

“Storm Still.”

Violence, Power and Justice in Shakespeare

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Introduction

With the opening and commercialisation of playhouses in the 1570s, the golden age of theatre began, moving and fascinating spectators of all age and rank alike. Whereas the entertainment value certainly was one of the most important aspects when going to the theatre, many playwrights like William Shakespeare, realising its high potential, used the opportunity to deal with questions of life, society and status, as well as religion, astrology and politics. Therefore – and as will be discussed in this thesis – the Shakespearean plays written during this period show a high ideological complexity, incorporating a broad range of different, contradicting and ambivalent views, approving as well as criticising them. Likewise, the Elizabethan and Jacobean period as well as the literary works that emerged from that time present and expose a common, everyday violence that – due to its severity and frequent occurrences – seems almost medieval to today’s readers. Numerous traditions and records on public executions and punishments, but also theatre plays attest a fixation on the display of violence, as well as the exertion of violent acts.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, changing perceptions of the world and newly emerging notions of power and legitimization conflicted with old ways of thinking and structuring of the cosmos. As a result, the English Renaissance

can be seen as a historic period where insecurity and doubt dominated the people as well as the realms of literature and art to some extent. Likewise, suspicion and closer examinations regarding aspects of violence, manifestations of power, as well as the existence and exertion of justice started to spread.

An out-of-control violence became the signature of the era, bringing the significance of the state's monopoly on discourse to a new level. Discourses do not exist in themselves but are always born out of power structures – in other words, the state dictates and controls the discourse, turning his own view into the discourse of truth – thus, prohibiting and excluding discourse that is not his. As a logic consequence, the power that is exerted through the dictation of discourse “produces knowledge” (Foucault, *Discipline* 27), which is highly ideological.¹

Consequently, every subject is characterised and influenced by the state's discourse of truth, meaning that cultural factors exist, which control and steer the people's use of language (Turk/Kittler 24). And yet, according to Michel Foucault, literature can be seen as a counter discourse that is not subjected to power structures (Winko 469). Therefore, literature can take up a questioning position where everyday perceptions – thus also concerning the state's exertion of power and justice through violence – can be challenged, giving literature a subversive authority through the possibility of an own exertion of power (Winko 469). Accordingly, it is to be expected that also Shakespeare's works of the Elizabethan and Jacobean period reflect on contemporary events and changing structures in a critical and subversive way.

Furthermore, due to changing political views towards absolutist ideas, the demonstration of power through public displays of violence not only reached its peak during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, but also entailed growing notions of arbitrariness of means, hence using a variety of cruel methods. In his *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault discusses the power of the sovereign to use the body of the victim as a sign of the state's authority over the people as well as over jurisdiction, restrengthening the monarch's power and using atrocities as a deterring effect for further actions against the state by the subjects (Foucault, *Discipline* 3-4)². If one considers the power of subversion through literature, the aspect of public punishments and executions is pivotal for a thematisation of violence, power and justice in Shakespeare's plays and hence is likely to be found throughout Shakespeare's works, from the earliest to the later plays – as shall be shown in this research.

Hence, the aim of my thesis is twofold: Firstly, I will analyse how violence is depicted in Shakespeare's plays. Secondly, I will illustrate in how far the violence as well as power and justice that are exerted in the works can be contextualised, bearing in mind that the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods were the scenes of great social, religious and political changes. Although Shakespeare can be seen as a

¹ On the meaning of Foucault's notion of discourse see also Philipp Sarasin (114-21).

² For a condensed illustration of Foucault's notion of power, see also Michael Ruoff (146-56).

highly ambiguous writer, my additional intention is to show a subversive force in the plays, where violence is used to reveal a growing insecurity within the system and towards the position of power of the sovereign.

In order to explore the interdependent themes of violence, power and justice during the Elizabethan and Jacobean age in connection to their display on the Shakespearean theatre stages of that time, especially three plays lend themselves to an analysis – namely *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard III* and *King Lear*. Not only do these works cover almost the entire creative phase of Shakespeare – *Titus Andronicus* being his earliest and *King Lear* one of his later tragedies – but also the fact that these three works are the poet's plays with the highest body count of all the pieces he ever wrote, promise a revelatory and insightful investigation of violence, power and justice in connection to the cultural context of Elizabethan and Jacobean times.

I shall start off my thesis with a description of the Elizabethan world picture, discussing at first the role of religion and church, as well as addressing changing approaches to divinity, and considering the attitude of the Queen and the state towards the topic. Secondly, the astrologic view of Renaissance England shall be presented, in which the connection between microcosm and macrocosm, disorder and order, as well as the great chain of being and the role of the sovereign shall be explained, concluding with a thematisation of the challenged astrologic beliefs by new scientific discoveries. Thirdly, a ventilation of the topic of Elizabethan politics follows, in which I shall draw upon the 'Tudor Myth', the influence of the Italian political thinker Niccolò Machiavelli, and shifting ideals concerning the legitimization of the monarch. Lastly, the chapter on the Elizabethan world picture shall be concluded with a discussion on Queen Elizabeth I and the power of her role as a woman on the English throne.

In the second part of my thesis, the aspect of violence as well as its effects and its value for the sovereign in the Early Modern period shall be treated, beginning with considerations on different modes of violence infliction, such as private revenge, public punishments and public executions. Thereafter, the use of violence for the demonstration of power and for reasons of retributive justice, as well as its function for a distinction between good and evil shall be examined. A discussion of the aesthetic appeal of violence off- and onstage constitutes the last point of the second part, in which the spectators' motives for visiting displays of violence are revealed.

Analyses of the three Shakespearean plays constitute the final part of my thesis according to their chronological order of appearance, thus starting with *Titus Andronicus*. For many centuries, Shakespeare's presumably earliest tragedy had been neglected by numerous dramatists and despised by critics, such as T. S. Eliot, who's well-known statement that *Titus Andronicus* was "one of the stupidest and most uninspired plays ever written" (82) certainly summed up the theory of many people before and also after him, who were reluctant to actually attribute the play

to Shakespeare at all. However, the temporary unpopularity of *Titus Andronicus* stands in contrast to the period between the early 1590s and the end of the seventeenth century, where the play proved to be quite favoured by the audience (Kermode, "Titus" 1019). Premiered probably in 1594 (von Koppenfels 492), the combination of a revenge tragedy with elements from Seneca and Ovid, numerous mutilated bodies, a villain who is – and at the same time is not – Machiavellian, a tragic hero who repels the audience, and the portrayal of an utterly destroyed state attracted hundreds and hundreds of spectators. In the analysis on *Titus Andronicus*, I shall begin with a discussion on the rape of Lavinia, where I argue that the violence imposed on her can be read as both demonstration and destruction of power. In the subsequent chapter, the focus will be on the character of Titus. Here, I raise the assumption that the main protagonist and his views are, in fact, stuck in a traditional overcome society where his violence and injustice appear to be the only outlets in a changing world that is not his. Lastly, I shall treat the portrayal of the character Aaron, who, in fact, can be seen as a subverter of power, deconstructing the authority of the state of Rome.

For my analysis I will be using the edition of the play by Eugene M. Waith, published in Oxford by Oxford UP, 1984. This edition is based on the first Quarto version of 1594 to which – due to its significance, yet only existence in the 1623 Folio version – scene 3.2 has been added by the editor.

The second play to be analysed in this thesis is *Richard III*, the final play of the first tetralogy of Shakespeare's history plays. Richard, Duke of Gloucester and soon-to-be king was born on 2 October 1452 at Fotheringhay and died on 22 August 1485 during the Battle of Bosworth Field (Kalckhoff 11, 435). After his death many myths surrounded the monarch and thus his depiction in historic sources is highly controversial until today. Records, chronicles and biographies are contradictory and show a range of negative as well as positive portrayals of Richard, the most famous being the description of the king as a murderous and immoral machiavel. Shakespeare's play *Richard III* takes up this depiction, relying almost exclusively on the information he had gathered from Raphael Holinshed's second edition of *Chronicles*, respectively Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York* (Jowett 12-3). Probably debuting in 1592 or 1593, the history play is one of Shakespeare's earliest productions, corresponding to the contemporary enthusiasm for historical topics and England's national past (Habermann/Klein 324). However, although the events portrayed in the play can be considered historically true to some extent, Shakespeare accelerated the story, combining incidents into one short period of time, instead of stretching them out over the years as they had actually happened. Furthermore, he added a considerable amount of elements, which are now known to be fictitious, respectively historically not proven – such as Richard's murder of the two princes in the tower – but which render the plot all the more dramatic and thrilling for the audience. Due to its popularity, *Richard III* was published in six Quarto versions as well

as in one Folio version, although the texts do not vary as much as other Shakespeare plays do³. However, the first Quarto version from 1597 is generally considered to be more stage and performance oriented (Habermann 343). Furthermore, combining elements of both genres, the Quarto editions all identify the play as a “Tragedy” whereas only in the later Folio version *Richard III* is sorted under the category of the “Histories” by the editors. The structure of my analysis on *Richard III* will be as follows: Opening with a discussion on the aestheticism and appeal of violence in the play, I argue that a double attraction of cruelty is shown – for the audience as well as for the character of Richard. Furthermore, in the second chapter, an evaluation of violence as the creation of an Other succeeds, in which the portrayal of violence functions as a distinction between good and evil.

For the analysis of the play I will be using the edition of *Richard III* by John Jowett, published in Oxford by Oxford UP, 2000. This edition is based on the first Quarto version, but refers to the Folio version in cases where metrical reasons or clearer stage directions indicate that the Folio has the better copy.

The third and last play analysed in this thesis is *King Lear*, one of Shakespeare’s later tragedies. In 1823, *King Lear* was, for the first time in 150 years, put on stage in its original version. Before, it had been considered too gruesome and violent a play to be presented. Thus, the adaption by Nahum Tate, who drastically changed the contents, cut the blinding of Gloucester out completely and gave the story a happy ending by marrying Cordelia off to Edgar and reappointing Lear as king, was preferred by many dramatists in the eighteenth century (Schülting 559). The story itself, however, is old and many versions exist, such as in Holinsheds *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*. Furthermore, an anonymous drama called *True Chronicle History of King Leir* was published 11 years before Shakespeare performed his version in 1605 – during the reign of James I – however, not without generously taking ideas and characters from the anonymous *Leir*. Nevertheless, whereas all existing versions end happily, Shakespeare’s is the only one which finishes badly (Schülting 553-4). When publishing his play in 1607/1608 as a Quarto version, the title still read *William Shakespeare: His True Chronicle Historie of the life and death of King Lear and his three Daughters*, but in the Folio version of 1623 it appeared as *The Tragedie of King Lear*. Apart from the changed appellation, both versions differ dramatically from each other, with the Folio varying in 850 instances, yet missing 300 lines that can be found in the Quarto (Schülting 553).

I shall begin my analysis on *King Lear* with a discussion on Lear and his actions, arguing that the initial blunder of the main protagonist caused a destruction of cosmic balance, provoking universal injustice and the damnation of everyone’s existence. Subsequently, I shall thematise the blinding of Gloucester in scene 3.7, in which the disorder of the universe is mirrored in the limitless cruelty. Next, I raise the theory that Goneril’s and Regan’s violence can be seen as an expression

³ In *King Lear*, the Quarto and Folio version differ greatly from each other.

of atheist faithlessness, drawing on the nature of man and changing perceptions of divinity in Early Modern England. The last chapter shall address the character of Edgar and his confusion of divine justice with justified violence, eventually provoking a continuation of the disruption of the universe instead of ending it.

For the analysis, I will be using a combined version of *King Lear*, edited by George Ian Duthie and John Dover Wilson, published in Cambridge by Cambridge UP, 1960, which integrates the elements from both the Quarto and the Folio version. However, when necessary for the study, Quarto readings are cited separately from the version edited by Stanley Wells and published in Oxford by Clarendon Press, 2000. The use of Quarto elements will be indicated in the running text, using the abbreviation ‘Q’.

Finally, this thesis on violence, power and justice in Shakespeare shall be concluded with a résumé of the most important insights and results of this work. Additionally, an outlook for future prospects of research shall be given.

The Elizabethan World Picture

Religion

Church and religion both played a very important role for the people of the Early Modern Period. Since Henry VIII’s reign and the institution of the Anglican Church, the English had to cope with an ecclesiastic up-and-down. Whereas Henry VIII initially condemned the protestant beliefs and reforms of Martin Luther, he soon after broke with the papacy and the Roman-Catholic Church after unsuccessfully asking Pope Clement VII to divorce him and his first wife Catherine of Aragon. The new Church of England, the break with Rome as well as the consequences of the institution of a new religion – such as the dissolution of monasteries – were readily accepted by most of the English (Suerbaum 83-4). However, when Henry VIII’s daughter Mary I ascended the throne in 1553 after the short reign of her brother Edward VI, she returned to Catholic doctrines, bloodily and cruelly persecuting protestant commoners and clerics throughout England, incurring the hatred of her nation. It was only during Elizabeth I’s reign that the question of religion was settled once and for all.

A compromise with church and parliament – the so called Elizabethan Settlement of Religion – was made and Elizabeth I was announced to be – or rather announced herself to be – the “supreme governor as well in all spiritual or ecclesiastical things or causes as temporal” (Suerbaum 152; G. Elton 299) instead of being declared as ‘supreme head’, like her father had been. This gave a new notion to her leadership of the Church of England – a ‘supreme head’ being a monarch as the highest cleric, whereas ‘supreme governor’ being the commissioner of God himself, a cleric outside of church hierarchy (Suerbaum 152; G. Elton 301). This

in turn led to an increase of her monarchical powers, her new title making clear and even emphasising that she was chosen by God and thus had the divine powers behind her (political) actions and decisions.

Although Elizabeth's settlement determined Anglicanism as the answer to the question of religion, Catholics were not persecuted at first. In place of rigour and hardship, the Queen preserved a milder course without, however, according the Catholics the full rights Anglicans enjoyed (Klein 12). Moreover, concerning religious contents and practises the new Church of England was closer to Catholicism than to Protestantism. This led to the fact that different protestant groups started to split off, feeling not only underrepresented but also angered by Elizabeth I. To them, the 'true' religion that was supposed to be supported and promoted by the state and the sovereign remained too close to odious Catholicism. This closeness eventually gave way to separations from the Anglican Church, which again gave orientations such as Puritanism and Presbyterianism breeding grounds.

Even if the Queen did not act against supporters of the Catholic belief, this did in no sense mean that Elizabeth I advocated religious freedom. Instead, non-conformity was merely left unpunished and thus Catholics were tolerated. However, when the Pope officially excommunicated the Queen in 1570, the Counterreformation started in Europe which also encouraged Catholicism on the island. The hatred against the tolerated religion flamed up again and, as a result, many Catholics throughout England were sentenced and/or executed (Klein 12-3; Suerbaum 155). Whereas England had turned Protestant again after the ascension of Queen Elizabeth I, Ireland – England's oldest colony – however, remained Catholic and thus not only became an ever so present eyesore to the monarch and her state, but was also regarded as a threat to the country. For one thing, Ireland's outdated Catholicism was linked to barbarism, as opposed to English civilisation, and for another thing, the Queen feared for an invasion of catholic Spain through the help of England's Catholic neighbour (Klein 30-1). As a result, the dread of a potential attack fostered the hatred as well as the prosecution of non-protestant religions in the country and led to increased torture and executions of Catholic commoners and clerics.

The ever-present importance of religion and the centrality of church for the people of the Elizabethan and Jacobean Age also gave rise to opportunities of criticism on the state and the sovereign's actions. Owing to the high frequenting of churches by the population, the buildings offered a perfect platform for anti-government propaganda and other critical expressions. The state and the monarch, on the other hand, tried to prevent the conversion of churches and similar public spaces – as for instance execution sites, as shall be discussed later on – into sites of resistance (Klein 13). Nevertheless, the state naturally knew of religion as an instrument of power and thus the subjects' religiousness and the compulsory attendance of Sunday mass made it possible for the state to exploit people's fear

of God's wrath as means to inoculate obedience to the sovereign as well as authorities in general by using church and mass as platforms of propaganda themselves (Dollimore 83). Correspondingly, the state as well as the monarch profited from sermons such as the following *An Exhortation concerning good Order and Obedience to Rulers and Magistrates* from 1547, in which the obedience to the monarch and the maintenance of the divine order was preached to the subjects during mass:

Almighty God hath created and appointed all things, in heaven, earth, and waters, in a most excellent and perfect order. [...] In earth he hath assigned kings, princes, and other governors under them, all in good and necessary order. [...] Every degree of people in their vocation, calling, and office hath appointed to them their duty and order. Some are in high degree, some in low, some kings and princes, some inferiors and subjects, [...] and everyone have need of other; so that in all things is to be lauded and praised the goodly order of God, without the which no house, no city, no commonwealth can continue and endure. [...] Take away kings, princes, rulers, magistrates, judges, and such states of God's order [...] all things shall be common, and there must needs follow all mischief and utter destruction, both of souls, bodies, goods, and commonwealths. [...] Christ taught us plainly that even the wicked rulers have their power and authority from God. And therefore it is not lawful for their subjects by force to resist them, although they abuse their power; much less then is it lawful for subjects to resist their godly and Christian princes which do not abuse their authority but use the same to God's glory and to the profit and commodity of God's people. ("Exhortation" 421-2)

Especially the appeal for acceptance of a ruler's violent actions is striking here. However, it has to be taken into account that the Elizabethan and Jacobean period can be considered as a time of rekindling of religious scepticism which influenced the feeling towards a deity in a strong way, as shall be shown in the following.

According to William R. Elton, the second half of the sixteenth century was influenced by several changing approaches to divinity and providence (*King Lear* 9). In Renaissance England, a rekindling scepticism in form of an Epicurean revival occurred, making its followers question divine providence and reinforcing the belief in a God that distanced himself not only from the people of England, but also from the entire humankind. Thus, for one thing God turned into an idle deity that acted arbitrarily and – seemingly – without a pattern, and for another thing, he turned into an absent God that had left the humans to their fate and therefore to whatever might happen to them (Elton, *King Lear* 9). Among Calvinists, the idea of providence existed, however, here God also turned into a *Deus absconditus*, i.e. an instance that was considered to be hidden and incomprehensible to the people, nevertheless having – contrary to the Epicurean belief – already

determined the fate of humankind (Elton, *King Lear* 9). Here, God also acts arbitrarily and is compared to a tyrant, since he leaves the people in ignorance about salvation and damnation and thus is both – friend and foe (Elton, *King Lear* 31-2).

As a result from the changing views and perspectives, insecurity among the people of the Renaissance was caused. The question arose as of where exactly mankind found itself in the universe, and with this question, the “relative medieval sense of security” (Elton, *King Lear* 9) got diminished, which had seen man ever surrounded by God and enclosed in the never-wavering presence of his wisdom and benevolence (Elton, *King Lear* 9). By their questioning of divine providence, followers of the Epicurean idea tended to be compared to – but also denounced as – atheists by Calvinist believers. According to W. Elton, a Renaissance religious-sceptic person “considers God’s providence faulty; [...] denies the immortality of the soul; [...] holds man not different from a beast; [...] denies creation ex nihilo [...] and [...] attributes to nature what belongs to God” (*King Lear* 54). Such a person’s beliefs thus clashed with all that the monarch and her subjects (officially) believed in, respectively were supposed to believe in, and it is hardly surprising that an atheist view brought the people at odds with each other. Thus, the Calvinist bishop Thomas Cooper wrote in his *An Admonition to the People of England* in 1589 that “there are an infinit [sic] number of Epicures, and Atheistes” (11) and that “the schoole of Epicure, and the Atheists, is mightily increased in these days” (125)⁴. Furthermore, the English translator Thomas Bowes declared in his translation of La Primaudaye’s *The Second Part of the French Academy* in 1594 that “this poison of Atheisme hath passed the narrow seas, & is landed in the hearts of no smal number” (sig. b3^v). He goes on by saying that “there are as many, yea moe at this day that doe openly shew themselves to be Atheists & Epicures, then there are of those that are taken for good Christians” (sig. A3^v)⁵. It is therefore apparent that religious-sceptic views, as much as they existed in Renaissance England, were not considered acceptable – neither by Calvinists, nor by the Queen and the state who condemned religious unorthodoxy (Dollimore 84).

