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### **The Loneliness of the Villain: Shakespeare and Schiller**

As my paper wants to show, loneliness is a characteristic of dramatic evil. Shakespeare's Richard III represents the prototype of the lone villain. In the opening scene of the play, the protagonist explains his 'villainous' behavior with his exclusion from society. Richard's loneliness, which is only superficially substantiated by his ugliness, fulfills several dramaturgical purposes. By being complicit with the public (via a shared enjoyment of cruelty), a perspective of an extradiegetic overcoming of his loneliness is opened. Schiller's drama "Die Räuber" follows Shakespeare's reflections on loneliness and villainy. Franz Moor is an intertextual successor of Richard III: He too is isolated by his greed for power. In contrast to Shakespeare's play, however, the political setting is much smaller: Moor doesn't fight for the English crown, but only for the annihilation of his family. In this sense, Schiller re-stages the drama of the lonely villain in the genre of bourgeois tragedy.

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Within the tradition of political philosophy, loneliness is traditionally understood as a complete exclusion from the political sphere. According to the definition in Aristotle's *Politics*, only the divine or animals are able to live completely on their own outside of the polis. "And anyone who cannot live in a community with others, or who does not need to because of his self-sufficiency, is no part of a city, so that he is either a wild beast or a god,"<sup>1</sup> Aristotle writes. Therefore, any political

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, 4 (1253a).

community is grounded upon a specifically human deficiency, since only gods and animals can fully claim to possess self-sufficiency and self-enjoyment.<sup>2</sup> This constellation explains why the monarch within political philosophy is traditionally described as a lonely person. In his *Six livres de la République* (1583), Jean Bodin states:

Just as God, the great sovereign, cannot make a God equal to Himself because He is infinite and by logical necessity (*par demonstration necessaire*) two infinities cannot exist, so we can say that the prince, whom we have taken as the image of God, cannot make a subject equal to himself without annihilation of his power.<sup>3</sup>

In this influential theory of political sovereignty, the king is conceived as not fully human. Insofar as only God's power exceeds his own, he represents something similar to divine power to his subjects. This definition of the sovereign as a representation of God on earth follows the late medieval legal doctrine of the "King's Two bodies," according to which the monarch, like Jesus Christ, commands over two entities: the mortal "body natural," and the immortal and quasi-divine "body politic."<sup>4</sup> From this theological elevation of the monarch Bodin concludes that the ruler is fundamentally unrelated to the laws and norms of society. For Bodin, this primarily relates to absolute freedom from laws and contracts: the monarch can never be bound by the laws of his predecessors, but much less by his own.<sup>5</sup> Acting and judging purely as he wishes to do, the king cannot be bound by any previous law or decision: "whatever the king pleases by way of consent or dissent, command or prohibition, is taken for law, for edict, or for ordinance."<sup>6</sup> Structurally, the monarch assumes the role of God who is able to live outside the polis by enjoying his self-sufficiency. Nonetheless, his connection to the society he rules appears to be so problematic that he cannot have any part in it. Thus, the monarch embodies a structural paradox: a

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Tomšič, *The Labour of Enjoyment*, 37.

<sup>3</sup> Bodin, *On Sovereignty*, 50.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Bodin, *On Sovereignty*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 19.

political loneliness, an absolute withdrawal from the community within its center.

In Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651), the monarch's elevation and lack of commitment is visualized in a dramatic scene: the founding "social contract". The dramaturgy is well known: tired of the war of everyone against everyone, people decide to found a political organization. According to Hobbes, this is achieved by transferring all natural rights – especially the "right of everything" – to the sovereign.<sup>7</sup> However, he is the only person in the whole state not to sign the social contract: he remains in his natural state as the only one, in raw savagery, not subject to any law or contract.<sup>8</sup> As such, the sovereign is never part of the human society he controls. Agamben has described this structure as the "paradox of sovereignty": "The paradox of sovereignty consists in the fact the sovereign is, at the same time, outside and inside the juridical order."<sup>9</sup> For Agamben, this paradox arises from the dual position of the sovereign within European law: he represents the basis of all law, but at the same time and precisely for this reason, he cannot be bound or restricted by any law or right.

