Hebbel felt that art cannot exist in a historical void. He said that "art... as the highest form of historical writing... is quite unable to represent the most glorious and significant processes of life without at the same time revealing the decisive historical crises... the atmosphere of the ages."\(^1\) Of all the art forms historical drama is, by its very definition, the closest artistic statement to real history in an attempt to suspend time in its flight and to reimpose order on the apparently chaotic architecture of the political and social events of the period.

In the composition of historical dramas the reader will find, among others, two contrasting approaches. Often a writer will use a time-honored theme and, while addressing himself to the events of the past, will actually reinforce the universally valid principles of history. Another writer of a different creative temper will use the lessons gained from the examples of the past, and, in an artistic synthesis of past and present, reimpose a second plan on the original theme.

In this paper of limited scope an attempt is made to take a critical look from the vantage-point of the nineteen seventies at two parallel historical dramas of the early nineteenth century, a time of great flowering of historical dramas when, in the words of George Lukács, "the problem of the artistic reflection of past ages emerges as a central problem of liter-

ature,”2—Schiller’s unfinished *Demetrius* (1805) and Pushkin’s *Boris Godunov* (1824).3 Although it is not quite proper to compare a fragment with a completed work, these two dramas of historical conflict do offer themselves ideally to a reassessment of aesthetic, moral, and political values in the relation between historical process and the development of literature. The paper will try to consider the illumination these plays can provide on the epoch in which the German and Russian playwrights lived and worked, especially in the area of the representation of historical consciousness in the drama.

In a broad sense the history of the Boris Godunov–Demetrius theme reveals a protest against the ethos of the period, shows antagonism to its environment, and displays a critical attitude to the establishment and its social and political conventions. It almost becomes a revolutionary motif.

Thus, the theme—rich, vital, and timeless—was there and it called the playwrights. However differently Schiller and Pushkin answered the call in the relation of the drama to history, the theme loomed large in supplying them with an issue of great artistic and political importance. In their dramas an individual representing a new outlook challenges the old order in a changing society. He may be finally crushed, but not without making a decisive mark in the political arena of the time.

Intellectually and morally restless in their works, the two poets are different in vision, style, and spirit that inform and determine their dramas, to which the last century and half lends a temporal distance and a cultural charm. As it will be shown, it is not simply that these dramatists reveal markedly different sensibilities, but that their conception of the drama places them wide apart.


3 The following editions were used: “Demetrius”, *Schillers Werke*. 10 vols (Basel: Verlag Birkhaeuser, 1946), vol. 6.; “Борис Годунов”, А. С. Пушкин, *Сочинения*, в трех томах (Москва: Госиздат Худож. Лит., 1954), том I.