Throughout the Renaissance, the Elizabethan was constantly confronted with different and divergent views and conflicts about the divine, to such an extent that the people did not know what to think anymore. Could salvation be influenced if providence existed? Is there a deity, and if yes, does it care about justice? Religious ‘certainties’ like afterlife, hell, purgatory as well as the guarantee of God’s benevolence and care seemed to have been sacrificed for a sceptic idea of an uncertain – and maybe even non-existent – beyond. Hence the Elizabethans found themselves confronted with a strong feeling of loss of transcendental comfort, which was moreover joined by a dramatic increase of insecurity. Shakespeare used the different tendencies the audience of his time had and reflected on the various traditional and new notions through his literary works, as shall be shown later on.

⁴ Cf. also W. Elton (*King Lear* 20).

⁵ Cf. *ibid* (21-2).

Astrologic Views

As pointed out, the Elizabethan and Jacobean age was a period of change and transition. However, although a strengthening of religious scepticism and thus a certain kind of “demystification” (Dollimore 19) of the world surrounding the people took place, the Elizabethans – and thus also Shakespeare’s audience – were still known to have been highly influenced by astrological beliefs (Elton, *King Lear* 147). Throughout the Middle Ages and into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, people attempted to explain the world and life to the very last detail and therefore their attitude towards the world and the existence of beings had been quite complex and thoroughly structured. The established belief was that of a partial invisibility of reality, meaning that there was more to the world than met the eye and that one had to refer to this hidden reality through signs, language and actions (Suerbaum 465). Furthermore, the firm assumption was that everything was subjected to a fixed order and steadfast hierarchies with super- and subordinations (Suerbaum 475) as shall be explained in the following.

According to E. M. W. Tillyard, the Elizabethan world picture was universalistically, theologically and hierarchically based, which first of all meant that every phenomenon on earth and in the universe has its special and fixed place. Second of all, everything – even universal order – is existent because of God’s will and making and is thus subordinate to Him. Thirdly, the cosmos and everything that is contained in it – from minerals to archangels – is structured in a hierarchy with subhierarchies and hence belongs to a specific order of ranking (Suerbaum 478-9; Tillyard, *World Picture* 18-28). Additionally, another structure separated the sublunary from the macrocosm, the sublunary being the elementary world below the moon – the minerals, the plants, the animals and the humans, the macrocosm being everything from the moon ‘upwards’ – the stars and their spheres as well as heaven in its religious sense (Suerbaum 480).

Furthermore, the position of an element in the hierarchy, or in the words of Arthur O. Lovejoy’s the “Great Chain of Being”⁶, also showed its value and thus made clear, which other elements were of more or of less value and therefore dominated the former or were subservient to it. Moreover, adjacent elements mirrored each other in their qualities, in other words the lower creature faintly reflected the qualities of the upper creature (Suerbaum 485-6). According to the hierarchy, man found himself in the highest position of all bodily creatures as well as in the lowest position of all spiritual creatures and was therefore assumed to have held a central position in the universe, being a connector between the cosmos and the world. This position was not ascribed to man by coincidence, but

⁶ This is the title of Lovejoy’s work *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea*. The concept of a chain of being, respectively a *scala naturae* can to some extent be traced back to ideas of Aristotle and Plato and is thus an ancient way of structuring life and existence (Lovejoy 4-5).

through God's decision. In man, God's creation is mirrored – the angels, the stars and the material world – and thus, in him all aspects of the cosmos are merged, making man the so-called microcosm (Suerbaum 492-4; Tillyard, *World Picture* 21; Klein 21). The monarch, appointed by God as His representative on earth, held the highest position of all the people in a society and is thus at the top of the humans. He presides over the body politic, an analogy between the state and the humanly body. The body parts of a human, with the head as the central part, are compared to the state (the 'body'), with the monarch (the 'head') at the top of society. Like within a body, where the head ensures the synergy and cooperation between the individual parts, the monarch is responsible for the perfect synergy in a state. Thus, his most important task is to represent order and protect the subjects from disorder and chaos (Suerbaum 498-501).⁷

Due to the connection between man and the cosmos, i.e. the analogy between micro- and macrocosm, cosmic harmony and order was mirrored in earthly harmony and order and vice versa. Accordingly, a disruption of order on earth was believed to bring about a disruption of the cosmos, leading to chaos in both spheres (Klein 19; Tillyard, *World Picture* 20-3). This was to be prevented at all costs. However, in contrast to the medieval notion that man was created after God's image, the Renaissance belief distanced itself from that of divine likeness (Elton, "Shakespeare" 18). Caused by man's original sin and his resulting Fall from grace, Elizabethans assumed that a constant insecurity and mutability influenced the order and that thus society was constantly in danger of turning to chaos. Through his sinful existence induced by Adam, man ran the risk of being corrupted by his innate evil inclinations, of sinking onto the level of beasts in the chain of being and thus of not acknowledging order anymore, striving for change and revolution instead, causing the whole cosmos to disarrange (Suerbaum 504-5; Tillyard, *World Picture* 29, 47). Since order was believed to be divine and therefore immutable, but the Fall of Man was considered to be a steady concern, governmental and political disorder and chaos were one of the greatest fears of the people of Elizabethan England, since it implied the return to a similar state of chaos like the one before God's creation of the world (Tillyard, *World Picture* 24-6; Suerbaum 511-2). As a result, the topics of the world picture and its containing themes of order and disorder, as well as their consequences, were a subject widely used by Elizabethan writers and poets – and also Shakespeare, as shall be shown in detail later on. The famous poet was, like his fellow Elizabethans around him, influenced by the world picture of his time (Suerbaum 509). The explosive nature of the topic of disorder and chaos affected his choice of subject, plot and dramatis personae and it was one of the reasons why he was ever so well-received in his time.

⁷ For more information on the topic see also Rolls 53-95.

The Elizabethan world picture was a system of categories that – although not very often explicitly mentioned (Tillyard, *World Picture* 18) – was practically known to every person in England and can thus be considered to have been common knowledge (Suerbaum 476-7; Tillyard, *World Picture* 22). Therefore, it was present in everybody's minds, as well as in everyday situations as when watching a play on stage. Especially language, and hence also (Shakespeare's) literary works and performing arts, served as means to depict the Elizabethan world picture, since they not only contained elements of the common belief, but also required a sound knowledge of the world view from the audience (Suerbaum 477).

The astrologic importance and its effects on the Elizabethan and Jacobean world view were challenged by the emergence of the Copernican heliocentric system. For thousands of years people had wondered about the universe and the position of earth in space, following the Ptolemaic idea and thus stationing the blue planet in the centre of the cosmos. According to the old, geocentric world view, the earth was believed to be surrounded by the spheres of seven planets, which again were encompassed by a cope of the fixed stars, a crystalline sphere and the sphere of the *primum mobile*, finished off with the realm of God – the macrocosm (Klein 18). However, with the Copernican discovery of the earth not being in the centre of the universe but instead turning around the sun and therefore merely being one of the other planets, the insecurity of the people as to where they found themselves in the universe and their insecurity about their cosmic relevance steadily grew. This meant that the old world view – although still commonplace among many Elizabethans – was not compatible at all with the new discoveries, and the new discoveries were not compatible with many of the religious and astrological beliefs the people deemed to be true. These incoherencies within their old beliefs led, among other things, to a resurgence of the antique gods – such as fickle Fortuna with her wheel of life, who decided over people's fates regardless of their rank – and were accorded distinct properties and traits (Reichert, *Fortuna* 13-4). With the instauration of said goddess and the factor of uncontrollability she brought along, the Elizabethans hoped to escape their stars' providence (Klein 20) and were thus able to justify their lives' up-and-down with an entity of fate.

However, since the Elizabethans found themselves in an age of transition where several concepts of seeing the world existed at the same time, the importance of the planets and their influence on people's lives affected everyone's thinking. As a result, the antique and medieval theory of the influence of the planets on the four bodily fluids, the so-called 'humours', was still a contemporary belief and generally well-acknowledged (Klein 20). According to the theory, man contains within himself four different fluids – black bile, yellow bile, phlegm and blood – which condition the well being or unwell being of a person. Ideally, the fluids are balanced out and thus the person is healthy. However, most of the time one of the substances would dominate the others and thus influence the person's temperament (Klein 20). The bodily fluids are mirrored by the four elements that

exist in the world – earth, water, fire and air. Like the fluids, the elements are responsible for a balance and thus have to be well mixed in order to be harmonious. An increasing influence of one of the elements would result in an imbalance and thus would lead to a certain natural phenomenon (Tillyard, *World Picture* 79-80). Therefore, since the elements as well as the fluids were believed to have been influenced by the movements of the planets, an imbalance in nature would directly reflect on an imbalance in the cosmos, as can be seen by the storm in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. In addition, since man's body (parts) were considered to be connected to the cosmos and therefore also connected to the spirits and daemons that were assigned to the planets, the Elizabethans believed in the possibility of temptation. Thus, they knew themselves in constant danger of evil corrupting them (Elton, "Shakespeare" 21).

Politics and Changes

The break with Rome and the change from Catholicism to Anglicanism initiated a new era, not only religiously but also politically. Through the centrality of the monarch as head of church, a cultivation of image and self-portrayal started that rendered the sovereign even more powerful. Thus, Henry VIII and the Tudor monarchs that followed after him became masters of "self-fashioning" (Greenblatt, *Renaissance* 1) which would culminate in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. With the defeat of Yorkist king Richard III on Bosworth Field in 1485 by Henry VII and the resulting termination of the Wars of the Roses between the House of Lancaster and the House of York, the contemporary historicists had strengthened a heroic depiction of Elizabeth's grandfather and the following Tudor successors that would soon lead to a mystification and a teleological glorification of the family and thus simply be referred to as the "Tudor Myth" (Tillyard, *History Plays* 29). Especially from Henry VIII onwards, the sovereigns reinforced the powerful image of their God-given representative status and emphasised their rule and existence as the providential purpose of English history, making clear that their reign was the beginning of an empire of peace, unity and strength (Pfister 49; Suerbaum 43). Through the depiction of political and state history as well as the portrayal of Queen Elizabeth I and the cult around her, historicists such as Holinshed enhanced a strengthening of national identity (Suerbaum 521). This, furthermore, led to a growing feeling of unique- and specialness among the Elizabethans, which in turn boosted the nation-building through an immediate construction of an Other, i.e. of something that was different than England and the English. The identification of belonging to a certain nation, and thus a 'we-you-divide', was on the rise. This was, according to Winston Churchill, particularly the case after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 (106), in other words, around the time Shakespeare grew steadily famous with his plays on stage. However, whereas Churchill argues that the 1590s were a time of enthusiasm and national strength (106), Robert Ash-

ton is of the opinion that the last 15 years of Elizabeth I's reign had not been as glorious and nationalistic as they were often depicted, but instead entailed a huge economic crisis as well as disorder in the state and anxiety among the people (180-4).⁸ Both scenarios are probable. In any case, a feeling of national upsurge, and also the possibility of financial problems certainly had a great impact on Shakespeare's process of writing, the end product as well as the reception of his works by the theatre audience. Furthermore, not only Shakespeare, but literature and culture in general were highly influenced by an increase of never before seen self-reflexivity that would change the arts as well as historic thinking entirely.

The identification with their own country, the growing nationalism and, as a result, the 'we-you-divide' between the English people and practically everyone else eventuated not least from the Elizabethan's ventures overseas. What began as voyages in order to capture gold, resources and other treasures from the New World, soon resulted in colonies, plantations and a booming slave trade. Encounters with the indigenous peoples increased insecurities not only among the travellers, but also among the English at home, who were influenced by the experience with the Other through the voyagers' travelogues (Pfister 91). Suddenly questions of nature and culture became highly topical. Opinions differed on whether the peoples of the New World were noble savages, indigenous to a paradise-like place and easily integrated into the English culture, or whether they were evil savages, in need of civilising influence (Pfister 93). Consequently, the English asked themselves if man was born innocent and then corrupted by society, or if he had to be civilised in order to escape his evil nature he had from birth (Pfister 93). These questions influenced the English society to a high extent and raised doubts about the divine image of man. Especially Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes treated the ideas mentioned above in their literary works, as shall be explained in more detail below.

With the Tudor reign a change in politics and power structures took place, in which the aristocracy was continuously deprived of their power, but was, however, acknowledged regional independence in exchange for total subjection to the sovereign. By this, the medieval feudal state with its rigid and established status groups was gradually turned towards an absolutist and humanist state – based on intellect and knowledge (Pfister 50; Klein 23-4) – with a central control over the people, ascribing to the divine appointment of the monarch. Ironically, the sovereign was, despite his divine existence, partially restricted in his actions by the parliament and thus needed its approval for several political decisions. However, although the monarch could thus be considered to have been dependent on the parliament, it was still he, the sovereign, who had the last say in all decisions (Klein 4). Nevertheless, parliament and monarch worked together most of the time, thus creating an – apparently – infallible powerful authority. This, however,

⁸ See also Christopher Haigh, who calls the golden age, which Queen Elizabeth I supposedly induced, an "illusion" that deceived scholars for several centuries (7).

did not last after the Queen's death. During the reign of James I – who would insist on his Divine Right that he, as king, had received from God and who used his rights to put himself above the law – growing conflicts arose, when James tried to reign without the parliament's approval (Coward 91-3).

As mentioned above, the medieval idea of the sovereign being God's representative was still a relevant factor during the Tudor dynasty. Yet, the appointment of the monarch, respectively the execution of his powers were already highly influenced by new emergent tendencies brought about by the Italian political philosopher Machiavelli, whose works became quite popular during the reign of Elizabeth I (Petrina/Arienzo 6). The new concepts saw the exceptional place of man in the cosmos as a result of man's predisposition of free will and the fact that innate opposing powers gave him the potential to decide between good and evil (Klein 21). Thus, providence and Fortuna's wheel of life were rejected by Machiavelli, since a person could vanquish Fortuna's arbitrary actions through his own *virtù*, i.e. his skills and self-autonomy:

success in rising from a private rank to that of a prince presupposes either personal merit or good fortune, [...] nevertheless, he who has relied least on fortune has maintained himself best. (Machiavelli, *The Prince* 34)

This image of *virtù* – the driving force of man – differed entirely from the medieval notion where passion, ambition or desire were considered not only to be against God's law but also to be highly dangerous to a society, as they could lead to change and therefore disorder and chaos (Pfister 142). According to the new ideas, man was now seen as being responsible for himself and thus taking fate into his own hands. From Machiavelli's point of view, this also entailed violent actions in the realm of politics. Since the administration of the state was separated from ethics and morals, any methods that could be considered profitable and good for the sovereign were acceptable means:

Cruelties may be said to be well used [...] when they are committed all at once, out of the necessity of securing one's position, and then not persisted in, but rather directed, as much as possible to the advantage of the subjects. (Machiavelli, *The Prince* 49)

Taking this into consideration, the ruler was deemed to be fit and rightful, if he was accepted by his subjects and if his stance was a strong one, i.e. if he showed a strong presence – when necessary, with violence and brutality. Thus, dependence, submission and fear were the goals a monarch had to reach within his people, so that order could be maintained and chaos prevented in the state (Machiavelli, *The Prince* 76). Although “every prince should desire to be held merciful and not cruel” (75), Machiavelli points out that “it is much safer [...] to be feared than loved” (76). However, the sovereign “must only make every effort [...] to avoid being hated” (78). In addition, it is possible that the Italian thinker was of the opinion

that man was not only characterised with evil from the moment he had fallen from grace, but that he had always been evil from the start, since Machiavelli says in chapter three of his *Discourses on the First Decade of Titus Livy*:

They who lay the foundations of a State and furnish it with laws must, as is shown by all who have treated of civil government, and by examples of which history is full, assume that ‘all men are bad, and will always, when they have free field, give loose to their evil inclinations. (18)

Thus, more than one hundred years prior to Hobbes, Machiavelli anticipated a view on society that would make Hobbes and his *Leviathan* famous, by saying that man’s nature is never peaceful and hence he has to be led by the sovereign, otherwise order could not exist in a state. According to Hobbes,

Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; [...] where every man is Enemy to every man [...]. In such condition, there is [...] no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short. (Hobbes 103-4)

Therefore, Machiavelli’s and Hobbes’ view is that disorder is the natural predisposition of man, whereas civilisation existed due to convenience (Tillyard, *History Plays* 21) and consequently can be considered a mere convention of society.

Furthermore, what also influenced a reception of the Machiavellian notion of *virtù* concerning the fitness and success of a sovereign was the slow but steady change in acceptance of the ruler’s divine right in Elizabethan England. The approval of the monarch’s God given status as the deity’s representative on earth began to falter, since the sovereign’s status was connected to a Christian ideology – which was also diminishing, as has been already mentioned. Moments in English (Tudor) history, where unfit monarchs such as Richard II were usurped but where the action was seen to have inflicted God’s wrath on the people of England, clashed with new arising views, for instance that people should subject completely to authorities, i.e. the sovereign (Elton, “Shakespeare” 30). Likewise, the idea of the existence of unfit rulers or the necessity of replacing them with a better ruler came up – notions that would have been downright impossible in medieval England.

All three aforementioned theories, that is providence, fortune and Machiavelli’s *virtù*, were current beliefs (or at least tendencies) in Elizabethan England and thus all find themselves in Shakespeare’s plays (Klein 21-2), where the co-existence of varying assumptions – for instance the growing independence in contrast to medieval restriction of the self – is shown in distressing moments of insecurity and disorder that result in violent actions, as shall be discussed in later chapters of this thesis.

Queen Elizabeth I

Elizabeth I ascended the throne of England in 1558 as the fifth Tudor monarch, following her brother Edward VI and her Catholic sister Mary I, who had both reigned only for a short period of time. Like her predecessors, Elizabeth legitimised her reign through the power invested in her by God, however, she also drew on the new tendencies brought about by Machiavelli and other political thinkers (Pfister 51).

Although a myth was created around Elizabeth in later centuries due to her Tudor ancestry, opinions differ on whether there had actually been a cult around her person in Renaissance England as Roy Strong and Elkin C. Wilson suggest.⁹ Although many accounts exist in which it is noted that she was very popular among Elizabethans¹⁰ and also knew how to use theatre and (sacred) spectacles such as allegedly healing subjects of illnesses through touch and bless-giving in order to increase her prestige (Levin 26-35), according to Susan Doran, many different and also opposing depictions of the Queen existed (46), which point to the fact that a cult had only developed after her death in 1603. However, the portrayal of Elizabeth I was influenced by the fact that she was a woman in a man's position – causing anxiety among many people in the patriarchal society of England (Doran 47). During Mary's reign, voices had already been raised against the fact that a woman should rule over men and lead a country. Thomas Becon exclaimed in 1554 in his *An Humble Supplication unto God* that mankind must have angered the Lord, otherwise he would not have enthroned a woman (227-8) and especially John Knox' work *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* became known, in which Knox called for insubordination to female rulers (Knox 11-53).¹¹ The insecurities that resulted out of religious changes and shifting beliefs in divinity – as already mentioned in previous chapters of this thesis – mingled with the question of Elizabeth's legitimacy not only because she had been considered a bastard child, but also because of her gender. Was her rule legitimised if she was a woman and not a man? Could her femininity be brought in line with power, respectively would the exertion of her rule be limited by the fact that she was a woman and was thus not able to behave adequately like a king (Levin 2-3)? Although the Elizabethans saw the ruler as a male person, Elizabeth's reign, however, was oftentimes strengthened with the providential argument, legitimising

⁹ For further information on the assumption of a cult around Elizabeth I, see Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1977; and Elkin C. Wilson, *England's Eliza*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1939. See also the divergent views on Tudor England that are shown in Churchill's and Aston's works, as mentioned in chapter 2.3. of this thesis.