It happens in literary texts that the sovereign's lack of ties and relationships is represented as loneliness and abandonment. In his *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* (1928), Walter Benjamin describes the prince of the baroque tragedy as someone who is characterized by an existential sadness. Instead of being seen as superior and elevated, the king suffers from his status as sole ruler, insofar as it only shows him his inability to make a decision. "The prince, with whom rests the decision concerning the state of exception, shows that, as soon as the situation arises, a decision is nearly impossible,"<sup>10</sup> Benjamin writes. It turns out to be unfortunate for the despot that, according to baroque anthropology, he is divided between reason and affect, and accordingly determined not by "thoughts" but by "fluctuating physical impulses."<sup>11</sup> Contrary to political theory, which describes the monarch as a god-like figure,

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 114.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Hamacher. "Wilde Versprechen".

<sup>9</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 15.

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin, *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, 56.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

the king in baroque tragedy becomes painfully aware of his human personality. The appearance of a counselor who promises to help in decision-making exacerbates the problem: the counselor always turns out to be an intriguer who is “all intellect and will”<sup>12</sup> and therefore can manipulate the monarch. In the *Trauerspiel*, in short, the monarch has to recognize his “creatureliness” – in other words, he is thrown back on his humanity – and therefore his god-like elevation changes into a painful abandonment, which is filled with gloom and melancholy. Benjamin quotes the baroque poet Kaspar von Stieler: “Mournful melancholy dwells for the most part in palaces.”<sup>13</sup> In this sense, the notion of political sovereignty changes completely in Benjamin’s view: far from being an analogue to divine majesty, “the image of the court” – with the tyrant and the schemer at his side – “seems not very different of the image of hell, which is known, after all, as the place of eternal sorrows.”<sup>14</sup> The monarch is thrown back to his human creatureliness and thereby proves to be lonely, being surrounded only by minions and scheming courtiers. Insofar as the knowledge of one’s own humanity in Benjamin’s description is deeply melancholic, it is at least endowed with all the attributes of philosophical dignity: the abandonment of the monarch in the baroque tragedy is, so to speak, a *sublime* loneliness.

In his lectures on the *Abnormal* (1974-75), Michel Foucault describes how in modernity the monarchical double body dissolves in yet another form. Within the discourses surrounding the French Revolution, the constitutional exteriority of the sovereign – his lack of commitment to any law or norm, as Bodin has stated – could no more be understood as a metaphysical principle, but rather as a social and political problem. “The despot is the man alone,”<sup>15</sup> Foucault writes. As soon as his location outside of society can no longer be regarded as proof of a quasi-divine nature, the monarch’s exceptionality may be regarded as mere loneliness and his independence from social and legal norms as anti-social and criminal behavior. “The despot is someone who – beyond status and the law, but in a way that is completely bound up with

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 85.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>15</sup> Foucault, *Abnormal*, 94.

his very existence – permanently exercises and advances his interest in a criminal way,” Foucault writes. And he states further: “the despot is the permanent outlaw, the individual without social ties.”<sup>16</sup> In these discourses, many elements of political theology are now re-evaluated. Because the monarch “had never subscribed to the social contract,”<sup>17</sup> the laws do not apply to him (hence it is now everyone’s right to kill him). The monarch’s “mystical” dual nature – the attribution of a mystical body politic to his body natural – is now reinterpreted as monstrous: Louis XVI is marked as a “human monster”, and his metaphysical super-nature becomes a monstrous “counter-nature”. The scene of the monarch remaining in the natural state (as described by Hobbes) is now visualized by staging the king as a “wild animal” outside of any human society. This reinterpretation of sovereign exteriority in modernity can be described as a theory of monstrous loneliness: the monarch is not thrown back on his humanity (as in the German *Trauerspiel*), but on animality and criminal antisociality.

