Barad (*Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Mechanics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007], pp. 275–80) insists on the applicability of QM to ‘macro-worlds’, but she does so without any historical reference to the macro-world of which the paradox is an expression. See [Chapter 9](#) for further commentary.

of German science with its rejection of ‘Jewish physics’;⁴⁵ an international research community aligned with the Kantian ideal of a rationally organized community of all mankind.⁴⁶ Given his conviction that the community of mankind and the universe were both rationally organized, Einstein was never fully able to accept quantum entanglement. But, from that point on, both his own life and his work were increasingly entangled in its geopolitical implications. As he ceased to be German and became American, he maintained both his search for a unified field theory—the elusive equation(s) which would harmonize atomic theory and astronomy—and his internationalist commitment to a concept of world government. Indeed, he saw them as structurally connected, even if, as in quantum duality, the connection was sometimes distinct, sometimes blurred.⁴⁷ *The New York Times* issued regular updates on his progress.⁴⁸ On 23 June 1931, we learn that he has discovered ‘one basic law explaining the universe and its properties’; in November, that ‘we have arrived at the long sought unified theory’; three days later, 22 November, that he is participating in a conference on the necessity of a world superstate. On 14 March 1933, *The New York Times* reported his speech at a meeting in his honour at the Standard Club in Chicago, the day before he set sail for Belgium, in which he identified the ‘three major problems confronting humanity today’: the search for a theory that unified the dual nature of light, the search for an equitable system of economic distribution, and the need to organize international affairs to abolish war. On 5 July 1935, he has ‘a vast new theory link[ing] atoms and stars’, in which a ‘new pattern in the structure of space and matter’ is described as a ‘glimpse of the promised land of knowledge’, with a ‘bridge’ spanning the two worlds of relativity and quantum mechanics.⁴⁹

In 1940, as America prepared to abandon its position of neutrality in international affairs, Einstein, like Schrödinger’s cat, was caught between

⁴⁵ See Philip Ball, *Serving the Reich: The Struggle for the Soul of Physics Under Hitler* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), pp. 99–101.

⁴⁶ See Aurel Kolnai, *The War against the West* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938), for an account of National Socialism as ‘a conscious, deliberate revolt of Germanism against the freedom of the human personality alike in its religious, social and political forms’ (p. 5); see Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, *Wie westlich sind die Deutschen? Amerikanisierung und Westernisierung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), for an account of this revolt as a rejection of Western values followed by a process of westernization after 1945.

⁴⁷ Silvan S. Schweber, ‘Einstein and Nuclear Weapons’, in *Einstein for the Twenty-First Century: His Legacy in Science, Art, and Modern Culture*, eds. Peter L. Galison, Gerald Holton, and Silvan S. Schweber (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 95–6, has argued the connection between Einstein’s search for a unified field theory and his commitment to a principle of world government. Richard Crockatt (2016), p. 27, is more cautious: ‘it is one thing to posit structural parallels between certain of Einstein’s fields of interest and another to collapse his science and morals into each other’.

⁴⁸ Dates of articles are supplied in the text.

⁴⁹ See discussions of the bridge in [Chapters 5](#) and [6](#) below.

incompatible realities. A year after writing to US president F. D. Roosevelt to warn him that the Germans were working on the atomic bomb, he became an American citizen, but he was refused security clearance to work on the Manhattan Project because of his left-wing political sympathies. In 1949, as the USSR tested its own nuclear weapons and relations between the USA and USSR began to slide towards cold war, he published an essay in the inaugural edition of *Monthly Review*, 'Why Socialism?', in which he insisted that 'the establishment of a socialist economy accompanied by an educational system ... oriented towards social goals' was the only way to eliminate 'the economic anarchy of capitalist society as it exists today.'⁵⁰ The following year, both 'Why Socialism?' and the Albert Hall speech, now under the title 'Science and Civilization', were published in *Out of My Later Years*, reviewed in *The Scientific Monthly* by science writer Karl K. Darrow. Described in his collected papers at the American Institute of Physics as 'a twentieth-century intellectual [who] lived most of his very refined life in Manhattan ... an ardent patron of the arts, a connoisseur of fine food, and a guardian of decorum and proper manners',⁵¹ Darrow was also a guardian of what, by 1950, had come to be identified as American, as opposed to un-American, values.⁵² In his review he acknowledged 'the light' the collection 'shed on the feelings of a noble, generous and warm-hearted man', but regretted that 'in economics it is not evident that Einstein has read anything but the strict socialist doctrine, which he expounds as though it were a law of nature.' And he quoted back at Einstein the speech made in London seventeen years earlier:

'We must keep clearly before us ... what we owe to that freedom which our ancestors have won for us after hard struggles. Without such freedom there would have been no Shakespeare, no Goethe, no Newton, no Faraday, no Pasteur and no Lister.' ...

Not a bad showing for capitalism!⁵³

⁵⁰ Albert Einstein, 'Why Socialism?', *Monthly Review* 1.1 (May 1949), <https://monthlyreview.org/2009/05/01/why-socialism/> (accessed 21 October 2023).

⁵¹ Sandy Johnson, 'Inside the Papers of Karl K Darrow', Center for History of Physics, American Institute of Physics, <https://www.aip.org/history-programs/news/inside-papers-karl-k-darrow> (accessed 21 October 2023).

⁵² Karl's politics appear to differ from those of his uncle, celebrated trial lawyer Clarence Darrow, a lifelong advocate for workers' and Jewish rights; see Andrew Kersten, *Clarence Darrow, American Iconoclast* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2011). *The New York Times*, 15 March 1933, records Clarence's presence at the meeting with Einstein at the Standard Club in Chicago, above; see also [Chapter 3](#) below.