¹⁰ In Elizabethan literature, the Queen was worshipped and referred to in many different ways. She was attributed for instance with names such as Gloriana or Belpheobe – two protagonists of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* as well as Artemis or Astraea – two Greek goddesses (Suerbaum 198).

¹¹ On Knox' work, see also David M. Bevington (157) and Carole Levin (10-1).

her position as a woman monarch with the reason that God chose her out of a special or mysterious purpose (Doran 47).

Every person in England and Europe expected the Queen to marry, pass her powers on to her husband and then produce an heir apparent, thus fulfilling her duties not only as a sovereign, but also as a woman. However, although there had been many suitors, she never decided on a husband and remained a ‘Virgin Queen’ until her death. Her position as head of the country was – to a patriarchal society – a most unusual situation. In Renaissance England, a legal status of women practically did not exist. While an unmarried woman had limited rights such as possessing property, after her marriage she had to subject to her husband, economically, socially and sexually (Klein 25-7). Whereas the Queen’s celibacy was seen as highly problematic in the first decades of her reign – an early death probably would have entailed a destabilising war of succession among potential ‘heirs’ (Levin 9) – she used this social ‘flaw’ to her advantage. Probably fearing the loss of power through marriage and a subsequent subordination to a husband, Elizabeth preferred to be considered the centre of the state (Suerbaum 190), instead of somebody’s wife. The fact that she (officially) remained a virgin played into her own portrayal as a chaste and pure sovereign, working in the name of God (Suerbaum 191-2; Doran 48-9) and thus portraying herself as completely dedicated to her reign and subjects, in other words, as wife and mother of the nation (Neale, *Elizabeth I* 48-50).

Like with her virginity, the Queen used her status as a female ruler as optimal as possible, deploying a rhetoric that played on both male and female attributes in combination with the theory of the monarch’s two bodies – her female, human body and her body politic, the personification of the polity (Doran 50). In her “Speech to the Troops at Tilbury“ she gave in 1588 before the Spanish Armada she supposedly exclaimed: “I know I have the Body but of a week [sic] and feeble Woman, but I have the Heart and Stomach of a King” (*Cabala* 343).¹² This presentation of being female, due to her human body, and male, due to her body politic, not only soothed her subjects who desired a male sovereign (Levin 4), but also empowered herself as a monarch and turned her into a never before seen “political hermaphrodite, not only a queen, but a king as well” (Haigh 25). Following Carole Levin’s argument of the Queen disguising herself to some extent as a man when emphasising her male position as ruler in a female body, it is exceptionally interesting that Shakespeare used hermaphrodite elements in his plays as well, for example in *Twelfth Night*, where Viola disguises herself as a page boy in order to “hide her vulnerability” (Levin 125) that is accorded to her through Elizabethan

¹² The speech she allegedly gave can only be found in an exchange of letters between Dr Leonel Sharp and the Duke of Buckingham, published in *Cabala, Sive, Scrinia Sacra [...]*. London: Printed for G. Bedell and T. Collins, 1691. 342-344. Print. It is, however, questioned, whether or not Queen Elizabeth I ever spoke these words, or whether they were put in her mouth later on by historians, in order to enhance the mystic image of the Tudor family (Neale, *Essays* 104).

social conventions. Thus it is evident that the presentation of Elizabeth I as a 'King' with two bodies is already highly theatrical and emphasises her skills in optimising her situation through staging.

Nevertheless, the absence of an heir apparent became a problem again towards the end of Elizabeth's reign, causing insecurity among her subjects as to what would happen when their sovereign died. Additionally, a financial crisis as well as crop loss had England in a firm grip and the fear of a new Spanish invasion appeared to escalate again (Levin 9). Consequently, the people felt the continuity of the Tudor line and the stability of the kingdom to be endangered (Pfister 53). This topic was also integrated and reflected upon in many literary works of the time, as for instance in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard III* and *King Lear*.

Violence in the Elizabethan Period

The Early Modern period was an era where violence was common. Displays of dead criminals on stakes, severed heads hanging from the cities' gates and publicly decaying corpses were daily pictures to every man, woman and child living in a town or city. Despite the general assumption that the Tudor Age, and especially London as its centre, were strongholds of delinquencies, the crime rate – and particularly violent crimes – actually decreased steadily from Henry VII's ascension on, amongst other things because of the abolition and prohibition of feuds and actions of private revenge (Suerbaum 342). And yet, although the people's violence lessened, the severity of state violence did not merely stay the same, but instead criminal prosecution increased. Capital punishment was not only imposed when felonies had been committed, but also as a sentence for petty crimes, such as theft or vagrancy (Suerbaum 343-4).

Modes of Violence Infliction

As there have been several different types of violence in the Elizabethan and Jacobean period, we first have to distinguish between officially approved actions of violence – thus, the violence executed by the state – and state-prohibited actions of violence – thus, the violence executed by the people themselves, i.e. self-administered justice.

The most significant and best known action of state-prohibited violence performed by the people is without a doubt the action of private blood-revenge, which was an accepted method of justice before the first attempts at establishing state justice were made. However, it took several centuries for the concept of state justice to develop. Even during Elizabeth's reign, many people still did not approve of the fact that they were not allowed anymore to punish injustice against themselves or their family members on their own initiative. Thus, although the Elizabethan and also the Jacobean state saw themselves responsible for punishing

injustice, and considered the monarch to be the sole person to decide between right and wrong due to his status as God's representative on earth, actions of revenge yet existed (Bowers 8). However, since it was not only considered a violation of the victim, but also of the state, the sovereign and God¹³, the Early Modern avenger was not treated with clemency, but persecuted like any other murderer (Bowers 10-1).

The Elizabethans who witnessed public executions of a murderer were especially interested in the motive of the criminal deed. Although murder was considered to be the worst of all crimes, they sympathised with an avenger who reacted against a treacherous injustice. However, if the murderer acted out of an unknown and/or unnatural motive, the audience was horrified (Bowers 16-7), but also intrigued to find out more. Similarly, revenge on the Elizabethan stage was only accepted and aroused compassion for the offender, if the deed was committed as vengeance for base injuries, when it was committed out of self-defence, when the state was not capable of, respectively willing to, exert justice himself, or when the revenge was a retaliation for murder (Bowers 36-7). Yet, in any case, the spectators would nevertheless condemn the act as highly immoral and deem the public execution or theatrical death of the murderer to be just, since he had still offended God's law.

As already mentioned, to the state, any kind of "Wild Justice" (Bacon 16) performed by a subject impinged the laws of the sovereign and bereaved him or her of the monopoly to exert justice. In Renaissance England the state differentiated between several forms of official, sovereign-approved inflictions of violence – torture, punishment and execution.

Torture was, despite general assumptions, not used very frequently in the Elizabethan and Jacobean age, since there is evidence for only 81 cases of torture between 1540 to 1640 (Langbein 81). Although the estimated number of unknown cases is higher, it has to be noted that, firstly, the 81 known cases of torture also included mere threats of the act; in other words, the deed was, at least in some cases, not even performed (Langbein 84). Secondly and consequently, it is apparent that torture – which had in its official sense not existed in the Middle Ages but had arisen during the Tudor reign – had quite an exceptional status and was therefore performed only in exceptional circumstances (Langbein 82), and thirdly, Elizabeth's reign had the highest number of torture cases in English history – 53 of the aforementioned 81 cases happened during her rule (Langbein 82). Furthermore, torture was never used as a means of punishing an individual but served only to collect evidence, to make the accused person confess a certain crime and therefore to gather information before a trial. In addition, torture was practically never displayed in public, but executed in private, for instance in the Tower of London, under the presence of specially appointed judges (Langbein 83-

¹³ "Vengeance is mine, and I will reward" (*The English Bible* Deuteronomy 32:35).

5). The infliction of torture, which was always prescribed by the monarch, was mostly put upon offenders who were believed to have a political and religious intention. It is thus quite significant, that the number of tortures was as high as that during Elizabeth's reign – after all, both insecurity and fear of a possible attack from Spanish Catholics reached their peak during that period.

The act of punishment, which is nowadays often mistaken for an act of torture, due to its cruelty and painfulness, was not used as a means for gathering evidence or information. It was only applied *after* the condemned had been put to trial. Thus, punishments such as the boiling of hands in hot water, the burning of skin with hot irons, whipping, castrating or the slitting of noses served merely as sentences to a crime in Early Modern England (Langbein 76-7). Likewise, dismemberment was an established mode of punishment as well and served as a penalty for many different crimes. Afterwards, it was common to display the severed body parts in an open, accessible and visible place, such as on the city gate or on top of bridges (Lin 139). Furthermore, the punishment of subjects could be performed in private as well as in public, however, as means of deterrence and also as emphasis of the state's power the act was almost exclusively carried out for all citizens to see. This also applied for executions, as shall be shown in the following.

As already discussed, the public sphere of Elizabethan and Jacobean England was mostly influenced by open punishments and public executions. Both methods became familiar and well-attended spectacles – sometimes attracting thousands of spectators at once. Like the modes of punishment, execution methods were just as diverse and manifold. However, they differed greatly in duration and in pain inflicted on the accused. Additionally, termination of lives depended on rank, state and sex of the culprit. Whereas men and women alike were put to death in public, aristocratic and well known females were always executed in private, for fear that their death might rally supporters or endangered the political status quo (Dolan 160). Men, aristocratic or not, were almost exclusively executed in public, except for the Earl of Essex, whom Queen Elizabeth I had put to death in the Tower in 1601 (Doebler 60).

Quick execution by the sword for the aristocrats, breaking on the wheel, boiling to death, beheading, disembowelling for lower traitors – nearly everything, it seems, was a lawful sentence (Pettifer 83-170).¹⁴ And yet, most deaths occurred through hangings and the *peine forte et dure* (Barker 173), a procedure where the person was pressed to death. According to Francis Barker, in England and Wales in the period between 1559 and 1624 approximately 24,147 men and women were hanged (on average 371 per year), and 516 died from the *peine* (on average 7 per

¹⁴ For further information about the punishments in the Elizabethan age see also the historical description of England in the sixteenth century by William Harrison (187-95).

year) (178).¹⁵ These numbers may seem extreme,¹⁶ and yet it is most probable that the figures of people put to death are highly underestimated since many original records of executions – so called “hanging books” – were either originally not consistently kept or lost over the centuries (Barker 179-82).

Power and Retributive Justice

The determination of harshly sentencing any kind of law breaking was strong in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Dozens of offences led to capital punishments, hundreds of offences to corporal punishments and/or prison. With the institutionalization of violence and justice – as opposed to the feudal structures that could be found in the Middle Ages, where self-administered justice could be executed by private persons as well – the Tudor state and monarch enhanced their power as the only authority that was allowed to determine right from wrong. The state, therefore occupied the discourse of truth – thus, excluding and prohibiting every other discourse (Foucault, *Ordnung* 7-15). Hence, when a citizen broke the law or applied a certain kind of crude violence, the state and also the monarch saw not only an action against their absolute monopoly of the exertion of violence, but also feared a diminution of power. This is also applicable to the case of private revenge by an individual, as already mentioned. By exertion of his or her own means of violence and justice, the subject offended the discourse the state held for himself. Therefore, the criminal act was not only an offence against another citizen, but also an offence against the community and, most importantly, the state itself. By using counter-violence, the state ensured that the monarch’s authority was not diminished and that his interests in maintaining the dominant position and in restoring order and obedience to him were preserved. The counter-violence here can be seen as an ‘eye-for-an-eye’ action, although – as has been discussed earlier – not only murder was punished with an execution, but also theft. Although the counter-reaction was declared to be an “administration of justice” (Barker 169), it is questionable whether a thief received justice through being hanged from the gallows. Thus, the reason for the state to execute an offender may officially have been that of retribution.

However, the state’s actual intention was of a different kind. According to Molly Smith, the English writer Samuel Johnson once said that hangings only made sense if they were done in public (25). It is only through own actions of violence that the state can regain power (Cohen 4). Furthermore, only through

¹⁵ Ulrich Suerbaum even claims that numbers of execution reached 1.500-2.000 per year in Elizabethan England (344).

¹⁶ According to Barker’s calculations, in comparison with the population of today’s England and Wales – Barker uses the population of 1989, which had been 50,562,000 – this would mean that 4,599 people would be hanged and 98 people pressed to death each year. For the United States and their population in 1989 this would mean that 22,383 people would be hanged and 478 people pressed to death each year. (178-9)

actually displaying the violence for everyone to see, the state can bring home the message that there is just one authority. As already pointed out in chapter 2.3., Machiavelli emphasised the prince's use of violence to enhance his power and to produce complete obedience of the people. It is thus out of sheer calculation that also in the Elizabethan and Jacobean age the sovereign used physical and also psychological violence – through torture, punishments and executions, but also through the mere suggestion of possible violence – in order to enhance fear in the subjects and to keep them down. Therefore, the fact that physical violence was displayed openly and with the intention of the state to be shown to as many subjects as possible meant that the attendance of people at executions and punishments was thus a crucial element of power preservation. The Elizabethan and Jacobean state envisaged complete subservience of their people, brought about by their apprehension of punishment. Therefore, demonstrations of public executions – often of exceeding cruelty – were supposed to function as deterrents to further crimes and also showed the people what the state was capable of in order to keep the subjects down. In addition, the pivotal element of a visibility of the subject's punishment as well as the remaining mark on the victim's body was the internalisation. Hence, the body "become[s] a sign [...] to ensure that the individual internalizes his or her subjection to power" (Parvini 87). This means that a public display of violence and death had a highly didactic function for both spectator and victim. In addition, through the display of a subject's destroyed body and thus through the calculated terror exerted by the state, the symbolic power of the ruler, which had before been damaged by the culprit, could be restored. Therefore, the adamant authority was demonstrated by the excessive exaggeration of the violence (Foucault, *Die Anormalen* 110).

In this context, especially the putting to death of famous people can be considered to have been memorable and thus even more didactic to the audience than the executions of 'normal' persons. The state knew of the power of public displays and their appeal to the citizens of a city. Thus, a hanging or a disembowelment was in some way comparable to going to the theatre. The audience, the stage, the player, announcements and last words were all part of executions. (Doebler 65-6) The theatricality of a hanging or beheading drew the audience to the gallows or scaffolds and as a result, the often huge crowds were exposed to and also influenced by the state's ritualised demonstration of authority.

All in all, it is therefore obvious that the sovereign was highly dependent on the power through executions and public punishments. They served both as a deterrent, with the intention of preventing future crime and as a means of the state to assert its power. To achieve this effect, the publicity of the procedure was a salient point. Only by being openly visible and by being 'staged' as a theatre play, the executions could unfold their didactic effect. It has to be noted, however, that not infrequently this effect backfired and the opposite happened of what the state hoped to achieve. Victims were aware of their own power 'on stage'. Through

speeches given on the scaffolds they used the last moments to criticise and mock the state as well as to challenge legal efficacy of the executions. They could say what they wanted since they had nothing to fear (Smith 27-39).

Good vs. Evil

The public termination of a citizen's life accompanied by the display of power was one possibility for the ruler to reinforce his authority and potency. However, it is essential to look at the way *how* this was actually done. To strengthen the sovereign's power, the violence that he and the state performed had to be considered reasonable, believable and rightful by the people. However, as already mentioned in chapter 2.3., in doing so, the sovereign must not turn into a despised monarch, but was only allowed to reign with an iron fist. More importantly, the subjects not only had to be shown that the doings of the ruler were right, but they had to believe in the rightfulness of the monarch's actions. Accordingly, it was pivotal to portray the violent deeds of the ruler as necessary and, above all, as good and right. Hence, the accused person had to be depicted in the worst possible way in order to justify violent actions against him.

Violence is all the more effective and comprehensible for the spectators when they can discern a clear distinction between good and evil. It is only through a black and white depiction that the sovereign can be acknowledged as the sole power and authority and can thus fully use his strength. If the spectator does not absolutely believe the actions of the sovereign to be right and just, the authority and credibility of the ruler is undermined. Whereas the former firm belief of a ruler being God's representative on earth would not necessarily have needed an affirmation of the monarch's credibility, the rising insecurities about religious and divine notions and therefore also the changing perception of political legitimacies during the Elizabethan and Jacobean period made a portrayal of the sovereign's rightfulness and justice ever so important. Therefore, it became essential to draw a well-defined line between the monarch and the person to be executed, respectively the good and the evil. The similarity between executions and onstage theatre made it important for the sovereign to also use elements of theatricality on the scaffolds and thus employ exaggerations to emphasise his actions. Thus, the visuality of a violent *mise-en-scène* enhanced the sovereign's spectacle of power. Consequently, the crueller and more gruesome evil is destroyed, the better and more honourable good is portrayed. Thus, it did not suffice 'only' to behead the person accused of high treason. Instead, he had to be hung from the gallows, cut down while still alive, his body sliced open and disembowelled, his intestines burned and the body quartered. These exaggerated atrocities led to the fact that through the bad ending of his life, the victim could be portrayed as bad himself. As a result, a distinction to the good – the sovereign – was formed.

Furthermore, people of the Elizabethan age believed that a person's death – respectively how exactly a person came to die – said a lot about how he had led his life. If someone died in a cruel way, he actually had been a cruel person in his time (Doebler 65). Therefore, the fact that the accused had been punished in an extraordinarily violent way pointed to the deed he must have committed – often the criminal act that was punished to such an extent was treason out of political or religious reasons. Since, the Elizabethans and Jacobean assumed that man, due to his Fall and original sin, was in constant danger of being corrupted by his innate evil inclinations, the conclusion would be that his life ended badly, because he had led a sinful life, indulging in his evil tendencies and striving for change, revolution and therefore disorder. He thus had been the evil that had to be destroyed by the good. Therefore, violence in the Elizabethan and Jacobean time not only had the function of demonstrating power and making clear to the subjects who was in charge. The function of violence was also, in fact, to make a clear cut between good and evil, tyranny and legitimacy, right and wrong, dishonourable and honourable. It was only thereby that the state and the monarch could maintain and reinforce power and authority.

Aesthetic Appeal Off- and Onstage

As already discussed, despite their cruelty and their bloody procedures, public executions were highly popular events in the Elizabethan Period and attended by many people of all rank and age. In some cases, several thousands of citizens gathered, only to watch the convict's slow and excruciating – or sometimes also quick and easy – death. Similar to a visit to the theatre, people could buy various kinds of fruit and snacks during an execution, or purchase leaflets enumerating the felonies the culprit was supposed to have committed. At Tyburn, people who could afford it were even able to rent seats in order to enjoy the best view on the famous Triple Tree – the first gallows in England that made mass execution possible (Smith 17). It almost seems as if this kind of spectacle had been a much-loved afternoon activity, just like cock-fighting and folk football (Reay 137). Already in ancient Rome, gladiator fights to death had been well-frequented attractions. Slaves, equipped with nets, swords or spears, who had to fight wild animals or even each other until there was only one – or no one – alive in the end were a favoured amusement of many Romans. Although the entertainment value of public and theatrical violence certainly appealed to the Elizabethans and Jacobean, the audience's only attraction to public executions and punishments as well as violence in theatres cannot solely have been a mere lust for bloodshed and amusement, as shall be explained in the following.