The loneliness of kings is a frequent theme in the history of literature. This arises from a reflection on the effects of power: by being ultimately solely responsible for far-reaching decisions, the king must feel oppressively isolated. Consequently, in literary representation, the monarch’s loneliness need not always be a sign of his bad character. Numerous dramas portray the ‘good’ monarch as careworn and lonely, surrounded only by intriguers. The prototype of this representation of the monarch’s solitude is found in Friedrich Schiller’s *Don Carlos* (1787), where King Philip lives in a “court world of distrust created by himself” that “leads him, as a sovereign without sovereignty, to an abyss of treachery, hypocrisy, and deceit.”<sup>18</sup> Philip’s loneliness is expressed particularly concisely in a short soliloquy in the third act of the drama, in which Philip calls on “gracious Providence” to send him a “man”: “Thou’st given me much already. Now vouchsafe me / A man! For thou alone canst grant the boon. / Thine eye doth penetrate all hidden things. / O! give me but a friend: for I am not / Omniscient like to thee.”<sup>19</sup> This

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<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>18</sup> Alt, *Schiller*, vol. 1, 441.

<sup>19</sup> Schiller, *Historical Dramas*, 99.

positive representation of monarchical loneliness – visible, for example, in the king’s insomnia – is also found in Shakespeare’s dramas, for example in the increasingly lonely king in *Henry IV* (around 1590). However, loneliness in Shakespeare’s dramas is always already the first stage of the descent into madness – which eventually becomes the fate of almost all the kings in his dramas: “Thus (...), madness appears as the definitive sign of the sovereign’s degeneration,”<sup>20</sup> Moretti writes.

In Shakespeare’s dramas, this degeneration is triggered by the sovereign’s boundless greed for power. In this respect, the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ kings becomes less relevant in the perspective of Shakespeare’s texts.<sup>21</sup> This can best be studied in Shakespeare’s historical drama *Richard III* (around 1592). It stages a theatrical payback with Richard Gloucester, the last monarch from the Plantagenet family. Richard is already introduced in Shakespeare’s play *Henry VI*, and here he describes himself as a fundamentally lonely and isolated person:

I had no father, I am like no father /  
I have no brother, I am like no brother.  
And this word ‘love’, which graybeards call divine /  
Be resident in man like one another, /  
And not in me. I am myself alone.<sup>22</sup>

“‘Richard III’ is the tragedy of the radically lonely person,”<sup>23</sup> Klaus Reichert comments: and in fact, Richard here is a lonesome man *par excellence*. He has no connection to other characters – not to the people, not to the women around him, and certainly not to his brothers. Richard’s wickedness, brutality, and contempt for laws and morals derive directly from his loneliness, which does not let the word “love” dwell in his chest. Richard himself mentions this connection, in the play’s famous entrance soliloquy, in which his loneliness is a dominant theme. It provides him with a reason for his acting as a villain. The scene begins with the court celebrating the end of the civil war and the

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<sup>20</sup> Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders*, 51.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, 38.

<sup>22</sup> Shakespeare, *The complete Works*, 405.

<sup>23</sup> Reichert, *Der fremde Shakespeare*, 299.

beginning of the reign of the new King Edward IV. However, Richard Gloucester – who is Edward’s brother but does not want to have brothers for this very reason, because he wants to own his throne – takes part in this celebration and yet stands apart from it. “Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this son of York:”<sup>24</sup> The first two verses of Richard’s soliloquy reveal an abysmal ambiguity. The discontent that is expressed in the first verse is brought into the past in the second verse with reference to Edward’s victory. However, this optimistic perspective is limited by the first verse, as Marjorie Garber notes: “the audience hears both: I ought to be contented, but in fact (I am telling you privately), I am not.”<sup>25</sup> Thereby, tone and structure of Richard’s soliloquy is given. In the first lines of the soliloquy, the word “our” is used six times (“our discontent”, “our house”, “our brows”, “our bruised arms”, “our stern alarums”, “our dreadful marches”) to describe Edward’s triumph.<sup>26</sup> However, Richard’s self (“But I”, “I, that am not shap’d”, “I, that am rudely stamp’d”, “I, that am curtail’d”) is displaced. The word “our” cannot be understood inclusively here: Richard describes himself as radically excluded from society.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the structure of the play is shaped by the main character’s loneliness: again and again, Richard speaks *aside*, directly to the audience. He keeps stepping out of the plot. The villain is always a *player*, who not only manipulates the other characters, but also shares his knowledge with the audience – trying to make it his accomplice.