⁵³ Karl K. Darrow, 'Collected Papers', *The Scientific Monthly* 71.4 (1950): p. 278.

Who, what, where is Shakespeare now? What does he mean, to Einstein, to Darrow, to Einstein's readers, to Darrow's readers, at this point of intersection between the crisis of a Europe struggling to resist the Nazis in the 1930s and a post-war West now led by America and defining itself against communism and the USSR in 1950? Does he still stand for the personal and intellectual freedom Einstein asked a British audience to associate with his name in 1933? Or is this a completely different kind of freedom, the freedom the Truman administration identified that year in the policy document NSC-68 as the American responsibility of military leadership against communism?⁵⁴ Microscopic as this Shakespearian reference is—a mere cultural quantum, smeared out across two points of time and space—it is at the explosive core of interconnected geopolitical events. The questions whether Shakespeare's historical world was a capitalist world, or Shakespeare himself had capitalist values or expressed capitalist values in his plays, are immaterial. In 1948, Richard Hofstadter described consensus on 'the economic virtues of a capitalist culture as necessary qualities of man' as the 'common ground' of 'American civilization.' Projecting this common ground back to Shakespeare past its historical origins in America's defining break from the European chronology of Einstein's list, Darrow engages a strand of geopolitical thinking about entanglement distinct from the European strand with which I have been concerned so far but converging at precisely this mid-century moment.

Entanglement was the term used by the Founding Fathers to repudiate the European turmoil that resonates in Schrödinger's choice of the word for the absurdity of quantum theory. In 1793, John Adams referred succinctly to the fact that America needed 'all its integrity and wisdom ... to avoid entanglement in European calamities.'⁵⁵ George Washington used it in the Farewell Address in 1796: 'Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest ...'; Thomas Jefferson used it in a letter to James Monroe in 1823 in support of what would become known as the Monroe Doctrine: 'our first and fundamental maxim should be, "never to entangle ourselves in the broils of

⁵⁴ See Audra J. Wolfe, *Freedom's Laboratory: The Cold War Struggle for the Soul of Science* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), *passim*, for National Security Council Paper NSC-68 ('United States Objectives and Programs for National Security'). NSC-68 made the case for a massive build-up of conventional and nuclear arms 'to protect the United States and its allies from Soviet land and air attacks, maintain lines of communications, and enhance the technical superiority of the United States through "an accelerated exploitation of [its] scientific potential"; <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/NSC68> (accessed 21 October 2023).

⁵⁵ John Adams to Francis Adrian Van Der Kemp, 11 December 1793, 'Calendar of Letters from John Adams to Francis Adrian Van Der Kemp, 1783–1825', in the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 66.3 (1942): pp. 334–350.

Europe”⁵⁶ When, in 1940, the USA weighed the consequences of entry into what would thereby cease to be crisis in Europe and become World War II, discussions of what had become known as ‘the principle of non-entanglement’ proliferated. In *American Political Science Review*, Albert K. Weinberg, like Einstein a fellow at the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study, recapitulated ‘The Historical Meaning of the American Doctrine of Isolation’:

Americans expressed their view of the alliance system in the virtually novel application to it of a certain pejorative term, the most common and significant in the history of American isolationism: ‘entangling’ or ‘entanglement.’ An entanglement, in international life as in the love life, is not a mere association but a relationship so intimate that two destinies become intertwined—and by implication not for better but for worse.

Non-entanglement was, he argued, ‘an end in itself’, ‘freedom from foreign mortgage’, and he considered it to be nothing less than the foundation of American national sovereignty. Later the same year, Nathaniel Peffer, Professor of International Relations at Columbia, returned to the question: ‘Entanglement or Non-Entanglement: Is there a Choice?’. He concluded more pragmatically that non-entanglement was unsustainable in the face of American economic interests in the global conflicts from which it wished to hold itself politically aloof, but he insisted nonetheless that even this measured participation was a loss of the ‘unique or even distinctive character America once had in the world of nations.’⁵⁷

In a striking reversal, Francis Biddle, Roosevelt’s Attorney General and primary American judge for the Nuremberg International Tribunal in 1945–6, proposed in a series of lectures at the University of Chicago in February 1948 that entanglement in the world of nations was nothing *less* than the distinctive American character.⁵⁸ His occasion was the launch in 1947–8 of the

⁵⁶ Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 24 October 1823, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-3827> (accessed 3 July 2023). Jefferson endorsed Monroe’s proposal for what would become the Monroe Doctrine, which repudiated European ‘intermeddling’ in ‘cisatlantic affairs. America, North and South, has a set of interests distinct from those of Europe, and peculiarly her own. She should, therefore, have a system of her own, separate and apart from that of Europe. While the last is laboring to become the domicile of despotism, our endeavor should surely be to make our hemisphere that of freedom. See Ralph H. Gabriel, ‘Thomas Jefferson and Twentieth-Century Rationalism’, *Virginia Quarterly Review* 26.3 (1950): p. 328, for continuities between American revolutionary and mid-twentieth-century attempts ‘to keep American citizens free from entanglement in the tribal conflicts of Europe.’

⁵⁷ Nathaniel Peffer, ‘Entanglement or Non-Entanglement: Is there a Choice?’, *Political Science Quarterly* 55.4 (1940): pp. 522–34.

⁵⁸ Francis Biddle, *The World’s Best Hope: A Discussion of the Role of the United States in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).