First, the audience was probably drawn to the scaffolds through the element of retributive justice. Since it was the responsibility of the state and the monarch to ensure that rules and laws were observed and protected, the people were animated

by a desire for righteousness and thus they wanted to be present when justice took place. The monarch was – after God – after all the authority who was to impose law and order, and without his well-ruling, the state would fall victim to disorder and chaos. Therefore, an execution was an excellent opportunity to check whether the sovereign really proved to be a good ruler and punished injustice in his country, or if he proved to be flawed and not virtuous and did not prosecute law-breakers appropriately or severely enough.

Quite on the contrary, however, it was also possible that executions came to appeal to its audience because they turned into an open stage for satire and criticism. Naturally, the monarch could only influence the course of the execution to a limited extent and thus these spectacles manifested themselves as unique opportunities to listen to open criticism addressed to the sovereign. Since the convict could utter last words and say whatever he wanted, the audience could indirectly take part in the convict's exertion of justice. The accused person expressed negative feelings about the monarch and mocked the state. Like that, the intention the state had by open violent punishment was actually subverted, allowing the authority of the monarch to be questioned and ambiguities of power to be uncovered instead.

Another motive for such a high presence of people at an execution presumably also was their strengthening of identity. As a “collective spirit” (Gurr 45), the audience could generate a ‘we-you-divide’ and thus declare the accused person an outsider of society. By use of their portrayal as themselves being lawful subjects and the contrasting offender as law-breaker, the audience reinforced their identity as being good subjects and thereby expelled the culprit from their community. Furthermore, through mutual verbal attack against the accused person, the spectators combined and concentrated their power, which lead to an intensified evocation of strength and might.

However, not only did executions and punishments provide the people with an opportunity to strengthen their collective identity of ‘lawful’ citizens against one trespasser. At the same time, with the culprit on the scaffolds, the people had a scapegoat at whom they could direct their frustration. (Ehrenreich 29) Thus, during an execution the audience addressed their words to the culprit and spoke their minds, accused him collectively and ‘condemned’ him. By this means the people were made to believe that they, for once, had the possibility to be the judge, instead of being judged. With their collective spirit and their “thrill of defensive solidarity [they could defeat] the beast that was the ancestor of [their] fears” (Ehrenreich 94). And yet, this belief – or perceived empowerment – was only an illusion. The strengthening of the individual's conviction to be free and powerful is after all a calculation of the state and his power. Instead of an empowerment of the subject, the state and the sovereign only increase their authority – without the people's detection.

Finally, people's enthusiasm about public executions can also be explained as religiously motivated. The citizens could liberate themselves mentally by projecting their own wrongdoings, faults and guilt onto somebody else. By choosing a scapegoat on whom they could unload their vices, they unburdened and released themselves from guilt and therefore cleansed their conscience. Comparable to Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God who took away the sins of humankind, the convict took the punishment for the people's sins and burdened himself with it. Consequently, with the projection of the onlookers' faults unto the accused man, the cumulated evil was unified in one person. This was even intensified by the fact that at executions it was common to view the culprit as a pseudo-martyr. Quite often the person on the scaffold was assigned a Jesus-Christ-like status (Merback 19). Furthermore, many myths surrounded him. His blood for instance was supposed to have healing and divine powers, which lead to people dipping handkerchiefs into the victim's blood.¹⁷ Rumour had it that the corpse or even the "death sweat" of the executed cast out diseases and sickness (Linebaugh 109-10). The spectators firmly believed that the death of another person would empower them and provide them with strength and (spiritual) healing.¹⁸

All things considered, it can be said that in the Elizabethan and Jacobean period, the audience expected more from an execution than just watching an exciting afternoon spectacle. The desire to possess power and strength, as well as experiencing justice or a consolidation of their sense of community were underlying, yet powerful, motivations for people to attend – and rejoice in – public executions. However, the anticipation of empowerment and freedom remained an illusion. It is, after all, the state who strengthened his authority.

After having shown the appeal of public executions and punishments, it is now pivotal to take a look at aestheticism of violence on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage. In London around 1600, every day approximately 3000-4000 men, women and children of every age and rank went to the theatre (Castrop 114-5). However, the spectators were, on the one hand, inevitably influenced by public executions and punishments and, on the other hand, biased by accounts about the history and also current affairs of their country. This led to the fact that the audience brought certain expectations, respectively expected conventions with them into the playhouses.

¹⁷ The tradition of dipping handkerchiefs in blood, respectively the keeping of relics of a dead person can also be seen in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. After Caesar's death, Anthony says: "But here's a parchment, with the seal of Caesar; / I found it in his closet – 'tis his will. / Let but the commons hear this testament – / Which, pardon me, I do not mean to read – / And they would go and kiss dead Caesar's wounds, / And dip their napkins in his sacred blood, / Yea, beg a hair of him for memory, / And dying, mention it within their wills, / Bequeathing it as a rich legacy / Unto their issue." (3.2.128-37).

¹⁸ It is interesting that this is heavily reminiscent of myths still existing in the twenty-first century. Acheiropoieta such as the Shroud of Turin or the Sudarium of Oviedo are still supposed to carry healing powers and to strengthen the person touching it.

First of all, it is without a doubt true that the audience was drawn to the theatres because they wanted to be entertained. Since plays and public executions or punishments were mutually dependent in their use of emotional and symbolic overload, they displayed tragic and/or horrifying fates of men and women which moved and thrilled the audience to an extent no other afternoon activity could have done.

Secondly, it is also very likely that – similar to today’s cinema goer – the spectators of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre highly enjoyed the bombast of stage plays. Dramatists and especially Shakespeare went all-out with their use of props and theatrical elements, for instance in war scenes, which were simulated as lifelike as possible, with armed weapons such as guns and canons, riot gear, war drums and clarions. These elements were an integral part of theatre pieces, regardless of whether tragedies, comedies or history plays were presented (Chambers 3: 52-3). Added to that was the utilization of music instruments, with whom not only war noises but also birds’ twittering could be imitated. (Keenan 73)

This penchant for life likeness also covered the portrayal of violence on stage. To all appearances, the depiction of violence was an important element and seemingly indispensable – not only in real-life executions but also on stage. However, the amusement in form of violent scenes that were imbedded in the play sometimes turned out to be so realistic that they were a threat to everyone present. Especially the use of armed weapons on stage led to accidents and even fatalities (Chambers 1: 283). Thus wrote the contemporary witness Philip Gawdy about a play of the Admiral’s Men in November 1587:

My L. Admyrall his men and players having a devyse in ther playe to tye one of their fellowes to a poste and so to shoote him to deathe, having borrowed their callyvers one of the players handes swerved his peece being charged with bullet missed the fellowe he aymed at and killed a chyld, and a woman great with chyld forthwith, and hurt an other man in the head very soore. (Chambers 2: 135)

Moreover, in order to act out violent scenes as realistic as possible, animal blood and innards were used during stage productions (Keenan 73). As a result, in the Elizabethan and Jacobean period, plays with gory scenes turned out to be particularly attractive to the audience and quickly became crowd favourites. Due to their innovative transfer of execution cruelties onto theatre stages, Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*, Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine the Great* and also Thomas Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy* proved to be veritable money-spinners (Smith 43), displaying highly exaggerated elements of violence, as for instance in the depicted braining of Bajazeth, Emperor of the Turks, and his wife Zabina, prisoners of Tamburlaine in Marlowe’s piece¹⁹, or regarding the dismemberments, mutilations and multiple deaths in Shakespeare’s play. Although these two plays can already be considered

¹⁹ On the aesthetics of braining see also Claudia Richter (63-8).

to be extremely violent, the Jacobean drama from 1604 on put forward plays with even more gruesome scenes (Tennenhouse, "Violence" 77).

Thirdly, it certainly can be said that, in general, violence and its display had an aesthetic appeal to humans, not only today, but also during the Elizabethan and Jacobean age. Therefore, the success and the attractiveness of violent theatre pieces developed due to the fact that the spectators were pleased to be viewers to violence during executions as well as on stage.

However, although the audience was on the one hand drawn to the playhouses because of the splendour and bombast which theatre was able to produce, they were, on the other hand attracted by an even more important quality of Elizabethan and Jacobean plays. Jürgen Wertheimer states:

[Es] steht zu erwarten, dass hinter der literarischen und künstlerischen Stilisierung von Gewalt elementare individuelle und gesellschaftliche Bedürfnisse der jeweiligen Kultur zum Ausdruck kommen. (10)

The cultural needs that Wertheimer mentions can in fact be seen in the presentation of themes used in the plays on stage. As the people were highly influenced by the display of violence through the state and its aforementioned steering of monarch-approved discourse, the attendance of plays in theatres was a means for the subjects to get a glimpse outside the box. The power of the stage was its possible subtle subversion of the monarch's authority and to – indirectly – question the ambiguities and paradoxes of the state's wheelings and dealings. Therefore, theatre became in some way "daily journalism" (Gurr 141), which could depict, discuss and challenge not only the lives of Elizabethan and Jacobean people – whether still alive or already dead – but also show a different opinion and view on things as the sovereign and the state showed themselves. The theme of violence in a play could therefore lay bare the power relations of the ruler towards the people and hence criticise the state's use of violence and punishments as means to subordinate and control the subjects. Furthermore, by underlining the relation between state-violence offstage and staged-violence in theatres and by showing that violence actually had turned into theatre, the playwrights could expose the use of theatricality by the sovereign, for instance Queen Elizabeth, thus subverting the monarch's most crucial and most relevant element of power.

All in all, the transfer of everyday violence onto the stage, as well as the use of spectacular and realistic elements were highly attractive to the Elizabethan and Jacobean people. However, the possibility of the state's subversion through the on stage challenge of the monarch's use of power turned theatre as well as the depiction of violence into a highly aesthetic and also satisfying experience for the spectators.

Titus Andronicus

In comparison with Shakespeare's other plays, there is no piece that he wrote which is as overtly bloody as *Titus Andronicus*. Alternating cruelties and atrocities dominate the plot, showing violence from which public punishments and executions in Elizabethan England could still learn a thing or two. And yet, although they seem – at first glance – to merely copy the exertion and display of power of the Elizabethan state and thus appear to conform with the proceedings of the sovereign, these exaggerated cruelties in *Titus Andronicus* are highly political and can be read not only as a reflection on Renaissance contemporary circumstances, but also as exceedingly critical of monarchical power, as shall be shown in this part of the thesis.

The Rape of Lavinia as Both Demonstration and Destruction of Power

The ravishment and mutilation in the second act can be seen in two different ways, because the meaning of Lavinia as a character and the significance of her body are highly ambiguous. Thus, I raise the theory that she is both: the state of Rome and a mutilated body politic, and a subject of Rome in form of a mutilated woman.

On the one hand, Lavinia is a female subject to the emperor Saturninus and therefore a subject to Tamora and her sons. By violating her, the state – in the persons of Demetrius and Chiron – exerts power through violence. It becomes clear, however, that the deed itself is completely arbitrary, since the two sons not necessarily have a reason for punishing the girl. It was after all Titus who had Alarbus – the oldest son of Tamora – unjustly executed, thus, the rape of Lavinia does not serve as a means of retributive justice. Instead, the use of violence against the girl acts as pleasure gain, since both violators do not appear to have an actual agenda. They only want Lavinia in order to have had her sexually:

DEMETRIUS	She is a woman, therefore may be wooed; She is a woman, therefore may be won; She is Lavinia, therefore must be loved. What, man! More water glideth by the mill Than wots the miller of, and easy it is Of a cut loaf to steal a shive, we know: Though Bassianus be the Emperor's brother, Better than he have worn Vulcan's badge.
	(TA 2.1.83-90)

Although both Demetrius and Chiron had thought about taking Lavinia by force, they eventually actually do it, because they are spurred on by Aaron:

AARON 'Tis policy and stratagem must do
 That you affect, and so must you resolve
 That what you cannot as you would achieve,
 You must perforce accomplish as you may.
 [...]

 My lords, a solemn hunting is in hand;
 [...]

 Single you thither then this dainty doe,
 And strike her home by force, if not by words
 (TA 2.1.105-119)

Since Lavinia is a woman, she is automatically othered from society. Apart from the fact that in *Titus Andronicus* women are treated as trophies that can be (and are supposed to be) possessed (Ballestra-Puech 122), her rape – like her death in the end of the play, too²⁰ – is an answer to her (unintentional) subversion of masculine power and ideals of honour. Whereas she is only supposed to be a tool and an object for the use of male authority games (Asp 335-7; Kolin 313), thus submitting to the will of the men around her, she ‘humiliates’ Saturninus by not marrying him, and ‘embarrasses’ Titus, who had promised the new emperor his daughter’s hand in marriage. Although Lavinia has no rights from the beginning on – she even keeps silent, when her brothers announce her being promised to Bassianus – she threatens male dominance and male power through her mere existence. Thus, as a means of demonstrating power, subjection is imposed on her through the disfigurement of her body by the sons of the Empress. Lavinia is physically and psychologically marked in order to assure the aforementioned internalization of (the state’s) power structure.²¹

However, she is not only mutilated, but also forcefully silenced forever – her tongue, i.e. her voice, is taken from her. If we consider Demetrius and Chiron to be agents of the state, the silencing of Lavinia and her inability to express herself are significant signs for a state monopoly on discourse, thus prohibiting any other discourse beside his own. Hence, the state imposes his powerfulness of speech on Lavinia and silences her with authority. Language therefore becomes an act of violence, and thus the question of discourse permission is raised: Who is allowed to speak and what is allowed to be said?

And yet, although Demetrius and Chiron intended for Lavinia to never speak again, she finds a way to express herself and to be heard anyway, by guiding a stick with her mouth and feet and writing messages in the sand. She, as a subject, thus subverts the will of the state – she will not be silenced. Likewise she does not

²⁰ By her rape, Titus feels that Lavinia has subverted the power of her father, causing him shame for which she can only pay for with her death. Thus, Titus says: “Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee, / And with thy shame thy father’s sorrow die” (TA 5.3.45-6).

²¹ Cf. chapter 3.2. Power and Retributive Justice of this thesis.

most of the people she was the only sovereign they had ever known. Thus, with the death of the monarch, England would be thrown into chaos, causing civil war to break out.

Hence, in *Titus Andronicus*, the spectators were confronted with a weak and fragile Rome, symbolizing a weak and fragile Queen Elizabeth, whose powers appear to have been diminished. The destroyed tree, i.e. the feeble body politic and the feeble human body show a rising feeling of insecurity and the growing questioning of the theory of the king's two bodies. Although the state in form of Demetrius and Chiron intends a demonstration of power through the violation of Lavinia, it turns out that eventually exactly the opposite happens. Rome in its personification of Lavinia is physically as well as psychologically mutilated, rendered powerless and finally destroyed. In other words, the worst fears of Shakespeare's Elizabethan audience are put on stage. However, through the short empowerment of Lavinia and her regaining of a language with which she can make herself heard, Shakespeare also shows a subversion of authority of the monarch by breaking the boundaries of discourse. And yet, the eventual death of Lavinia raises the question, if the subject can ever be empowered, or if it is just an illusion.

Titus, Injustice, and a Traditional Overcome Society

The depiction of the main protagonist Titus shows that his actions and demeanours cannot be brought in line with the actual development of the society and the political conditions around him. Titus does not belong into this world and hence does not find his way around in the new system. Instead, the avenger is confronted with a changing understanding of politics, resulting from the shifting ideals that occurred from the medieval to the modern period – i.e. the dissolution of chivalry and the change from a God-given to a civil system. Thus, his unjust and inappropriate actions provoke a disturbance in the cosmos, blur the lines between evil and good and result in a near extinction of his own genealogy.

Similar to Lear in *King Lear*, Titus commits several fatal blunders in the beginning and throughout the play, which are distinctive for the process of the plot, since they not only cause injustice but also incite revenge and escalating violence. Already in scene one, *Titus Andronicus* is presented as a universe, where a mixture of different political structures exists. Titus, who still believes in the system of the empire, is in favour of appointing a new emperor by primogeniture. Hence, he votes for Saturninus, although the new leader is by this time actually elected through a different system, that is, by the senate and via a democratic procedure. Even though Bassianus and Saturninus both strive for leadership, it is actually Titus, who is deemed to be the perfect successor by the people:

MARCUS Princes that strive by factions and by friends
Ambitiously for rule and empery,
Know that the people of Rome, for whom we stand

A special party, have by common voice,
 In election for the Roman empery,
 Chosen Andronicus, surnamèd Pius
 For many good and great deserts to Rome.
 (TA 1.1.18-24)

Consequently, it is likely that Titus himself is to some extent responsible for what happens in the following acts, since he – by refusing to become the next emperor and choosing a successor that is not at all fit for the job – provoked the upheaval of Rome and the destruction of his family. The hereditary rights that he deems to be sufficient for leading a country clash with the new era of democracy. As a result, the hopes expressed by Titus shortly before Saturninus is elected seem almost ironic to an Elizabethan audience, who – in contrast to Titus and everyone else – catches the element of foreshadowing of dark times to come:

TTTUS Tribunes, I thank you, and this suit I make,
 That you create our emperor's eldest son,
 Lord Saturnine, whose virtues will, I hope,
 Reflect on Rome as Titan's rays on earth,
 And ripen justice in this commonweal.
 (TA 1.1.223-7)

Strangely enough, Titus does not see the unsuitability of Saturninus as an emperor in the first place, although the speech the latter gives when he runs with Bassianus for leadership shows clearly to what Saturninus is capable of, setting the people of Rome against the two other contenders, wanting the people of Rome to fight for patrilineal primogeniture, if necessary with swords (Willbern 172). Hence, although a democratic system exists, Saturninus wants to use force in order to achieve his aims. However, it is much too late when Titus realises that – as a result of Saturninus reign – justice does not exist in Rome anymore, and Titus exclaims: “Terras Astraëa reliquit” (TA 4.3.4) – Astraëa, goddess of justice, has left the earth. The new emperor has turned cruel and abuses his powers, suspending laws and rules.²³ As a consequence, the power that had initially been Titus', has been passed down the line, from Titus to Saturninus, to Tamora and ultimately to Aaron. Thus, Titus himself provokes the tyranny that takes over the city:

TTTUS Ah, Rome! Well, well, I made thee miserable
 What time I threw the people's suffrages
 On him that thus doth tyrannize o'er me.
 (TA 4.3.18-20)

²³ Even the clown is killed – only for bringing bad news: “Clown: I have brought you a letter and a couple of pigeons here. / [*Saturninus reads the letter*] / Saturninus: Go, take him away and hang him presently. / Clown: How much money must I have? / Tamora: Come, sirrah, you must be hanged” (TA 4.4.43-6).

throughout the whole tragedy²⁴ and which would be enhanced by the fact that the audience knew that Titus' only way out of the system would be the complete destruction of it. However, the theory of an audience pitying Titus is eventually untenable.