As the reason for this exclusion and radical loneliness, Richard mentions his physical ugliness. He describes his deformity as well as his inability to be loved and to love in a very vivid and pictorial way: Richard is “rudely stamp’d,” “Cheated of feature by dissembling nature, / Deform’d, unfinish’d, sent before my time.” Due to his ugliness, Richard, as he explains in the soliloquy, is perceived as so repulsive that he remains completely socially isolated and therefore has to decide to act as a villain: “And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover, / To entertain

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<sup>24</sup> Shakespeare, *The complete Works*, 548.

<sup>25</sup> Garber, *Shakespeare and Modern Culture*, 112-13.

<sup>26</sup> Shakespeare, *The complete Works*, 548.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Zamir, *Double Vision*, 69.

these fair well-spoken days, / I am determined to prove a villain.”<sup>28</sup> And he is able to play the role of the villain sovereignly. Richard, who doesn’t shy away from killing his brother and his nephews in order to reach the throne of England, appears as the “epitome of Renaissance evil”<sup>29</sup> in Shakespeare’s drama. However, it cannot be fully convincing to explain his villainy by his ugliness, whether in terms of moral justification or psychological explication. On the contrary, Richard’s soliloquy is fascinating precisely because of its insufficient justification for his malice: his villainy appears to be without reason and precisely therefore abysmal.

In the second scene, Anne, Richard’s opponent (and later, his wife), reveals an alternative perspective to explain the connection between his ugliness and his malignancy: she doesn’t refer to morality or psychology, but rather to contemporary physiognomics and teratology, the science of monsters. Hence, she addresses Richard as a “foul devil” and “lump of foul deformity,” and describes his deeds as “inhuman and unnatural.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, she equates Richard’s deformed exterior and his inhumane behavior. According not only to Anne, but also to the physiognomics of the epoch, the one refers to the other. “There can be no more certain sign of evil than deformity,” writes Michael Torrey: “A misaligned body denotes a misaligned soul.”<sup>31</sup> At the same time, Anne quotes the *topos* of criticism of tyranny par excellence: the life of the tyrant outside the law and of human society. “Villain, you know’st no law of God nor man. / No beast so fierce but knows some touch of pity.”<sup>32</sup> Richard thus appears, in Anne’s perspective, as someone who doesn’t know any legal law, because he existentially violates every natural law (“unnatural”) and knows less pity than even a wild animal. Richard’s character, in short, is here both connected to the premodern concept of the monster – as something exceeding the natural law - as well as to the modern concept of the human monster. Richard’s loneliness proves to be a perfect sign of his monstrous nature.

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<sup>28</sup> Shakespeare, *The complete Works*, 548.

<sup>29</sup> Reichert, *Der fremde Shakespeare*, 299.

<sup>30</sup> Shakespeare, *The complete Works*, 553-54.

<sup>31</sup> Torrey, “The plain devil and dissembling looks”, 129.

<sup>32</sup> Shakespeare, *The complete Works*, 554.



However, the polemical representation of the monarch as a monster, as described by Foucault, is temporarily reversed to a certain extent: Richard is not a king who proves to be a human monster, but a monster who wants to become king and is successful – even if only for a short time within the drama. Richard, in other words, is not an inhumane, alien monster because he is king, but conversely, he wants to win the throne in order to resolve his social isolation – to close the discrepancy between “we” and “I” from the opening soliloquy. If Richard’s desire is to be accepted by the other characters, his tragedy is that his immense, ruthless will to satisfy that desire just makes it impossible. Richard’s violence and lack of conscience (i.e. his monstrous nature) helps him to conquer power, but in doing so he immediately loses it because revolts and counter-armies start to form. In act five, on the eve of the decisive battle against Richmond’s troops, the ghosts of those murdered by him appear to Richard in a dream. Richard is disturbed that his own dream can frighten him: “What do I fear? Myself? There’s none else by; / Richard loves Richard, that is, I and I. / Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am!”<sup>33</sup> Knowing his impending defeat, Richard is tormented by fear and his conscience. In this way, Shakespeare’s drama in the last scenes also calls upon the structure of sublime loneliness described by Benjamin.