Instead, the Romans are presented just as barbaric as the Goths, since Titus, in his fury, kills everyone, even his own sons (Cahn 310). Both Tamora and Titus show "Wild Justice" (Bacon 16), in other words unjust justice and exaggerated violence. Since the two characters act as embodiments of the state and thus their violence can be seen as an emblem of the state's violence in general, it is ironic that their own cruelty destroys the state in the end and therefore Titus and Tamora destroy themselves. Hence, *Titus Andronicus* reveals the non-existent difference between good and evil violence, for in both cases the aggressor is turned into a beast – even the Romans, although Marcus tries to talk some sense into his brother when he says: "Thou art a Roman; be not barbarous" (*TA* 1.1.378). It seems as if most characters of the play are reduced to the natural state of wild animals. As a consequence, Titus only listens to his egoism and his pride when slaying Alarbus, however, expecting clemency from Tamora later on. Therefore, the Roman protagonist is not different than Tamora or Aaron, showing off his power in the beginning of the play by deciding over life and death. Thus, it is more likely that Titus provoked incomprehension and repulsion for himself among the Elizabethan spectators.

And yet, it has to be noted that Titus does, after all, follow a certain logic by using revenge as an outlet. Since the violence around him has become completely absurd and irrational in its cruelty and gruesomeness, the eruption of violence on behalf of Titus, as well as his destruction of the people around him can be considered as the only way out of the system. Titus' impotence explodes and hence leads to an utter carnage and bloodbath, where extinction appears as the sole possibility to cope with the claustrophobia in a world that is not his own.

Concerning the ending of *Titus Andronicus*, I have to contradict David Willbern (and other scholars), who states, firstly, that with the instauration of an Andronici (in this case Lucius) order is restored in Rome and the state, and that, secondly, the society is rescued, turning Lucius into the hero of the play, bringing together Romans and Goths in peace (188).²⁵ Instead, I agree with Gail Kern Paster, who suggests that Rome is not newly ordered but the old violent structures which existed in the beginning are restored (84). Justice and order will never be reinstated in Rome, since violence and power of the sovereign always continue to exist, no matter who reigns. Thus, *Titus Andronicus* blurs the boundaries – showing that

²⁴ Unlike the bond that is created in *Richard III* between the audience and the protagonist, where the spectators also felt drawn to the tragic hero, however, where Richard loses the favour and affection of the Elizabethans due to his evil and the non-existence of repentance, as shall be shown in chapter 5. *Richard III* of this thesis.

²⁵ See also Robert S. Miola (71), who is of the same opinion as Willbern.

barbarism is no other but the self as well. Hence, at the end of the play everything finishes how it started, “the new emperor speaks with the voice of the old” (Smith 43), thus, Titus’ revenge neither brings back justice, nor is evil destroyed through Saturninus’ death, as Alan Sommers claims (121-2). Instead, Rome’s “broken limbs” (*TA* 5.3.72) cannot be put together again. Titus’s son Lucius and other generations of kings and queens to come will continue the path of violence and injustice (“Can the son’s eye behold his father bleed? / There’s meed for meed, death for a deadly deed”, *TA* 5.3.64-5) – everything comes round in a circle.

Aaron – the Remorseless and Othered Subverter of Power

In Renaissance England, the portrayal of the ‘other’ and thus the use of (cultural) difference became a popular theme in theatres. The influence of Elizabethan and Jacobean ventures overseas and the interaction with indigenous peoples raised questions of the natural state of man and led to manifold depictions of civilisation and barbarity in art, literature and on stage. Likewise, the moor, such as the Prince of Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice*, or Othello himself, was an ever-present type of character, not only in Shakespeare’s works (Bartels 265-6). In *Titus Andronicus*, the morally depraved Aaron with his propensity towards evil scheming and his remorseless use of violence can be seen as the ultimate outcast of society. However, although he is ‘other’, he is still one of the most powerful characters – if not *the* most powerful character – in the whole play. Even if he pays with his life in the end, his cunning use of manipulative force and his consequent subversion of the state turn him nevertheless into the actual winner of *Titus Andronicus*, as shall be shown in this chapter.

Aaron’s depiction literally is a black-and-white one. Throughout the play, the audience is constantly reminded that the outer appearance of the moor points to his immorality and cruelty, and that, thus, his soul is as dark as his skin (*TA* 3.1.204):

BASSIANUS	Believe me, Queen, your swarthy Cimmerian Doth make your honour of his body’s hue, Spotted, detested, and abominable.
	(<i>TA</i> 2.3.72-4)

Thus, because he is ‘other’, he is accused of incarnating all evil in himself. Furthermore, the audience knows of his dark and violent constitution not only through his outer appearance, but also because of the conversation he has with Tamora in the woods, where he refers to the planet Saturn as his influential element (“Madam, though Venus govern your desires, / Saturn is the dominator over mine”, *TA* 2.3.30-1). The astrologically educated Elizabethan knew right away that a reference to Aaron’s character is made, since man was considered to be connected to the cosmos, and being under the influence of a certain planet

Although his violence and manipulations other him from society, he cannot be considered a Machiavellist, since he has no intention of obtaining power. Instead, he only wants violence for the sake of it, as a pleasure gain. The audience is never told why else he commits the numerous violent acts, but for the idea of fun. It is clear that he has no conscience, whatsoever. The misery of others is his delight (Jones 53)²⁸:

AARON I played the cheater for thy father's hand,
 And when I had it, drew myself apart,
 And almost broke my heart with extreme laughter.
 I pried me through the crevice of a wall,
 When, for his hand, he had his two son's heads,
 Beheld his tears, and laughed so heartily
 That both mine eyes were rainy like to his;
 And when I told the Empress of this sport,
 She sounded almost at my pleasing tale,
 And for my tidings gave me twenty kisses.
(TA 5.1.111-20)

However, although Titus commits crueller deeds than Aaron – he kills his son, sacrifices Alarbus, stabs his daughter and slays Demetrius and Chiron in order to bake them in pies and feed them to their mother – Aaron is still portrayed as the ultimate villain, whereas Titus remains more or less a noble character (Fiedler 180). What makes Aaron different, and thus villainous, is his language. Therefore, whereas Titus acts out his violence, Aaron is strongly manipulative through his speech, remorselessly spurring other people on to be violent and cruel. His language is – among other things – what others him from Titus and the rest of the characters. And his language is – most importantly – his power, as shall be shown below.

As clarified, Aaron is the definition of an ‘other’. This is underlined by the fact that he defies the authorities, showing the uselessness of torture. When he is supposed to be slowly killed in the end, he easily manipulates Lucius (and hence the state as well) with the power of his language, demonstrating that even pain and violence prove to be a futile attempt of demonstrating monarchical power on his

²⁸ His attraction to violence can also be seen in other scenes of the play: “Aaron: O, how this villainy / Doth fat me with the very thought of it” (TA 3.1.201-2); “Messenger: Here are the heads of thy noble sons, / And here's thy hand in scorn to thee sent back – / Thy grief their sports, thy resolution mocked” (TA 3.1.235-7); “Lucius: Art thou not sorry for these heinous deeds? / Aaron: Ay, that I had not done a thousand more. / Even now I curse the day – and yet I think / Few come within the compass of my curse – / Wherein I did not some notorious ill; / [...] But I have done a thousand dreadful things / As willingly as one would kill a fly, / And nothing grieves me heartily indeed, / But that I cannot do ten thousand more” (TA 5.1.123-44).

body. As already mentioned in earlier chapters, according to Foucault, public punishment constitutes monarchical power, since

[the] public execution is to be understood not only as a judicial, but also as a political ritual. It belongs, even in the minor cases, to the ceremonies by which power is manifested (*Discipline* 50).

However, exactly the opposite happens in *Titus Andronicus*. Here, public death is presented as an “exposition of its hollowness” (Smith 46). Lucius wants Aaron to be punished “as a spectacle of royal power and authority” (Smith 48), but instead the state’s power is subverted in the end, because Aaron is not punished, respectively, because Aaron does not let his bad end be a punishment. As a matter of fact, things do not go the way Lucius had intended, since his victim does not try to change Lucius’ mind with pleas and assertions of innocence – he does not even show fear of his and his child’s nearing death – however, granted, he does fight for his son to live. Aaron rather revels in the opportunity to talk about his misdeeds until the very end, instead of being killed cleanly with a hanging (Smith 48-9):

AARON If there be devils, would I were a devil,
 To live and burn in everlasting fire,
 So I might have your company in hell,
 But to torment you with my bitter tongue.
(TA 5.1.147-50)

It is only then that Lucius realises that Aaron’s violence is first and foremost his manipulative language. Hence, the son of Titus orders him to be silenced: “Sirs, stop his mouth, and let him speak no more” (TA 5.1.151). Thus, it not only becomes evident how powerful speech turns out to be, but also that Aaron uses the power of language to torment everyone around him. Strikingly, Lucius falls for Aaron’s trick – instead of closing him off from public display, he makes it possible that Aaron can work his power of speech until his very end, keeping up his manipulation. As a result, the connection between Aaron and a condemned person at public executions in Elizabethan times is drawn, where language is used in order to subvert the state and the monarch’s political and ideological powers.

Thus, Shakespeare shows in Aaron a character, who is not only othered from society, but who is – to make matters worse for the state – capable of deconstructing power, being an emblem of subversive force (Smith 51). Furthermore, Foucault’s aforementioned thesis of the reactivation of power through public execution is also not fitting here, since – as a matter of fact – the state’s power is not reactivated in *Titus Andronicus*. As a result, Aaron can be considered as the true ‘winner’ of the play. Although he is killed in the end, he does not care at all. Instead, Lucius is shown as a weak successor, who is easily manipulated and who’s powers are effortlessly subverted. Thus, there is no hopeful new Rome existent,

but rather a Rome, where violence will repeat itself and exerted by the following generations to come, like the young Lucius says: “f I were a man, / Their mother’s bedchamber should not be safe” (*TA* 4.1.106-7) (Bladen 59).

Conclusion

Titus Andronicus shows a disturbed cosmos where violence seems to be the only possible reaction to a world that has changed completely. Nothing, it appears, makes sense anymore: Lavinia, the embodiment of Rome and an analogy to Queen Elizabeth is weak, mutilated and destroyed, Titus is both victim and attacker, slaying friend and foe alike, and Aaron, despite his status of the other, empowers himself and subverts the state and everybody around him with ease. Justice and order do not belong into this universe and are rendered illogic and futile by each character. Instead of a restored Rome, we find a vicious circle of damnation foreshadowing a never-ending violence. Thus, although a successor takes on the role of Rome’s emperor, it is evident that still no good can exist with him. Hence, due to its bleak outlook and the very likely repetition of history, the play remains open and unfinished to some extent.

Furthermore, although it is the intention of a state – Elizabethan and Jacobean alike – to use a separation of good from evil, as well as the promotion of good violence in contrast to the punishment of evil violence as means to enhance his power and underline the authority of the monarch, in *Titus Andronicus*, however, the power of the state is subverted – firstly, by Titus and his injustice and his own cruelty towards his children, secondly, by Lavinia who finds herself able to speak even though she was silenced, and thirdly, by Aaron who – ironically – is the embodiment of the Other, the evil. The play emphasises that the separation between good and evil is, in fact, the state’s way of manifesting its own power and of subjecting its people, and that, hence, a portrayal of goodness by the sovereign does not at all automatically entail social well-being for the subjects. Instead, in *Titus Andronicus* boundaries between good and evil are blurred – neither Rome nor the Goths are displayed as good and righteous, both are unjust and cruel, intent on gaining and maintaining their power by all means. As a result, violence always is an indicator for the inhumanness of man.

Therefore, Shakespeare mirrors the terror of contemporary Elizabethan England, where changes from old to new concepts of the world raise a strong insecurity among the people – and it is due to the capturing of the “claustrophobia of the age” (Haekel 9) that *Titus Andronicus* and other revenge plays turned out to be highly appealing for the spectators.

Richard III

Even if violence is not made explicit in *Richard III* like it is in *Titus Andronicus*, it is still strongly hinted at. Although only two characters actually die on stage, the primary text as well as the secondary text indicate that thirteen characters die in total – nine at the hands of Richard.²⁹ However, even though violence is not used in its bloody and gory form like in the revenge play mentioned before, it is nevertheless most fascinating that *Richard III* not only evokes but also portrays an ever-present violent atmosphere. On the one hand, the audience is intrigued by Richard as a character and – instead of condemning it – appreciates the protagonist's violent scheming. On the other hand, the spectators are confronted with a thoroughly evil character, who relishes every action of violence himself. The depiction of violence can, however, be read as the creation of an Other, thus enhancing a distinction between good and evil. This distinction produces a glorification but also a critique and warning, as shall be shown in the following.

Aestheticism and Appeal of Violence

Since *Richard III* constitutes the final play of the first tetralogy of Shakespeare's History Plays, it can be expected that the Elizabethan audience knew about the story of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, respectively Richard III, either through handed down historic knowledge or owing to earlier visits to the theatre. Hence, the spectators were aware that the play would – to the best of their knowledge – be about a ruthless, murderous and, at the end, defeated machiavel. Thus, it was because of Richard's covert intrigues and horrible scheming for power, as well as his secret and merciless murders that the play proved very popular among the audience from the beginning on. The playgoers would shudder about the piece and the protagonist's cruelties and inhumanities. However, at the same time they enjoyed the violence he performed, because they knew the historic ending of the king and hence were aware of the fact that he would be slain and rightfully punished in the end, thus receiving poetic justice. Furthermore, the spectators knew what was coming – also because Richard announces it in the first scene – and consequently they were shocked about the brutalities only to a limited extent.

However, the audience's knowledge and certainty about Richard's death was not the only motive for an aestheticisation of the depicted violence in the play, as

²⁹ These are: the Duke of Clarence, Lord Hastings, Lady Anne, Earl Rivers, Lord Grey, Sir Vaughan, the two young princes (Young Duke of York and Young Prince of Wales) and the Duke of Buckingham. Moreover, King Edward IV dies of illness, the Duke of Norfolk and Sir Robert Brakenbury are killed at the Battle of Bosworth Field and Richard is slain by the Earl of Richmond. Moreover, in the play there are also other people mentioned, who lose their lives, as for instance Walter Lord Ferrers and Sir William Brandon. These, however, are characters that are not mentioned in the play's dramatis personae and thus never appear on stage. Therefore they shall not be added to this paper's number of characters killed.

shall be discussed in the following. First of all, one definite argument for his success with the spectators was Richard's magnetic character. Although the audience was shocked and repulsed, they were also attracted to him at the same time. Even if they did not intend to, the playgoers found themselves siding with Richard, because they knew, a part of that cruel machiavel was hiding in them as well (Ros-siter 78; Bromley 33). Thus, Richard embodied a lust for violence, which was also familiar to the execution-loving Elizabethan audience.

Furthermore, the spectators are made into confidants of Richard's plans. Through monologues and soliloquies, the machiavel lets them in on his intrigues:

RICHARD Plots have I laid inductive, dangerous,
 By drunken prophecies, libels, and dreams,
 To set my brother Clarence and the King
 In deadly hate the one against the other;
 And if King Edward be as true and just
 As I am subtle, false, and treacherous,
 This day should Clarence closely be mew'd up
 About a prophecy which says that 'G'
 Of Edward's heirs the murderer shall be.
 Enter Clarence with Brakenbury and a guard of men
 Dive, thoughts, down to my soul; here Clarence comes.
 (R.III 1.1.32-41)

The fact that he plays a role in front of every character in the play and is not who he pretends to be, but at the same time gives away openly all of his secret intentions towards the audience, turns him into a very charismatic and fascinating person. By means of this manipulation of distance and the closeness to the audience Richard makes them feel a certain kind of intimacy towards him. Consequently, the spectators are only partially scared off and instead develop a voyeuristic interest in Richard's cruelties. There is also the fact that the playgoers presumably detected a moral weakness in the characters Richard killed, and thus did not necessarily feel pity for them dying. Donald G. Watson argues that all characters that are put to death in the play can be considered complicit in their own downfall. Hence, they engaged the spectators' contempt and anger:

Self-interest governs everyone: Clarence naively believes his defection from the Yorkist cause will be forgotten because he wants it forgotten; Anne finds security in a profitable marriage; Edward allows his fears to displace kinship in ordering Clarence's imprisonment" (109)

According to Watson, the victims deserved their death and thus, the audience could enjoy the violence inflicted on them by Richard. This argument seems justified in some cases; however, it is questionable whether the two young princes deserved to die as well. The attractiveness of the tragic hero is due to what David

D. Raphael calls the “grandeur d’âme” (26). Although the audience is in *Richard III* not confronted with the typical tragic hero, but instead finds a Machiavellist, yet winsome villain as main character, they still admire him for his “effort to resist” (26).

However, not only the audience is interested in the violence Richard presents, but also the protagonist Richard himself relishes in the action of murdering. Like the audience that entertained themselves at executions and considered the bloody spectacle as a pleasant afternoon activity, Richard, too, perceives the destruction of people as entertaining. First, he devotes all his power of persuasion and rhetoric abilities on convincing Anne to be his wife. Then – after a positive answer – he triumphantly informs the audience about her awaiting death when she has served her purpose. Thus, he says in 1.1.:

RICHARD The readiest way to make the wench amends
Is to become her husband and her father,
The which I will – not all so much for love,
As for another secret close intent
By marrying her which I must reach unto.
(*R.III* 1.1.154-8)

One scene later he adds, again to the audience:

RICHARD Was ever woman in this humour wooed?
Was ever woman in this humour won?
I’ll have her, but I will not keep her long.
(*R.III* 1.2.213-5)

Given the fact that it does not become clear until the end of the play what exactly he had planned for her, respectively what his “secret close intent” (*R.III* 1.1.157) had been, it can be concluded that he only wanted to have her in order to destroy her. He killed her just to watch her die and therefore Anne’s murder can be considered as pure amusement, due to its needlessness.

Hence, what is striking in *Richard III* is the fact that the protagonist is not using violence in order to gain power, but that instead he is using the power that he gained in order to exert violence (Held 179; Rabkin 95). He wants to be violent out of lust and aesthetic reasons, and since he “cannot prove a lover” (*R.III* 1.1.28) he simply wants to “entertain these fair well-spoken days” (*R.III* 1.1.29). Therefore, in the play violence is used for the sake of violence. Richard, as a Machiavellian tyrant, has no remorse to kill his brother, his wife Anne, as well as the two young boys. He uses murder for the sole purpose of amusing himself; he uses violence, because he *can*. And yet, it is the lust for violence and consequently the striving for power and the fact that cruelty and evil appeal to him to the extent that is shown in the play, that Richard provokes his own doom and that he thus becomes the agent of his own downfall (Baker 709). In other words, with his

deeds he acts against the Machiavellian ideal of a prince who is – though feared – not hated. Accordingly, he is not a good and just ruler anymore and, as a result, disturbs the cosmos, which, in turn, discards of him in the end. Fortuna's wheel has carried him up and – through his own faults and the use of tyranny – ultimately brought him down again, turning the history play into a de-casibus-tragedy.

Yet, in contrast to other tragic heroes who draw the spectators' admiration until the very end of the play, Richard steadily begins to repel the audience's attraction to him. Since he is evil from the first to the last scene, a final moral redemption which is typically found in a tragic hero does not emerge in his case. The brief insecurity after he wakes from his restless sleep

RICHARD O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!
 The lights burn blue. It is now dead midnight.
 Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh.
 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.
 Then fly. – What, from myself? – Great reason why:
 Lest I revenge. – What, myself upon myself?
 Alack, I love myself. – Wherefore? – For any good
 That I myself have done unto myself. –
 O no, alas, I rather hate myself
 For hateful deeds committed by myself.
 (R.III 5.4.158-69)

is quickly discarded by him:

RICHARD Let not our babbling dreams affright our souls.
 Conscience is but a word that cowards use,
 Devised at first to keep the strong in awe.
 Our strong arms be our conscience, swords our law.
 (R.III 5.5.37-40)

Thus, due to the lack of moral recognition, the attractiveness of his character diminishes through the course of the play and finally, in the end, Richard himself seems to know the feelings of the audience he has driven away, voicing the words “if I die, no soul will pity me” (R.III 5.4.180).

All in all, *Richard III* shows a double meaning for violence. On one side, the audience could find aesthetic violence in the play. The very negative depiction of Richard as well as his evil scheming, in combination with his appealing ambiguous aura made the general aesthetic experience of violent plays on stage all the more attractive. On the other side, the play presents Richard's own lust for destruction and murder, which – to some extent – seems to mirror the audience's own lust for violence and destruction. However, since the protagonist does not use violence

for power, but power for violence, his thorough evil is emphasised, eventually repelling the audience and bringing Richard to his own provoked destruction.

Yet it could be argued that the fascination with evil is the most crucial aspect in the play, and the reason the audience is drawn to Richard, as well as repelled by him in the end. Since it becomes not entirely clear, why Richard uses violence, evil remains unexplained, thus scaring the audience away eventually.

Violence as the Creation of an Other (Good vs. Evil)

Both Holinshed's and Hall's chronicles that were used by Shakespeare to construct the play of *Richard III* had been written during the Tudor period and were therefore biased and highly restricted in their perception of political history. Consequently, the poet's portrayal of the past also distorted and blurred historical facts (Holderness 209). Apart from the two sources mentioned, Shakespeare did not refer to other chronicles, although other traditions and records must have existed. According to George Buck's description, Richard III had been anything but murderous and cruel. Thus, Buck elaborates:

But King Richard did many good things both for the publike good, advancing Gods service, and maintenance of his Ministers and Church-men. [...] Tyrants be cruel and bloody: but this King, by the testimony of his enemies, was very merciful and milde; who confesse he was of himself gentle, and affably disposed. These be their own words. (134)

According to Thomas Heywood and his *An Apology for Actors*, the intended effect of a play is "to teach the subjects obedience to their King" (Book 3, sig. F3^v) and to demonstrate what will happen to those who cause trouble and disturb the peace. Therefore, it is not surprising that such a violent depiction of Richard as a ruthless killer is designed to defame the Yorkist past and to glorify the present – the Tudor reign (Bromley 31). In this case it is Richard, a usurper and evil machiavel, who is portrayed as a violent and cruel villain in order to make the audience see and realize what is considered good and evil in their own Elizabethan time. Everything belonging to the old Yorkist reign is foul and thus has to be portrayed as such on stage as well. Accordingly, the main concern of the chroniclers was to depict Richard in the worst way possible. Shakespeare – who probably would have had to expect sanctions if he had referred to sources that showed a positive portrayal of Richard – consequently also presents a sovereign who is almost bursting with brutality and violence.

Identical to public executions, where the destruction of evil justified and strengthened the good, also Richard III had to be portrayed as evil as possible in order to glorify and justify the Tudor reign of the Elizabethan period. The violence exerted by the king in the play, the intrigues and the secret conspiracies to murder have to be so cruelly depicted that actions against him – in this case in

form of Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, the subsequent king – not only seem comprehensible to the audience but are even desired by them. Thus, the evil Richard is put in contrast to the just Richmond to manifest a clear distinction between evil and good. Given the fact that Richard is killed in the end, the audience not only realises that he *will* meet his downfall, but that he *must* meet his downfall. The violent evil has to be destroyed, even if this means that the sovereign himself has to be destroyed. Therefore, the plot also comments on the question of royal succession, as well as the people's right to resist a bad and violent king. Richmond, who is later crowned king, defied his bad sovereign successfully and even killed him and was still, or because of that, celebrated as the glorious victor and rightful successor. Thus, violence in *Richard III* also serves to separate good from evil. At the same time it also separates legitimised violence that is exerted by the good from illegitimate violence that is exerted by the evil. Richard's intrigues are understood by the spectators as unlawful and therefore his evil violence cannot be justified, whereas the violence exerted by Richmond at the end of act five – namely killing Richard in battle – is understood by the audience as legitimised and good. Consequently, Tudor royal splendour and righteousness are reinforced through theatricality, whereas the enemies of this splendour are destroyed through theatrical violence (R. Wilson 11-2).

The destruction of evil in the cruellest way possible, as could be seen in the public executions, where a person would be hanged, disembowelled and quartered, is also applicable to the depiction of evil in *Richard III*. Here, however, the crueller evil is portrayed, the better good is portrayed. The necessity for a black-and-white-depiction can especially be seen in Richard's plotting for the murder of his brother. The sovereign's fratricide is the worst murder that could be committed, since it is "a violation [...] of the contract known as 'family'" (Liebler 47). The murdering of a brother thus crosses the line between the tolerable, the reasonable and the immoral, the utter evil. Through the execution of Clarence, Richard is depicted as inhuman and almost beastly. As a result, the audience not only accepts his death but also sees his eventual downfall as a just punishment. Furthermore, being a violent and cruel character he is not attributed a positive outer appearance, but is instead portrayed as ugly and almost devilish. Since physical deformity was seen as a sign for moral depravity in Shakespeare's time (Held 187), the deformity of the protagonist is used as an enhancement of his evil inner depiction. Thus, the black and white portrayal of evil versus good is strengthened, since evil is even more evil when it is ugly. Therefore, Shakespeare's Richard is of bad shape "deformed, unfinished" (*R.III* 1.1.20), born with a limp and a deformed arm, "mine arm / Is like a blasted sapling withered up" (*R.III* 3.4.73-4), although the historic Richard not necessarily looked like that. The portrayal of his mythic and devilish appearance is even enhanced when Queen Margaret adds that Richard had been born with teeth ("That dog that had his teeth before his eyes", *R.III* 4.4.46). Being physically attractive is and has always been reserved for virtuous and morally good

characters and therefore evil in Shakespeare's play is defined from good through the exaggerated description of Richard's bad outer appearance.

However, the Tudor Myth and its ambiguity of good and evil is not only the most prominent theme in *Richard III*, but it also emphasises the idea of torment as a uniting factor for the state. It is only through the suffering of the individual that the country can emerge much more strengthened and unified in the end. In order to be a great nation, hardship must be overcome first. Therefore, the Tudor Myth also underlines that old structures have to fall apart to make way for better things. Thus, the age of violence that was brought to its peak with the ascension of Richard III has to be defeated. It is only through the evil depiction of the other, the wrong way so to speak, that a portrayal of what is good can be successful and reasonable – it is only thereby that good can take full effect.

Here it furthermore becomes clear that Shakespeare – seemingly following the path of the righteous Tudor monarchs – presented the play very ambiguously. On the one hand, we see a highly religious piece, in which evil turns into God's last test for mankind before the advent of the Golden Age, the “troubles of a country [being] God's punishment for its sins” (Tillyard, *History Plays* 156). Richard thus becomes an element of God's greater scheme, eventually leading “England into her haven of Tudor prosperity” (Tillyard, *History Plays* 204).³⁰ However, although this can be seen as one element Shakespeare adapted in support of the Tudor Myth, I have to contradict Philip K. Bock's view that *Richard III* merely “gives prophetic and supernatural sanction to the winning side and stresses the moral significance of events” (37). Instead, other elements can be found that seem to subvert the idea completely. Richard, although being part of God's greater scheme and imposed onto England as His representative on earth, is evil from nature. He has – due to man's Fall – let himself be corrupted by his innate evil inclinations, thus sinking unto the level of beasts in the chain of being, striving for change and revolution instead, causing the whole cosmos to disarrange. Consequently he is described in animal terms, being a “poisonous hunch-back'd toad” (*R.III* 1.3.246), a “bottled spider” (*R.III* 1.3.242), an “abortive, rooting hog” (*R.III* 1.3.225) and a “hedgehog” (*R.III* 1.2.100). Although he is a more or less rightful and crowned monarch, he is at the same time the incarnation of man's Fall and the embodiment of Original Sin. There is no humaneness in him, only lust for power and violence by all existing means. Hence, it is made clear that *Richard III* is not only a play about the good and evil in human nature (Baker 709), but that it likewise questions the steadily rising power structures and capabilities of the sovereign in general. As a result, by showing violence as the creation of an ‘other’, the play serves as a warning, a mirror for magistrates so to speak, stressing the dangers of a monarch who reigns however it pleases him. Machiavellianism thus transforms the

³⁰ On the role of Richard as God's avenging agent as the result of the deposition of Richard II see also David L. Frey (74), Arthur P. Rossiter (82-3) and Calvin G. Thayer (12-3; 94-5).

prince into said other, who distances himself from parliament and subject, in order to gain absolute power.

Therefore, on the one hand, the non existence of Richard's morals emphasises a Tudor reign where rule and the sovereign are supposed to be 'better' than before and where violence is good violence if it is useful to the glorious Elizabethan period. However, on the other hand the portrayal of evil as opposed to good also acts as a warning for kings and queens, to not abuse their power. By showing a corrupted kingdom, Shakespeare criticises a monarch who literally takes the centre stage and dismisses and defies all existing rules.

Conclusion

With the use of a time lapsed structure in his depiction of historic events as well as a diverse and broad addition of theatrically important details, Shakespeare steers the portrayal of Richard together with the contemporary theme of the Tudor Myth and the dealing with the Elizabethan / Tudor past even stronger into a fixed direction. On the one hand, the quick succession of cruel historic events during Richard's rule, and also the accumulation of historically not identifiable but scenic and thrilling elements – as for instance the dream he has in scene 5.4 in which he is haunted by the ghosts of the people he had murdered – emphasise his wickedness, turning him into an even more magnetic villain for the audience. On the other hand, a black and white depiction is underlined, firstly, making Richard seem even more vicious from nature and, secondly, stressing the fact that his malignity and evil cannot be explained. This in turn renders the character of Richard as well as his actions so fascinating for the spectators. It can be seen that in Shakespeare's piece not only the fascination with evil but also the question of man's natural state plays a leading role. Thus, Richard is depicted as a monstrous arch-villain, who – by his character traits and the exaggeration of negative bodily features – strongly enhances the Tudor Myth surrounding Henry VII.

However, although he at first captures the audience with his winning manner and his rhetoric skills, his initial attractiveness gradually subsides, until solely his tyranny remains at the end of the play, leaving the Elizabethan spectator puzzled by his ambiguity and paradox character, possibly asking themselves in how far the negative portrayal of Richard could be compatible with general ideas about monarchs and the state of England.

Likewise, although the mythologization around the Tudors is without a doubt the most prominent feature in *Richard III*, in can nevertheless be gathered from the play that a closer examination of the sovereign as well as his or her power expansion takes place. Even if the Elizabethan world picture still refers to the God-appointed status of the king or queen, however including a joint collaboration with the parliament and the state, a development towards an absolutist sovereign becomes visible. In addition, the question arises if a monarch, even when he

proves to be a tyrant, can be deposited although he had been crowned and thus appointed by God himself. Both aspects are highly topical in *Richard III*, yet cannot find an answer in the play. Still, Shakespeare subverts the expectations of his audience, confronting them with an ambiguous, almighty machiavel, who is both loved and hated by the spectators.

King Lear

The play of *King Lear* is generally considered Shakespeare's play with the highest number of universal themes and topics of Elizabeth and Jacobean relevance, combining questions of evil versus good, divine legitimacy in a changing perception of the world and the cosmos, as well as integrating elements of insecurity and fear. In the following, these issues will be analysed to a closer extent.

Lear and Universal Injustice

Right in the beginning of the play, Lear commits a fatal blunder that will not only influence the whole future of his life and everybody's around him, but – even worse – ruin the cosmic balance and engulf the world he lives in a crisis. The combination of his decision to resign from his duties as a king and to divide the country into three parts, the choice of putting his trust in the wrong daughters, to give in to his pride when he realises that Cordelia will not speak the words he had laid out for her in his head and the resulting emotional overreaction to disinherit her and turn her into an outcast entail catastrophic consequences that cannot be undone.

My first proposition, which traverses the entire storyline of the play, is that of a creation of an alternative universe through Lear's actions in the beginning of the play. He wrongly assumes to be in an absolutist position in which he can use and abuse his monarchic powers at his leisure, thus believing himself rightfully able, firstly, to give away his position as king before he has actually died and, secondly, to choose an heir, therefore disregarding hereditary rights and obligations. By doing so, he not only violates the rules of the state, but also and more significantly violates universal and God-given laws. In the Elizabethan age, being God's chosen representative on earth was not considered to be an office the sovereign could tamper with, instead it was a personal property that was inherent to the monarch and thus could not be discarded at will but had to be taken as a fact and executed with dignity and a demeanour fit for a ruler, until his (or her) death. Thus, either the king has not understood the concept of the two bodies he inhabits and is thus "in deep confusion over it" (Kermode, "King Lear" 1251), or he overestimates his power abilities and consequently the pretension concerning his rank is what made him violate the rules.

This hideous rashness. Answer my life my judgement,
 Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least,
 Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sound
 Reverbs no hollowness.

[...]

My life I never held but as a pawn
 To wage against thine enemies; ne'er feared to lose it,
 Thy safety being motive.

[...]

---- Revoke thy gift,
 Or, whilst I can vent clamour from my throat,
 I'll tell thee thou dost evil.

(*KL* 1.1.148-65)³²

Kent fails in his attempt to illuminate the dangerous situation that is about to arise for the king, who in his pride is not able to see the violence he will do to the cosmos if he decides against a withdrawal of his decision. In both instances, with Cordelia as with Kent, Lear commits violence against two of the few people in his state he can actually trust, only out of pride. Moreover, his bad decision of giving his kingdom into the hands of Goneril and Regan happens entirely out of arrogant and proud reasons. From this moment on, the audience knows that Lear and everybody else is irrevocably doomed. By his blunders, Lear created an alternative universe, in which everything good that is attempted turns out evil, and everything evil that happens, happens because of the disruption Lear caused in the beginning. In other words, in the alternative universe, all laws and rules that existed before have been turned around at 180 degrees and “every possible thesis about the action and its implications [is confronted] with an antithesis” (Rackin 30). As a result, everything that happens in the alternative universe can be seen as an inverted mirror image of what should have happened. Instead of a Cordelia that takes him in into her house, he has a Goneril and a Regan who discard him and cast him out into the storm. Due to his blunder, everything that *can* go wrong actually *will* go wrong from now on – Lear created the universal injustice in an unjust parallel universe.

Lear, whose beliefs are pagan and who repeatedly calls upon the forces of the natural and divine (Cantor 232)³³, consequently thinks in the beginning of the play

³² Whereas in the Folio version Kent only entreats Lear to reverse the latter’s “state“ and to revoke his “gift“, the Quarto version is more explicit regarding the fate that will befall the king, should he cast out his daughter Cordelia: “Kent: Reverse thy *doom* [...] Revoke thy *doom*“ (*KL* Q. 1.140, 1.153, my italics).

³³ LEAR: “For by the sacred radiance of the sun, / The mysteries of Hecate and the night, / By all operations of the orbs / From whom we do exist and cease to be“ (*KL* 1.1.109-12); “Hear, Nature, hear! dear Goddess, hear!“ (*KL* 1.4.284); “You nimble lightnings, dart your blinding flames / Into her scornful eyes! Infect her beauty, / You fen-suck’d fogs, drawn by the powerful sun, / To fall and blast her pride!“ (*KL* 2.4.166-9); “You Heavens, give me that patience, patience I

that order – cosmic and therefore also political – is existent in nature and therefore a given fact. Furthermore, he is certain that natural and divine order belong together and cannot be separated from each other and that they are moreover conjoint with human justice (Cantor 231-2). Thus, by putting his faith in nature's justness, he expects that Goneril and Regan will be justly punished for their behaviour by a divine instance and that he does not have to do it himself (Cantor 232). He exclaims when Goneril dismisses him:

LEAR All the stored vengeance of heaven fall
 On her ungrateful top! Strike her young bones,
 You taking airs, with lameness!
 [...]
 You nimble lightnings, dart your blinding flames
 Into her scornful eyes. Infect her beauty,
 You fen-sucked fogs drawn by the pow'rful sun
 To fall and blister her!

(*KL* 2.4.158-64)³⁴

However, although it becomes clear to the audience – after having witnessed the ungrateful behaviour of the two older daughters in the first seven scenes – that in this alternative universe human nature does not necessarily entail human justice, but Lear does not (yet) realise the wrongness of his assumptions. Furthermore, it does not occur to him that he is the cause for injustice in his world. If it had not been for him and his blunders, the injustice would not have developed in the first place. It is only later, outside in the heath, after the outbreak of the storm that he starts to question whether justice can exist by nature at all.

After having been cast out by Goneril and Regan, Lear finds himself in an apparently never-ending violent thunderstorm (“storm still”, *KL* 3.2) – a result and at the same time a mirror image of the disorder in the cosmos provoked by Lear himself. Gradually turning mad, his “wit begin[ing] to turn” (*KL* 3.2.67), he is joined by the fool and Edgar who, on the run and fearing for his life, has disguised himself as a madman called Poor Tom. Ironically, even though Lear is out of his senses, he understands that injustice is all around him and ever existent for the lower “poor naked wretches” (*KL* 3.4.28) and that he now, too, has become a victim of injustice. He convokes a staged trial to bring justice upon Goneril and Regan, in which the fool takes the role as a “sapient sir” (*KL* 3.6.22), a “yokefel-

need! – / You see me here, you Gods, a poor old man” (*KL* 2.4.273-4); “Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow! / You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout / Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks! / You sulph'rous and though-executing fires, / Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts, / Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder, / Strike flat the thick rotundity o'th'world! / Crack Nature's moulds, all germens spill at once / That makes ingrateful man!” (*KL* 3.2.1-9); “Spit, fire! spout, rain!” (*KL* 3.2.14).

³⁴ The Quarto version says “You fen-sucked fogs drawn by the pow'rful sun / To fall and *blast her pride*” (*KL* Q 7.323-4, my italics).

low of equity” (*KL* 3.6.37) and the mad Edgar becomes a “learnèd justicer” (*KL* 3.6.21), a “robèd man of justice” (*KL* 3.6.36). Paradoxically, Lear sees the fool and Mad Tom as the opposite of what they are. To him, they are wise men who can speak justice. This scene can be considered as one of the most crucial moments in the play, exposing not only the senselessness of invoking justice in a universe where justice does not exist, but also pointing to the disrupted and turned-over cosmos. If justice can be executed by two madmen and a fool, it is meaningless and in vain. Moreover, not only does Lear realise that justice is merely a convention of society and can therefore be discarded easily, but he also sees that man is uncivilised in his natural state. In an unjust universe, ethics and morals cannot exist – everything is corrupt (Knight 193):

LEAR ---- Look with thy ears. See how yon justice rails upon yond
 simple thief.
 Hark, in thy ear: change places and, handy-dandy, which is the
 thief, which is the justice?
 [...]
 ---- The usurer hangs the cozener.
 Through tattered rags small vices do appear;
 Robes and furred gowns hides all.
 [...]
 ---- Get thee glass eyes,
 And, like a scurvy politician, seem
 To see the things thou dost not.