That brings us to Schiller’s drama *The Robbers* (*Die Räuber*; 1781). There are two villain figures with the Moor brothers in this play, who represent sovereign loneliness in different ways. Franz Moor is a traditional court intriguer, who is modeled on Shakespeare’s Richard – down to the physiognomic detail of the ugliness and the structure of the violent desire for love and recognition. He constructs a complex intrigue to exclude his brother Karl from the family heritage, and to kill his father, the “old Moor,” and thus to rule over Moor Castle and to conquer Karl’s bride Amalia (ignoring that she hates him passionately). By intriguing against his own family, Franz proves to be genuine anti-social. He may not be considered a solitary person – in the midst of the court – but by explicitly cutting off all ties to the people around him, he removes himself from the social context. “I have heard a great deal of

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<sup>33</sup> Shakespeare, *The complete Works*, 633.

twaddle about the so-called ties of blood – enough to make a sober man beside himself,” Franz scoffs in a soliloquy in the first act: “He is your brother, they say; which interpreted, means that he was manufactured in the same mould, and for that reason he must need to be sacred in your eyes!”<sup>34</sup>

However, Franz is only a miniature version, just a caricature of the monstrous villain figure. First, the stake is significantly lower: it is not about the throne of England, but only about the inheritance of the father, Count Moor, and therefore about a castle somewhere in the German province. Second, Schiller’s villain is far less successful: more of a ridiculous than a tragic figure, his intrigue fails in the beginning. The second villain in Schiller’s drama is his brother Karl Moor, who represents an updated version of political monstrosity for the 18th century. He is modeled on the “noble” robbers of literature (Roque Guinart from *Don Quixote* and Robin Hood). After Count Moor breaks with him, Karl seems to be even more isolated than his brother Franz, but he immediately starts to build his own counter-community. In the spirit of contemporary, rebellious aesthetics of genius, Karl sees his loneliness as a sign of his superiority. The gang of “robbers” then stands for a parallel society of the outcasts, the disinherited and the disgraced. Following the tradition of monstrous sovereignty, Karl charges the principle of the law: “Am I to squeeze my body into stays, and strait-lace my will into the trammels of law? What might have risen to an eagle’s flight has been reduced to a snail’s pace by law. Never yet has law formed a great man; ‘tis liberty that breeds giants and heroes.”<sup>35</sup>

Karl’s loneliness is, here, not driven by an impulse to become a despot. On the contrary, his upheaval against authority is driven by his best intentions: Karl is motivated by protest against social injustice, against corrupt churches and arbitrary authority – and it is precisely this utopian rebellion that instigates actual evil actions (and here is the ironic dimension of Schiller’s play). Karl’s band of robbers then burns down entire villages and raids monasteries. It is not the stock villain Franz who is responsible for excessive violence, but the (supposedly) “noble”

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<sup>34</sup> Schiller, *The robbers*, 14.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

robber Karl, who cannot adequately control his band of robbers. Karl is a tragical character because his undertaking for rebellious freedom produces nothing but colossal and extreme violence. In this sense, it is his character that continues the tradition of monstrous sovereignty in Schiller's text. As it turns out, the loneliness of the villain represents a form of political monstrosity in both Shakespeare's and Schiller's text. The comparison of the two texts not only proves the close intertextual relationship, which has been little analyzed in scholarly research. It becomes visible how the monstrous sovereignty presupposes in each case the contemporary model of the exercise of political power: Shakespeare's villain is the prototype of the courtly intriguer, who at least corresponds to the clichéd image of monarchical rule. In Schiller's text, Franz Moor corresponds to this, marking the decline of the intriguer to an almost ridiculous figure. Schiller's villain Karl, on the other hand, represents the danger of a rebellion that is driven by political idealism and causes a bloodbath precisely because of this. Thus, the monstrosity embodied in both texts by the isolated figure of the lonely person points in each case in some way to a central risk within the political system: the uncontrolled lust for power of individuals (in the case of Shakespeare's Richard) or the uncontrolled energy released by rebellions (in the case of Schiller's Karl Moor).

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