(*KL* 4.6.150-71)

If “all is corrupt” (Knight 193), justice no longer has a meaning, because it does not exist. Instead, it is replaced by “universal injustice” (Knight 193). This entails that divine justice is not existent, either. Lear – hoping at first that Goneril and Regan will be punished for their cruelty – is confronted with the fact that no one hears him, he is all alone, the gods have left him for good (Knight 193). His realisation that not only he but everyone around him, and thus humankind as well, is not the centre of God’s attention anymore directly reflects upon the changing perceptions of the Elizabethan age. The earth that had once been the core of the universe, and the king who once was the central point of man, now merely are specks of insignificance in a wide and obscure heliocentric cosmos, questioning the sense and purpose of man’s existence.

As a result of the non-existence of divine justice and cosmic structure, every moment of justice that is attempted by the characters throughout the play is no actual justice, but justified violence.³⁵ Kent and Oswald, Goneril and Regan and Gloucester, the servant and Cornwall, Edgar and Oswald and Edmund – all of them act because they believe their actions to be right. However, they are not just.

³⁵ On this topic, see also chapter 6.4. Edgar, Justified Violence and Poetic Justice in this thesis.

According to Goneril and Regan, Gloucester is a traitor and has to be punished, but the violence they exert is everything else but just, it is overtly cruel and highly exaggerated. Without the existence of justice, i.e. in a world of universal injustice, an action for justice is absurd. Thus, violence becomes a symbol for absurdity. *King Lear* shows that in the existent cosmos no laws exist anymore which could be applied. The universe is turned upside-down, it is in disorder and human justice is replaced by universal injustice.

In the end, due to Lear's blunder everyone, evil and good people alike, is punished to the same extent. In fact, innocence in form of Cordelia gets the worst share of them all. Whereas Edmund, Goneril and Regan die a relatively "noble" (Knight 174) death, Cordelia dies the cruellest way possible. Although the storyline is practically over – Goneril, Regan and Edmund are dead – Cordelia is killed nevertheless, emphasising the disturbed universe where nothing makes sense anymore. Violence loses its meaning and turns into a 'means of nothing'. Furthermore, the end emphasises the horrific fact that good is ruined by evil, instead of the other way round, like it is supposed to be. Although Goneril, Regan and Edmund are gone, they still triumph over Cordelia's and Lear's fate. Thus, the play ends utterly senselessly. Instead of evil being destroyed as evilly as possible, and the state and king restrengthened, exactly the opposite happens. Hence, the play shows that good power, respectively the king's power, does not exist anymore. Instead good power is replaced by evil forces. Even though the audience knows from the beginning of the play on that there is no hope left for a reordering of the universe and a turn of fate for Lear, his family and his people, they nevertheless do not expect such an ending. The fact that Shakespeare finishes the plot but leaves it open at the same time, showing senseless violence and injustice for every being, as well as a world full of desolation, bleakness and insecurity, causes suffering and mental violation among the spectators (Booth 102).

On the whole, Lear's actions in the beginning of the play open up a catastrophic situation, in which the disruption of the universe and its consequent events are mirrored in violent and evil actions. Lear's moments of insight and self-recognition, however, come too late. He has caused universal injustice and thus his existence is doomed from the division of his kingdom on, until his death – ruining not only his own life, but that of all the people around him, including that of his most beloved daughter Cordelia.

The Blinding of Gloucester: Limitless Cruelty Mirroring the Disorder of Things

The punishment directed against Gloucester in scene 3.7 is without a doubt the most violent and the most brutal scene in *King Lear*, and also one of the gruesome moments in all of Shakespeare's plays. In the seventeenth century, as well as today, the brutality of the act staged was and still is horrific and certainly hard

to watch for the audience, but pivotal for the play and its depiction of a universe turned upside-down and the senselessness of man's existence that it evokes.

Several aspects prove that the alternative universe created by Lear's blunder not only created universal injustice, but also a limitless cruelty that has no equal. What begins as a 'mere' interrogation as means for the retrieval of information and a confession by Gloucester

CORNWALL	Come, sir, what letters had you late from France?
REGAN	Be simple-answer'd, for we know the truth. [...]
CORNWALL	Where hast thou sent the King?
GLOUCESTER	To Dover.
REGAN	Wherefore to Dover?

(KL 3.7.42-51)

turns into an a never before seen act of torture:

CORNWALL	See 't shalt thou never. Fellows, hold the chair. Upon these eyes of thine I'll set my foot.
GLOUCESTER	He that will think to live till he be old, Give me some help! O cruel! O you Gods!
REGAN	One side will mock another; th'other too. [...]
CORNWALL	Lest it see more, prevent it. Out, vile jelly! Where is thy lustre now?

(KL 3.7.66-83)

As already mentioned in chapter 3.1. of this thesis, torture, unlike corporal punishment, was not very common in Elizabethan and also Jacobean England, however, it found its peak during the reign of Elizabeth I – between the 1580s and 1590s (Langbein 134) – where the fear of a catholic coup d'état led to an increasing number of people being racked because they were believed to be Catholic attackers or possible usurpers who planned to overthrow the Queen (Rocklin 301). With the ascension of King James I the use of torture began to disappear in England (Langbein 134). Although it was very rarely displayed in public and mostly executed during private trials and therefore could have easily been composed of random acts of cruelty, torture methods – although diverse in execution – followed a set structure for the imposition of pain and torment. In other words, if information needed to be gained from the accused, it was done according to the severity of the situation, with the rack or the manacles used most commonly (Langbein 84-5). Furthermore, torture was always witnessed by several judges who were specially appointed for such tasks (Langbein 85-6).

However, these facts already point to the absurdity of the act in *King Lear*. Regan – as part of the royal family – is not only present at Gloucester's 'trial', but

also inciting and encouraging her husband Cornwall to carve out the second eye of the accused. The fact that a member of such high aristocracy would commit this deed is not only bizarre but also virtually impossible – at least it never occurred during the reign of Elizabeth I or James I (Rocklin 304). Thus, the act must not only have seemed absurd to an Early Modern theatre goer, but rather it emphasised the chaotic universe and the senselessness of human actions in a disturbed cosmos. Additionally to the impossibility of a royal family member being present, the torture method ordered by Goneril (“Pluck out his eyes”, *KL* 3.7.5) and employed by Cornwall and Regan is also absurd and thus impossible. The gouging out of Gloucester’s eyes would never have been accepted as a torture method in Elizabethan/Jacobean England (Rocklin 304). Although Gloucester is considered to be a traitor by the two evil sisters and therefore would have had to be tortured especially severely for a confession, the destruction of Gloucester’s eyesight is by no means a suitable and just method. Accordingly, the absurdity and arbitrariness of the means of violence indicates the complete disorder of the universe.

Furthermore, I suggest that – although Goneril, Regan and possibly also Cornwall are evil to the core and thus lust for violence out of sheer pleasure – to some extent they are also interested in putting their reign and their own universe back into order by punishing what, according to them, has to be punished. As I noted in chapter 6.1. of this thesis, Goneril and Regan believe their actions to be right (although they most certainly are not just). For them, the employ of torture is a means to protect the state and identify and prevent plots against the system, in this case by Lear, Gloucester, Cordelia and France. This means, similar to Early Modern public executions where the monarch could strengthen his or her power through a black-and-white depiction of good and justified violence (performed by the state) as opposed to evil and unjust violence (performed by the accused) so as to make the public condemn the culprit and his deeds and – consequently – restore law and order in the state, this is also Goneril’s and Regan’s intention when they torture and then punish Gloucester. Yet, like so often during public displays of violence in Early Modern England, the opposite happens. Regan realises their mistake too late:

REGAN It was great ignorance, Gloucester’s eyes being out,
 To let him live; where he arrives he moves
 All hearts against us.

(*KL* 4.5.9-11)

Instead of strengthening the state’s and the monarch’s power by an attempt to restore order, the power is diminished. The violence which was applied turned out to be too cruel, unfitting and – worst of all – unjust and unreasonable. As a result, it is not perceived by the subjects as a punishment, but rather as an act of private revenge. Justice is replaced by wild terror, arising out of pure pleasure. Therefore,

the audience – and, in the case of *King Lear*, the public Goneril and Regan have released Gloucester into – condemns the violence of the state/the monarch, thus turning the intended strengthening of power and restoration of order into the opposite. Consequently, the people are repelled by the cruelty of mutilation and grow to hate the sovereign. Moreover, the accused rises in the audience's esteem and is being assigned the aforementioned Lamb-of-God-like status. Gloucester therefore becomes a martyr in the eyes of the audience. In other words, due to the rising sympathies for him, Goneril's and Regan's expected result of order is not attained. Instead, the state of disorder is even more emphasised.

The depiction of this violent scene points to the fact that Shakespeare knew of the possible counter-effect of the display of violence, respectively the abnormal violence of the state against its subjects. It is therefore possible to detect a certain amount of criticism of the general use of torture as well as its contra productivity here. Moreover, this scene can also be considered as highly critical against the rising absolutist tendencies of James I in a growing Machiavellian society. Right before Gloucester is brought in for his torture, Cornwall exclaims:

CORNWALL Though well we may not pass upon his life
 Without the form of justice, yet our power
 Shall do a court'sy to our wrath, which men
 May blame, but not control.

(*KL* 3.7.24-7)

Cornwall sees himself in a position where he can decide on whom and to what extent he can do justice, thus, neglecting laws and rules and punishing in every way that pleases him. Hence, a reasonable legal procedure is not necessary, since those in power can do whatever they want (Cahn 158). Shakespeare intensifies the experience of chaos for the audience by integrating the gruesome element of the destruction of Gloucester's eyesight. Although he could have chosen a different cruelty for Gloucester, he shows "limitless" (Cavell 73) and inexplicable violence that has completely gone out of hands and out of bounds. Since the "eyes are physically the most precious and most vulnerable of human organs" (Cavell 72), the audience feels limitless pity towards the victim.

I agree with Stanley Cavell who stresses that this scene does not only depict physical violence, but also psychological violence, since "physical cruelty symbolizes [...] the psychic cruelty" (73). However, whereas he argues that the destruction of Gloucester's eyesight shows "evil's ancient love of darkness" (73), I rather suggest that the importance of psychological violence lies to a greater degree in the fact that Gloucester is now confronted with never-ending darkness. Hence, mankind's worst fear is put upon him – i.e. fear of darkness and fear of not knowing what is about to happen. Instead of light and vision, insecurity and unpredictability reign. Gloucester's missing eyes therefore not only become a symbol for

darkness, but also for disorder – and thus the Elizabethan’s and Jacobean’s second greatest fear.³⁶

Furthermore, not only the violent act itself is a sign for the disorder of the universe, also the fact that man’s evil nature – as Hobbes and Machiavelli remark – is breaking through indicates a disturbed cosmos. Basic animalistic and barbaric structures are laid bare, the destruction of Gloucester’s second eye being only for the sake of violence, for pleasure of man’s wolfish state of nature. Thus, “the blinding of Gloucester marks the moment when the hierarchic, humanly constructed order [...] gives way to [...] predatory ‘Nature’ (*KL* 1.2.1)” (Rocklin 300). It is only because of divine disorder, in other words the absence of a divine instance, that nature is enabled to resurface. No entity is left which could preserve order, civilisation and benevolence in Lear’s alternative universe. Instead, the gods have left the world to its fate. Devout Gloucester, who puts his faith and the hope for help and revenge in a deity (“but I shall see / The wingéd Vengeance overtake such children” (*KL* 3.7.64-5) is deceived. His last resort will not respond to his calls (“O cruel! O you gods!”, *KL* 3.7.69), he is alone (“All dark and comfortless!”, *KL* 3.7.84).

Third indications for the limitless cruelty mirroring the disorder of the cosmos are the non-existence of social codes and the broken boundaries of social convention in scene 3.7. The first proof can be found after Cornwall has gouged out Gloucester’s first eye. He attempts to destroy the other one as well, when he is interrupted by his servant:

1 SERVANT	Hold your hand, my lord! I have served you ever since I was a child, But better service have I never done you Than now to bid you hold.
REGAN	How, now, you dog?
1 SERVANT	If you did wear a beard upon your chin, I’d shake it on this quarrel.
REGAN	What do you mean?
CORNWALL	My villain? [he unsheathes his sword]
1 SERVANT	[drawing his weapon] Nay, then, come on, and take the chance of anger.
REGAN	[to another Servant] Give me thy sword. A peasant stand up thus? [She takes a sword and runs at him behind]

³⁶ This theory shall also be discussed in chapter 6.3. Goneril’s and Regan’s Violence as an Expression of Atheist Faithlessness in this thesis.

Gloucester finds himself in a dilemma: Who should he be loyal to? He chooses Lear and therefore follows the social convention of respect and obedience to the king. However, he does not realise that conventions are non-existent. The social codes he is keen to observe do not work for Lear's alternative universe anymore.

The same problem appears when he reminds Regan and Cornwall that the two are guests in his home:

GLOUCESTER What means your Graces? Good my friends, consider
 You are my guests. Do me no foul play, friends.
 CORNWALL Bind him, I say. [Servants bind him]
 REGAN Hard, hard. O filthy traitor!
 [...]
 GLOUCESTER I am your host:
 With robbers' hands my hospitable favours
 You should not ruffle thus. What will you do?
 (KL 3.7.30-41)

He tries first to appeal to their humanity and their knowledge of social codes, however, he fails. His last resort is the appeal to the code of divine order and divine justice (KL 3.7.65), which, likewise, fails, because divine justice does not exist anymore (Rocklin 306-7).

As a consequence of the brutality in the blinding scene of Gloucester in *King Lear*, and the subjects' seeming impotence concerning the machinery of power, the aesthetic appeal of violence that so often had been the reason for a play's success – as for instance with *Titus Andronicus* – is not existent in *King Lear*. Instead of amusement and entertainment that the audience could gain from watching violence on stage, horror, shock and repulsion are the result. The exorbitant cruelty – staged in a dramaturgy of pity – cannot entertain the spectator anymore. Instead, compassion and indignation reign.

All in all, the limitless cruelty that is displayed with Gloucester's blinding does not only symbolise disorder by presenting the impossible act itself, but also through the emphasis on man's evil nature in a universe deserted by God. Divine disorder, as well as broken boundaries of social convention find themselves centred in the cruel deed, from which only darkness and chaos – man's greatest fears – remain.

Goneril's and Regan's Violence as Expressions of Atheist Faithlessness

The non-existence of justice and the development of a "universe of suffering" (Elton, *King Lear* 103) in which Lear and the other characters find themselves is even enhanced by the cruelty displayed by Goneril and Regan. Several explanations for such a portrayal can be raised here.

On the one hand, the actions of Goneril and Regan stress the antithesis of civilisation and nature (Knight 182), through which it becomes clear that in Lear's unjust

and overturned universe, man has finally succumbed to the beastly natural state, which both Hobbes and Machiavelli mention in their works. Consequently, the two evil sisters exploit the situation of chaos caused by Lear's blunder to their advantage, using their evil nature as a catalyst for gaining power. The breakout of their beastly being is underlined by many descriptions of the two throughout the play. Thus they are referred to and denoted as "most savage and unnatural" (*KL* 3.3.7), "pelican daughters" (*KL* 3.4.74), "she-foxes" (*KL* 3.6.23), "tigers, not daughters" (*KL* 4.2.40) and "dog-hearted" (*KL* 4.3.46). Goneril is separately called a "degenerate bastard" (*KL* 1.4.262), a "detested kite" (*KL* 1.4.271) with a "wolvish visage" (*KL* 1.4.309) and a "sharp-tooth'd unkindness, like a vulture" (*KL* 2.4.131) by her father. Although it is only after the division of the country has backfired on him that Lear addresses his older daughters by using beastly attributes, Cavell suggests that Lear knows of the evil and unloving nature of his two older daughters from the beginning on, however, he ignores it – like many parents do – hoping for a positive outcome with the division of the country (82).

On the other hand, the fact that Lear is apparently unexpectedly deceived by his daughters, his own flesh and blood, points to the worst violence possible – the violence of close family members. Here, cruelty is enhanced by the unexpected occurrence of brutality. Naomi Conn Liebler argues that violence in a surrounding that is originally considered safe – i.e. violence at home – transgresses the unspoken contract that exists in such a space (46-7). The first cruelty the two sisters commit in the play is therefore of psychological nature and directed against their father, who, in turn, clearly states what the unnatural character of this violence is – it is "filial ingratitude" (*KL* 3.4.14) (Liebler 38). Lear is humiliated by Goneril and Regan as they make him beg for accommodation, as well as when he calls to the gods for justice, as shall be shown below.

While these interpretations for violence are possible, I would suggest a third theory that incorporates both ideas, taking them a step further. While Goneril and Regan both revel in their evil natures and act against the contract of 'home', the violence, which they exert not only against their father, but also against Gloucester can be seen as an expression of a possible atheist and religious-critic mindset.

As already discussed in chapter 2.1. of this thesis, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw a growing tendency towards different religious orientations and steadily growing scepticism concerning an ever-present God and the providentialism in life. Thus, a notion that was termed 'atheism' by many critics such as by Bowes or Cooper began to gain awareness throughout the people of England. However, it is noteworthy that today's perception of what exactly constitutes atheism probably did not correspond to what atheism meant in the English Renaissance. Although Stephen Greenblatt explicitly states that is impossible to know today in what or in whom the Elizabethans exactly believed – also because they had to fear sanctions and punishments and therefore historic evidence and documents certainly can be considered as having been cautious concerning its religious

clarity – disbelief in and thus the complete rejection of the existence of any deity presumably was very rare (*Negotiations* 22). The same goes for Shakespeare and the use of own beliefs in his plays. Even if the poet had atheist tendencies, he could not voice his views too openly, since supporting non-orthodoxy or even Catholicism would mean punishment (in form of imprisonment or torture) and/or death (Dollimore 84; Mallin 10). Greenblatt, furthermore, argues that – even if the term ‘atheism’ existed – it was connected to the idea of an ‘other’ and used to isolate any other belief in a deity from one’s own belief, respectively those of Protestantism (Greenblatt, *Negotiations* 22). Thus, the thought of ‘otherness’ often resulted in the fact that different religious orientations were denoted to be atheist orientations.

When we take a look at *King Lear* now, it could be argued that both Goneril and Regan have been influenced by the Machiavellian Edmund, who at first rejects his father’s notion of fate and mocks superstition and the influence of the stars on man’s life. However, at the same time he is voicing the doubts of religious-sceptic Elizabethan viewers (Elton, “Shakespeare” 21):

EDMUND This is excellent foppery of the world that
 when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits of
 our own behaviour, we make guilty of our disasters the
 sun, the moon and the stars; as if we were villains on
 necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves,
 thieves, and treachers by spherical predominance,
 drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced
 obedience of planetary influence, and all that we are
 evil in by a divine thrusting on. An admirable evasion
 of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition to
 the charge of a star!

(*KL* 1.2.121-31)³⁷

Nevertheless, whereas Edmund believes in the divinity of nature (“Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law / My services are bound.”, *KL* 1.2.1-2), Goneril and Regan entirely reject a deity and any kind of religious thinking. I therefore concur with W. Elton’s assumption that both are “Machiavellian opportunists” (Elton, *King Lear* 119) and also atheists due to their natural, beastlike state, although the pursuit of Edmund might have spurred them on in their actions.

Looking at Goneril, it is striking to see that she is the only one of the main characters who does not once call upon a deity or mention a divine instance. Instead she mocks her husband Albany on his beliefs:

ALBANY ---- O Goneril,

³⁷ Ironically, in the end Edmund admits defeat to the instance he had always rejected – fate. Thus, he says: “The wheel is come full circle; I am here” (*KL* 5.3.172).

You are not worth the dust which the rude wind
 Blows in your face! I fear your disposition.
 That nature which contemns it origin
 Cannot be bordered certain in itself.
 She that herself will sliver and disbranch
 From her material sap, perforce must wither
 And come to deadly use.

GONERIL No more! The text is foolish.

(*KL* 4.2.29-37)

Hence, Goneril rejects any Elizabethan/Jacobean religious belief and instead seems to strive for change, which in turn would mean that she prefers chaos and anarchy – since change was not considered to be something positive in the Renaissance, but could only lead to disorder (Elton, *King Lear* 119-20).

Goneril's physical violence, as opposed to the psychological violence she uses against her father in the first act, is likewise violence out of atheist beliefs. Since she has neither Christian morals, nor a conscience, she poisons her sister for personal gain, i.e. to have Edmund to herself. However, when Edmund is fatally wounded and the plan to kill her own husband Albany fails, she stabs herself (*KL* 5.3.223-6). Here, she commits violence against herself, in other words, violence that a Christian or at least a god-fearing Elizabethan would consider a blasphemous act against God. Since it is very likely that Shakespeare as well as his audience had a great knowledge of the Bible, they probably immediately drew a parallel between Goneril's suicide and the suicides they were familiar with from Scripture. Thus, they knew that Ahithophel (2 Samuel 17:23), Saul (1 Samuel 31:4) and Simri (1 Kings 16:18) as well as Judas (Matthew 27:5) all killed themselves because they had either defied God and/or had had lived a sinful life. However, the fact that Goneril chooses to commit suicide points to her atheist mindset. If she were pious or at least acceptant of a deity, she would commit such a God-defying action. By her suicide she rejects a salvation through a divine instance, in other words, she rejects any belief in a deity. Additionally, the action emphasises her evil nature and sinful life.

Regan also defies God and mocks any belief in his existence. When Lear calls to the gods for justice against Goneril, Regan's response to his exclamation not only is the only moment in the play where she refers to a divine instance, but to a greater degree her answer is highly ironic and impatient, and thus openly deriding. Whereas her piety is only a show, her father, however, does not notice it:

LEAR You nimble lightnings, dart your blinding flames
 Into her scornful eyes! Infect her beauty,
 You fen-sucked fogs, drawn by the pow'rful sun
 To fall and blister her!

REGAN O the blest gods!

structure and order do not exist anymore and everything is allowed. Thus, also hideous violent actions can be committed without consequences. A display of Goneril and Regan as atheists would therefore reflect on their beastly nature. Without believing in God, man always remains in his natural state – he is never civilized. Therefore, Goneril and Regan are justifiably “pelican daughters”, “she-foxes” and “tigers”. Such a depiction automatically turns the two sisters into “archcriminals” (Greenblatt, *Negotiations* 25), raising the audience’s hostility towards them to no end. Every action done by them could be interpreted back to the fact that they are atheists in their natural, beastly state. Thus, the ‘other’ could be demonized.

Moreover, the cruelty toward their father and the neglect of social conventions could be explained as well. The “filial ingratitude” Lear denounces in scene 3.4 is also due to the fact that neither Goneril nor Regan believe in God, meaning that humaneness and the wish to follow the rules of courtesy are non-existent. To them, morality and laws are only customs and conventions designed by man – instead of God – and consequently can be dismissed in any given situation.

All things considered, if one assumes that Shakespeare intended to present Goneril and Regan as possible atheists, the poet could problematise the question of the need for religion. Are the two sisters right in discounting religious beliefs as hokum and useless? After all, the newly arising insights of science and astronomy could be used to question the existence and efficacy of a divine instance. And yet, does the portrayal of Goneril and Regan not show, how indispensable God and religion are for the preservation of social order and justice (Dollimore 86)?³⁸

Edgar, Justified Violence and Poetic Justice

As I have shown in the previous chapters, resulting from the initial blunder, the gods have left Lear’s universe to its fate and remain ignorant to calls and supplications from Gloucester and others. However, it is striking that only Edgar keeps up his faith in a divine and just instance until the very end, although everybody around him more and more questions the gods’ goodwill or realises the divine injustice (Gloucester: “As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods / They kill us for their sport” [KL 4.1.36-7]; Lear: “Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel, / That thou mayst shake the superflux to them / And show the heavens more just”

³⁸ On this topic see also the play *Selimus, Emperor of the Turks* from 1594, in which religion is questioned by the main character. Instead of a belief in a deity, Selimus explains God to be an invention of man and thus he himself promotes atheism as the only truth: “Then some sage man, above the vulgar wise, / Knowing that laws could not in quiet dwell, / Unless they were observed, did first devise / The names of gods, religion, heaven and hell, / And ‘gan of pains and feigned rewards to tell: / Pains for those men which did neglect the law; / Rewards for those that lived in quiet awe. / Whereas indeed they were mere fictions, / And if they were not, Selim thinks they were; / And these religious observations, / Only bugbears to keep the world in fear / And make men quietly a yoke to bear” (*Three Turk Plays: Selimus* 2.95-106).

[*KL* 3.4.34-6]). Edgar's famous words towards the end of the play ("The gods are just", *KL* 5.3.169) suggest that he is oblivious to the non-existence of justice – and that he still believes in justice. However, I argue that Edgar confuses divine justice with justified violence, and hence continues the disruption in the universe, as shall be discussed in the following.

According to Tom Clayton, poetic justice, i.e. the retribution in which evil is punished and good rewarded, can be found in numerous occasions in *King Lear* (186). Yet, if we consider the instances in which good and evil are equally punished and, in addition, consider the fact that evil and disorder keep the upper hand in the end, it is highly questionable whether Clayton is right. Instead, the characters find themselves in Lear's parallel universe, which in turn means – as I suggested earlier – that only universal injustice exists. Therefore, an assumption of the existence of poetic justice would be contradictive here. Likewise, since justice is a mere human convention in *King Lear*, Edgar's declaration that "the gods are just" is faulty. If Edgar's so-called 'justice' is existent in the play, it is only due to his own actions. In other words, 'just' moments that can be found in the play are neither poetically just, nor are they just in a divine sense. Instead, we only find actions of violent retribution, which are attempts of executing justice, respectively which are termed 'just' by the agents. In Regan's and Goneril's eyes, Gloucester's punishment is just, since he, as a "traitor" (*KL* 3.7.3), a "villain" (*KL* 3.7.34)³⁹ and an "ingrateful fox" (*KL* 3.7.28) gets what he deserves. Yet, this is no justice – Goneril and Regan merely justify their violence. Also Cornwall's servant attempts justice by taking laws and rules into his own hands, punishing his master in order to prevent him from causing more injustice.

Likewise, Edgar can be accorded two instances of justified violence – firstly, when he strikes Oswald in order to prevent the latter attacking the blind Gloucester (*KL* 4.6.227-53) and, secondly, when he fatally wounds his brother Edmund in the fight (*KL* 5.3.121-50). Although Edgar still believes in a divine and just instance, the fact that Oswald and Edmund are slain by Edgar's hand cannot be considered just, since Edgar only paid like with like. Thus, Oswald and Edmund did not receive poetic justice by the "just" gods, but justified violence by Edgar.

However, by confusing justified violence with divine justice, he replaces the one with the other. Thus, it is not the gods who (want to) impose justice, but Edgar. By imagining that the retribution that was brought upon evil was actually divine justice, he puts himself in the position of an agent of the gods (Adelman 15), meaning thus, that he acted on the gods' behalf. This, in turn, is the mistake that he makes which leads – just like Lear's blunder did – to a continuation of the disrupted cosmos, as shall be explained in the following.

According to the Elizabethan world picture, man is a mirror of the universe, created in God's image (Suerbaum 493), that is, he is the microcosm in the universal

³⁹ Gloucester is not once, but repeatedly called a "traitor" (*KL* 3.7.22, 3.7.32, 3.7.37, 3.7.44, 3.7.86) and a "villain" (*KL* 3.7.86, 3.7.95).

macrocosm. Therefore, a disruption in the microcosm will be reflected in a disruption of the macrocosm. Now the problem is that Edgar's justified violence which he committed in order to restore order in the disturbed universe is an action that he was not allowed to make. It can only be the king who ensures that order is kept during his rule, since this is his prime task as a sovereign – as has been established earlier in chapter 2.2. By acting and then justifying the actions by referring to the just gods, Edgar displays himself as an agent of the divine and thus puts himself in the place of King Lear. This, in turn, means that even if Lear's blunder is cleared after his death, a new blunder exists, caused by Edgar. Although it is left open in the end who will be the succeeding monarch among the three survivors Edgar, Albany and Kent, it is nevertheless very likely that Edgar will be the future king. Whereas Albany instantly rejects a possible coronation for himself ("Friends of my soul, you twain / Rule in this realm, and the god's state sustain", *KL* 5.3.319-20)⁴⁰, Kent is on the brink of death himself ("I am come / To bid my king and master aye good night" [*KL* 5.3.33-4]; "I have a journey, sir, shortly to go; / My master calls me, I must not say no" [*KL* 5.3.321-2]), either following his master Lear into death, or called by God.⁴¹

Consequently, Edgar would start his reign with an error which, similarly to Lear's initial mistake, would cause the disruption of the cosmos to be conserved instead of being undone. Additionally, even if he had not committed the mistake of striving for the position of a justifying entity, it is unlikely that Edgar as a minor character could restore order, peace and justice in the play's universe. He becomes king "only by default" (Land 126), since everybody else is dead, dying or unwilling to burden himself with sovereignty (Flahiff 227).

On the whole, by putting himself in the position of exercising justice, which turns out to be justified violence, and the resulting possibility of Edgar's succession as king would mean a bleak future for the play's universe. However, even if one disregards a blunder on his part, Edgar would not be the sovereign that is actually needed to restore the upturned cosmos to normal again. In both cases, history would repeat itself.

Conclusion

King Lear shows, like no other play, a hopeless and forlorn image of a cosmos turned upside-down, in which justice does not exist anymore and where, likewise,

⁴⁰ According to Mark A. McDonald, Albany does not reject the offer of becoming king, but instead invites the other two survivors to share the country between the three of them (203). This, nevertheless, could also mean chaos and a possible Civil War – thus the same result, the division of the country brought upon King Lear and his reign.

⁴¹ However, since it is questionable whether an afterlife or even a divine instance exists, Kent's 'future' looks just as bleak as Albany's and Edgar's. Instead of the comfort of knowing where death will lead him, his demise is an "escape into the unknown" (F. P. Wilson 121). Thus, also the audience's "uncertainty [is extended] into infinity" (Booth 103).

the use of utterly cruel violence turns into a means of senselessness. Lear and his initial blunder are the reason for complete chaos, provoked by the choice of absolutism over the medieval feudal system and its norms of action. It becomes clear that the king himself is the person who does not seem to fit into his own state, ruling however it pleases him and offending all existing laws, engulfing the world he inhabits in a crisis. With these themes, Shakespeare's play is highly political and topical, implying the changes brought about by the new line of Stuarts after Elizabeth I had passed away. Almost as a sign of foreboding pointing to future conflicts in England, Shakespeare shows a proud king, who does not see and hear the warning signs around him. Additionally to the changing perception of man's place in the universe, of divinity as well as providence, a man is presented who desperately tries to cling onto his pagan assumptions that human nature entails human justice, respectively that a divine and righteous entity exists who can set everything right again. Ironically, it is only in his state of madness that Lear begins to understand that justice is only a convention of society and that the gods have left him for good.

Instead of (poetic) justice and man's civilized existence, we find destructive and highly exaggerated justified violence, executed by Lear's oldest daughters, who not only incorporate changing religious perceptions of the Elizabethan and Jacobean age, but carry insecurity about man's existence in the cosmos to extremes, defying and mocking a divine instance and embodying pure evil. Likewise, their betrayal towards Lear, as well as Edmund's betrayal towards Gloucester emphasises a claustrophobic atmosphere, where nothing is as it seems and where man cannot trust another. Familiar structures are unhinged, social norms and boundaries are suspended, giving violence freedom to reign. As a result, the sheer pleasure shown by Goneril and Regan at the blinding of Gloucester generates a feeling of repulsiveness and shock among the audience, rendering impossible any kind of aesthetic appeal of the scene, in contrast to many other violent scenes of Shakespeare's plays. Instead, a desolated and insecure Jacobean world is mirrored by a desolate and unstable staged universe: The action falls from beginning to end; the ending is left unresolved, making the audience realise that this disturbed cosmos might continue to exist. The result is the devastating demise of a king who has gone mad and yet is lucid:

LEAR --- No, no, no life!
 Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
 And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
 Never, never, never, never, never!
 [...]
 Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
 Look there, look there!
 [dies]

(*KL* 5.3.305-8)

Final Conclusion

In *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard III* and *King Lear*, Shakespeare addresses the corruptedness of a changing society, where it seems as if ethics and morals cannot find their place anymore. The shift in astronomic beliefs, the influence of new discoveries in science, arising religious insecurities combined with a desperate clinging onto the old, feudal structures underline the insignificance of man in an obscure cosmos. The seemingly random outbreaks of violence, which can be found in all three plays presented in this thesis, indicate that, not only portrayed on stage but also in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, people's insecurities have risen immeasurably. Nothing makes sense anymore; life and man's existence have gotten out of hand. Even the security and reassurance of an afterlife has been taken from them. Apparently nothing, it seems, can be controlled anymore.

Especially *King Lear* and *Titus Andronicus*, but also *Richard III* are significant representations of Renaissance claustrophobia. In *King Lear*, we as readers as well as Shakespeare's spectators are confronted with an insecurity that is caused by a constant threat: namely that everyone can be a spy and that, consequently, everyone spies on everyone. Edmund, Goneril and Regan who betray their fathers; Goneril who in the end even poisons her ally; Kent and Edgar who disguise themselves in order to remain alive; Edgar who even takes on several characters; the Mad Tom and the illiterate country yokel – it seems as if nothing can be resolved rationally anymore. In *Titus Andronicus*, the arbitrariness of the state's violence in form of the sons of Tamora is met with the logic of revenge where powerlessness and impotence lead to the eruption of Titus' cruelties, culminating in the near extinction of his own genealogy. Meanwhile, *Richard III* shows the Renaissance tendency towards absolutism with, ironically, a Machiavellian twist, where the sovereign is everything and the subject nothing. It is this violence that is portrayed in all three plays that comprises Elizabethan and Jacobean questions of legitimization, exertion and maintenance of power and the issue, whether justice can exist at all.

It is due to these insecurities of the Early Modern period that character types such as the Machiavellist Richard III or Goneril and Regan are produced, respectively that they have such a powerful impact on the audience. By portraying them, it is made clear that violence – in whatever shaping – is always institutionalized. Furthermore, it is stressed that whatever the individual does, the subject will forever be impotent and will, for all times, be confronted with an almighty machinery of power. The public display of physical violence is in the end a proof for the never-ceasing might and authority of the monarch, for it is the sovereign who decides where and how to punish, who to execute and to torture. Even if the witnessing audience of these acts of public display gets the impression of being able to do justice once themselves and to blame the victim for the deeds he did or did

not commit, even if they are able to rid themselves of their own sins, passing them on to the victim in his or her Lamb-of-God-like status and then feel empowered – at the end of the day it is only the monarch who has strengthened himself. Hence, it does not matter who succeeds as king or queen, since violence and power are existent in the system – and that is also why there will never be the possibility to escape from it. History always repeats itself.

Despite the comprehensive research on Shakespeare and his plays by today's scholars, it is nevertheless noticeable that there are still gaps to be found concerning the thematisation of violence and power on the Shakespearean stage, especially concerning uncharacteristic violent plays such as *Richard III*. As I have shown in this thesis, not only *Titus Andronicus* or *King Lear*, but even atypically violent theatre pieces such as *Richard III* convey valuable information on the portrayal of violence and power on the Elizabethan stage, as well as integrate and give deep insights into the changing Renaissance world picture, political conditions and historical events. Hence, it would be very enriching for future studies to examine – not only in other tragedies or history plays but also in Shakespeare's comedies – in how far violent actions on stage are connected to demonstrations of power in Elizabethan and Jacobean everyday life. Especially since, as has been mentioned in this thesis, Shakespeare's plays apparently can be read as unfinished, i.e. they almost exclusively remain open at the end, showing a repetitive pattern concerning the sovereign's use of violence. In other words, it is very likely that in the three plays presented in this thesis neither Edgar, nor Lucius, nor Henry Tudor will bring (positive) change to the country. Instead, everything will remain as it has been before.

Moreover, in the three plays the existence of justice is questioned to an extent never seen before. All three tragedies show that neither human justice, nor divine justice can be found. In both *Titus Andronicus* and *King Lear*, it is even due to the fault of the main protagonists and their wrong decisions that justice abolishes itself. In *Richard III*, justice does not exist, because the main protagonist is a Machiavellist tyrant. As a result, the violence that is employed for 'justice' turns out to be a mere justification of violence and therefore a symbol for absurdity – transforming violence into a means that is only applied for its own sake by the characters – the sake of violence. Its production is hence surreal, anarchistic and almost nihilistic.

It is especially striking that in all three works presented in this study, injustice first and foremost exists particularly for female characters. In *Titus Andronicus*, Lavinia is raped and mutilated without a motive, and Tamora is thrown to the beasts after her death (*TA* 5.3.194-9) – although, for instance, Saturninus, who is as guilty in committing the atrocities like his wife, receives a proper and decent burial (*TA* 5.3.190-1). In *Richard III*, Anne is killed out of sheer amusement; thus, violence is directed at her merely because Richard is powerful, and she is not. Lastly, in *King Lear*, Cordelia is mistreated out of pride and arrogance by her father and dies completely unnecessarily although the play has practically finished,

whereas Goneril and Regan, instead of being unjustly treated, turn out to be the actual embodiment of injustice. Instead, all females of the three plays mentioned are – without exception – objectified. Since the gender aspect could not be treated in particular in this thesis due to lack of space, it would be most revelatory and fruitful to investigate the connection between violence towards women in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods and violence towards women on stage, especially since most of Shakespeare's plays were written during Queen Elizabeth's reign and yet portray in most cases powerless, flat or unsympathetic females that are mutilated and – in the case of Goneril, Regan and Tamora – mutilate others.

In conclusion, by integrating the themes of violence, as well as power and justice, *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard III* and *King Lear* can not only be seen as a highly political plays, but also as mirrors to the world, thus taking up themes that touched Renaissance England in history, society, religion and politics, as well as affecting the people's lives. And yet, by specifically taking up themes which were monopolized by the state, authority structures could be unfolded and undermined on stage. Considering Foucault's theory of power through discourse, it becomes clear that – although state and monarch dominated said discourse and internalized their power on the subject's body – Shakespeare's plays can be attributed a highly state- and power-subverting character. In other words, by portraying characters such as Aaron, Shakespeare undermines the state's assumption of the efficacy of punishment and execution, as well as violence and retributive justice in general. By taking up elements from public punishments and executions and then highly exaggerating these violent atrocities – especially in *Titus Andronicus* and *King Lear* – Shakespeare offers the possibility for the audience to not only question but also distance themselves from what they witness, making clear that the ending of a sovereign's rule always also means the beginning of a new sovereign's rule, entailing afresh demonstrations of power and subjection. Moreover, through the irrational and completely absurd use of violence in the plays, Shakespeare responds to public demonstrations of the state's power in general. By showing that Tamora, Aaron, Demetrius and Chiron, as well as Richard and Goneril, Regan and Cornwall only apply torture and violence as a means of pleasure gain, an analogy to the Elizabethan state (and to every other sovereign) is drawn, where violence does not need a justification anymore, but is applied as a whim, turning into an "acte gratuit" (Reichert, *Der fremde Shakespeare* 305).

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